

# **Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria in the British Army, 1939-45**

By Steven Kern  
BA (Derby), MA (Sheffield)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis fills a significant gap in secondary literature on the role of Jewish refugee soldiers from Germany and Austria, who served in the British army during the Second World War, 1939-45. It goes further than any previous specialised works in this area by examining the social issues surrounding the refugee soldier's experiences in the army, such as their relationship with British soldiers and their personal attitudes towards the policies of the War Office.

There are few surviving documentary sources specifically detailing the service of refugees. To compensate this there has been an emphasis on the gathering of oral testimonies. These interviews, conducted by the author, provided the opportunity to analyse crucial issues left unanswered within other documentary sources, principally the underlying theme of the refugees' religious and national identities.

This study examines the development of the refugees' identities from their experiences under Nazi rule, to their service in the British army and eventual naturalisation as British citizens. The thesis is organized into eight chapters. Each analyses key moments and dilemmas experienced during the refugee servicemen's army service.

This study demonstrates the dynamic interplay that existed between the refugees' own sense of self, and that which was held by the government in power. It also examines the perception of refugees held by British born soldiers and the general civilian population. These interactions were crucial in determining the lives of these men. The

thesis concludes by illustrating that the refugees' Jewish and national identities altered considerably as a consequence of their wartime experiences, and that the British War Office largely remained needlessly suspicious of the refugee soldiers throughout much of the war.



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A huge thanks to all my family and friends for their continual support and encouragement. My brother Lee deserves an extra special thank you for his advice in the final stage of my work. It's been a fantastic four years. I have enjoyed working on this thesis and have loved life in Nottingham.

This thesis is dedicated to my girlfriend Karen and to my parents, Paul and Joan.

## **Abbreviations**

AB64	Army Pay Book 64
AJEX	Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women
AMPC	Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps
ATS	Auxiliary Territorial Service
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
LDF	Local Defence Force
MI5	Department of Military Intelligence
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officer
POW	Prisoner of War
RAF	Royal Air Force
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
RAOC	Royal Army Ordnance Corps
RASC	Royal Army Service Corps
SOE	Special Operations Executive

## **Introduction**

This thesis examines the experiences of Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria who served in the British Military Forces during the period 1939-45.

It focuses on the major themes of their experiences from 1933-45. Principally it will analyse the 'identities' of the refugees. The social anthropologist Marion Berghahn argues that a person's identities play a significant role in determining their behaviour. Berghahn stated that a personal identity "ties people together, creates social groups and shapes an individual's relationship with the majority of society. However, when identities are brought into a state of confusion they will affect a person's ability to interact and adapt within their surrounding environment".<sup>1</sup> This is a concept that has much relevance for this study. This thesis will concentrate on three main strands of identities: the refugees' internal sense of their own identities; the status externally imposed upon them by the British government; and the perception soldiers and civilians of British nationality had of these refugees. As will become evident, all of these identities are seen to change through the dynamic interplay that existed between them. During this period - a time of intensity, stress and war, a time of upheaval and mass displacement - changes in these perceptions of identity are seen to have occurred quite radically, and over what was a fairly short period of time. This thesis will document and discuss such changes.

The changes in identity can be charted by examining the refugees' attitudes towards

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<sup>1</sup> Berghahn, Marion, *Continental Britons: German-Jewish Refugees from Nazism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Berg Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 1988), p. 13.

their nationality, religion, race, and their relationships with those around them.<sup>2</sup> There are also various events that occurred during this period which had a great impact on their sense of self. In the summer of 1940, despite the Jewish refugees' strident anti-Nazi feelings and passionate hope for an Allied victory, a cautious British government made no distinction between the Jewish refugees and potential Nazi sympathisers. As a consequence the vast majority were interned as 'enemy aliens'. However, the small contingent of refugees already in the British army were allowed to remain there. We see here that early on in the war the internal sense of identity held by the refugees could often be at odds with that officially ascribed to them by the British government. Such circumstances were not uncommon throughout this period.

The extraordinary experiences of the German and Austrian Jews in British uniform represent a significant chapter in the history of Jewish resistance to the Nazi regime. Jewish opposition to the Nazis has most frequently been examined within the context of resistance in the occupied countries of Europe. Most general texts on the Second World War ignore the considerable amount of resistance provided by Jews who fought from within the ranks of the Allied Forces. A unique phenomenon in British military history occurred during the Second World War in relation to this point. Despite being officially categorised as 'enemy aliens', the Jewish German and Austrian refugees were offered the opportunity to 'fight back' against the Nazis by becoming 'bona fide' British soldiers.

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<sup>2</sup> The question of the racial identity of Jewish refugees is considered during the analysis of their pre-war experiences in Nazi Europe and on their arrival in Britain. However, it has been chosen to avoid further embroilment on this issue as the notion of the Jewish people as a race is not accepted by the author. It was Nazism that institutionalised the Jewish religion into a biological concept and although this legacy remains today it was decided that apart from Chapter One and Two, this thesis only focuses on the refugees' Judaism as a religion and culture.

The experiences of these German and Austrian refugees in the British army are nearly invisible in the chronicles of the Second World War. This may not be surprising when considering their small numbers.<sup>3</sup> Yet, in spite of this they can be seen to have played important and noteworthy roles in the war effort. One such contribution was provided by the 'enemy aliens' serving in 3 Troop, 10 Commando. Formed in 1942, the Jewish refugees were used for reconnaissance, sabotage, and interrogation. Their story is recorded in detail in Ian Dear's *Ten Commando 1942-45*<sup>4</sup> and Peter Masters' substantial autobiography *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando's War Against the Nazis*.<sup>5</sup> Both accounts give an extensive insight into the individual experiences of some of the refugees, (mostly from Austria and Germany), who formed the highly secret and what has been described as, one of the mostly highly trained group of soldiers in the British Army.<sup>6</sup> However, these texts do not contribute substantially to the psychological or political issues affecting the refugees' war experiences. Nor do they consider in any great detail the experiences of those refugees who did not join the commando unit. E.H Rhodes-Wood's work, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945*, does examine the experiences of the refugees, but only within the

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<sup>3</sup> Henry Morris estimated about 6000 German and Austrian male refugees served in total, while Norman Bentwich stated that 7230 had enlisted in Britain during the war. However, Bentwich's figures also include the minority of non-Jewish refugees in the army. At the request of General Ismay, Chief of Staff, the government's records of refugee volunteers were only updated until the total had reached over 5000 on 29 May 1941. These statistics also included other nationalities, such as Czechoslovakians, Italians, Russians and Poles within the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. Morris, Henry, *We Will Remember Them: A Record of Jews Who Died in the Armed Forces of the Crown 1939-45* (Brassey's: London, 1989), p. 3; Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 176; The Returns of foreigners enlisted into the British Service, PRO PREM 3/42/1. Although these figures are small in comparison with the almost three million in the British army during the war, the ratio of refugees in the forces was larger. Norman Bentwich argued that about 14 per cent of Jewish refugees in Britain had joined the army compared to about 10 per cent for the general population of England. PRO WO 277/12; Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Dear Ian, *Ten Commando 1942-45* (Leo Cooper Ltd: London, 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando's War Against the Nazis* (Presido Press: California, 1997).

<sup>6</sup> Harry Brooke, Second Interview, Sheffield, 24 November 1999; Fox, John P, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), pp. 33-37.

alien companies of the Pioneer Corps.<sup>7</sup> The story of the majority of the refugees who transferred out of the Pioneer Corps in 1943 is not told. Furthermore, the main focus of Rhodes-Wood's study concerns the experiences of British soldiers in the Pioneer Corps. As a consequence, insight into the experiences of the German and Austrian refugees in the (alien) pioneer companies is both brief and lacking in analytical content.

Works specifically relating to the experiences of Austrian and German refugees in the British army remain few. Norman Bentwich has written the most authoritative work to date dealing with this topic. Bentwich's book, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War*<sup>8</sup> was published soon after the war. It has the advantage that Bentwich had first-hand contact with the refugees, visiting and lecturing to some of the former German and Austrians serving in the (alien) pioneer companies at the Kitchener Camp, Richborough.<sup>9</sup> There are shortcomings, however. Though Bentwich was an academic, the book is not always clear on its sources. The modern reader is likely to wish for more attribution of sources and for greater details on those persons interviewed. The book has also been criticised for making light of the fact that the vast majority of refugee servicemen were of Jewish origin.<sup>10</sup> There are other significant omissions from the text. Bentwich does not consider the role of Jews in the Czechoslovakian and Polish Free Armies who were regrouped and trained in Britain after the evacuation of

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<sup>7</sup> Rhodes-Wood, E.H, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1960).

<sup>8</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks. The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950).

<sup>9</sup> Bentwich's experiences in the Kitchener Camp were reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 19, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 November 1941, p. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Fox, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, p. 21.

Dunkirk in 1940. Nor does he consider the German and Austrian refugees who served in the United States Forces based in Britain. He also does not draw attention to the experiences suffered by the refugees prior to their arrival in Britain, or even their civilian experiences in Britain before they enlisted. Nevertheless, this still remains a seminal work that provides considerable insight into this largely neglected area of history.

In the last ten years a handful of other studies have emerged relating to the experiences of the German and Austrian refugee servicemen. Peter Leighton-Langer has published, *X Steht für Unbekannt*, but this text is presently only available in German.<sup>11</sup> There have been two articles written on the subject of Austrians and Germans in the British Army by John P. Fox, both published in the *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*.<sup>12</sup> Although Fox's work successfully introduces some of the important issues involved, it provides only a skeleton history of a topic that is in need of greater depth of analysis. More recently, two Masters dissertations have been written on this topic.<sup>13</sup> With *I Understand the Risks* having been written over 50 years ago, there is a need for a fresh approach and modern reassessment of the groundwork laid down by Bentwich, while a more authoritative and in depth analysis is needed to supersede the offerings of more recent texts.

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<sup>11</sup> Langer, Peter Leighton, *X Steht Für Unbekannt* (Berlin Verlag Arno Spitz GMBH: Berlin, 2000)

<sup>12</sup> Fox, John, P, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces and British and German Citizenship Policies', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book* (Secker and Warburg: London, 1992)  
Fox, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, pp21-50.

<sup>13</sup> Klugescheid, Andreas Bad-Orb, Translated by Bohm, E.I, *His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens: German-Jewish Emigrants to Great Britain Between 1933-47* (MA Thesis, University of Gottingen, No Date); Kosmin, Freda, *German and Austrian Refugees in the British Forces During World War Two: Was Their Expertise Properly Used, The Politics of Prejudice* (MA Dissertation, University College London, 2002).

This study makes use of War Office, Home Office and the Prime Minister's Office records in the Public Record Office. It also makes use of the papers of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the United Synagogue and the Office of the Chief Rabbi all located in the London Metropolitan Archives. Such documents would not have been available to Norman Bentwich. Unfortunately, the service records of individual soldiers who served during World War Two are still retained by the Ministry of Defence and unavailable to the public. At the same time, some of the records of the Board of Deputies are still restricted from viewing. To circumnavigate this problem, extensive research into the personal experiences of refugee soldiers was made through the use of oral history. This thesis draws on some 45 interviews with individuals from Britain, Israel, South Africa and Germany. The author organised and conducted these interviews.

It is widely accepted that oral history allows the historian to collect information needed "to illuminate particular areas about which too little information has survived from other sources".<sup>14</sup> This was the major reason this thesis makes use of oral testimonies. Indeed, it has been argued that most studies of minority groups have been influenced by oral evidence, especially the study of immigrants to Britain.<sup>15</sup>

The interviews are used to enrich the political documentary evidence. Sources such as parliamentary debates are integral in presenting the major issues that surrounded the refugee servicemen. However, questions regarding the social behaviour of the refugees and how it related to their sense of identity would remain unanswered if one

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<sup>14</sup> Lummis, Trevor, *Listening to History: The Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (Hutchinson: London, 1987), p. 17.

<sup>15</sup> Thompson, Paul, *The Voice of the Past*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Oxford University Press: Oxford), p. 98.



relied only on the existing documentary sources.<sup>16</sup> The interviews compensate this, allowing for the analysis of issues such as the refugees' relationships with other soldiers, their attitudes towards changing their name and their feelings towards being labelled as 'enemy aliens'. The interviews provide the opportunity to analyse the motivations behind major decisions taken by the refugees during their wartime experiences.

There are limitations in the use of oral history. Robert Perks has written that "collecting oral history is not easy, people forget things, their memories play trick by telescoping events together or changing their order. They will occasionally repress painful memories or artificially highlight their own role in a particular event. The dynamic and atmosphere of the interview situation may also influence what a person says".<sup>17</sup> The limitations of oral history are no more obvious than other documentary sources. Oral Historian Ken Howarth was of the opinion that "in terms of accuracy [oral history] is as good as the printed word and is usually far, far better".<sup>18</sup> The acquisition of oral history also reveals many nuances and details that would otherwise have remained unremarkable in other documentary sources. One such example in this study is that of the British wives of refugees who lost their British citizenship on marrying an 'alien.' The author did not at first consider this issue as of any major importance, however, the oral histories revealed this to play a major role within the refugees' wartime experiences.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p. 90.

<sup>17</sup> Perks, Robert, *Oral history: Talking about the Past* (The Historical Association: London, 1995), p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Howarth, Ken, *Oral History* (Sutton Publishing Ltd: Gloucestershire, 1999), p. viii. For a greater insight about the usefulness of oral history see the comprehensive texts, Thompson, Paul, *The Voice of the Past*; Perks, Robert and Thomson, Alistair (eds), *The Oral History Reader* (Routledge: London, 1998), and Thomson, Alistair, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1994).

Despite the advantages of using oral evidence within this thesis there remains some specific drawbacks that, although quite minor, require acknowledgment. One issue concerns the particular range and number of interviewees. Like most studies that examine oral histories, there is a restricted amount of evidence available to the author. The difficulty in completing a greater number of interviews for this thesis was two-fold. Firstly, being that the period of history specific to this work was over 60 years ago, it was impossible for the author to retrieve evidence from every Jewish ex-refugee who served in the British army. Reasons for this being that, sadly, the numbers of those ex-servicemen still alive is rapidly diminishing. The average age of the interviewees was around the mid 80's. Secondly, there was the problem of locating those who were willing to speak about their experiences coupled with the difficult task of preparing, organising and travelling to each ex-refugee servicemen for the interview. Nevertheless, a commendable number of interviews were conducted, some with ex-servicemen who have never been interviewed before.

The author intended to complete most interviews within the first two years of study in order to be prepared for writing up in the final years of the PhD. This limited time scale only allowed for a sample of interviews to be completed, perhaps under only one percent of those refugees who served during the Second World War. This asks the question of whether this number of interviews is representative enough of all the refugee servicemen. The fact remains that, considering all the difficulties in gathering information in this field of research, this was the greatest number of oral histories that could be achieved by the author. Through these testimonies, combined with the numerous and various documentary sources that were examined in great detail, it can

confidently be claimed that both reliable and original conclusions were drawn that were as representative of all refugee servicemen as possible.

Another concern was that most of the interviewees whose opinions were used in this study chose to remain in Britain after the war, suggesting possible anglophile bias. Despite there being validity in this argument, this problem was unavoidable and its limitations in the case of this thesis are minimal. The author's network of interviewees was mostly based in Britain because of the issue of practicality in reaching the destination of each interviewee.<sup>19</sup> Effort was made to interview in other nations but time and funding naturally restricted such activities. It would be wholly unreasonable to expect a greater sample of interviews away from the British Isles. Despite this, the seemingly biased collection of oral histories actually helps to reflect the fact that the majority of Jewish refugee servicemen eventually became anglophiles towards the end of the war and the vast majority choose to permanently remain in Britain.

This study also makes use of a wide range of autobiographical publications, unpublished memoirs and testimonies that have emerged since Bentwich's book. Furthermore, it draws upon a comprehensive survey of 11 different newspapers published between 1939-45, including every issue of *Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin* and *The Times*. Extensive research has been made of more contemporary periodicals. Every issue of the *Association of Jewish Refugees Information* has been examined from 1943-1960 and from 1999 to the present day.

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<sup>19</sup> See the bibliography for an indication of the many journeys taken across Britain, Germany, Israel and South Africa in order to retrieve as many oral testimonies as possible.

Previous works on German and Austrian refugees serving in the British army have not made similar systematic examinations of these sources.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Norman Bentwich and John Fox begin their surveys of refugee servicemen at the outset of war, this thesis begins earlier. It does so to provide the much-needed background and context for a full and proper understanding of the wartime experiences of the refugees. The persecution experienced by their families, their brethren and themselves under the Nazi regime are crucial to understanding the refugees' sense of identity.

Previous works examining this area of history have largely provided only a brief narrative of the refugees' experiences bereft of any investigative framework. For example, John Fox, Ian Dear and Norman Bentwich all bring to attention the key moment in 1943 when the refugees were permitted to change their names and identity discs. Their focus on this issue, as with others, is all too brief. They merely provide a factual reference to the event without any further analysis. They fail to engage with the question of whether there was a dilemma for the refugees when faced with the opportunity to change their names. This thesis discusses the impact of this issue and

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<sup>20</sup> There is only one exception, see Beckman, Morris, *The Jewish Brigade: An Army With Two Masters 1944-45* (Spellmount Ltd: Kent, 1998) He cited that he had examined every issue of the *Jewish Chronicle* 1939-45. The Jewish Brigade consisted of about 5000 soldiers and was the only independent Jewish military formation in the Allied Forces. Formed in September 1944 and consisting mostly of Palestinian Jews the Brigade saw action in the conquest of Northern Italy in early 1945. Although this is a comprehensive study of a unique army unit, it does not concern itself in any great detail to the general experiences of the German and Austrian soldiers in the British army. This is understandable as the Brigades were mostly formed out of the Jewish battalions of the Palestinian regiments. The experiences of those Jewish soldiers in the brigade and the Palestinian units in the British army will not be analysed within this thesis. Reasons for this are that the brigade was not formed and trained in Britain, (recruitment was in Palestine), and the number of refugee soldiers, already in the British army, that were permitted to transfer to the brigade or any other Palestinian unit was strictly limited, if not impossible. See *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 September 1944, p. 1; *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 September 1944, p. 1; *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 October 1944, p. 5. There are a number of autobiographies concerning the experiences of the Palestinian units and Jewish Brigade, such as Casper, Bernard, *With the Jewish Brigade* (Edward Goldston: London, 1947), and Rabinowitz, Rabbi L, *Soldiers From Judea: Palestinian Jewish Units in the Middle East 1941-1943* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1944).

many others that affected the male refugees.<sup>21</sup> As a comparator this thesis makes use of sources relating to the experiences of refugees within the American army, and of the Jewish Czechoslovakian and Polish soldiers who were based in Britain during the war. By comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences experienced by refugees in other armies one can reach a better understanding of the experiences of the refugee servicemen in the British army. A further comparative perspective is provided by examining the experiences of Jewish soldiers of British nationality. Finally, this thesis goes further in assessing the repercussions of the War Office's policies towards the refugees than has been provided by any previous studies.

The structure of this thesis is part chronological, part thematic:

- Chapter One examines the extent to which life changed for the future refugees following the Nazi rise to power in Germany. It looks at the impact that a Nazi policy of prejudice, persecution and marginalisation had on the German, and later, Austrian Jews relationship to their religious and national identities.
- Chapter Two is divided into two sections. Both analyse the experiences of the refugees in their land of refuge before volunteering for the British army. The first section considers the experiences of the refugees before war, whilst the second examines the changes in their civilian experiences as the war intensified, especially during the fall of France in May 1940 and the threat of Nazi invasion. Free from Nazi discrimination, the refugees found themselves

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<sup>21</sup> Although over 1000 refugee women served in the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) or Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF) their experiences are not examined within this thesis. Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 8.

subject to a British policy of close scrutiny motivated by the interests of national security. The screening and vetting of refugees inevitably involved some form of discriminatory practices.

- Chapter Three explores the experiences of the refugees whilst serving in the British army. It examines the issues surrounding the refugee's relationship to their Judaism during this time, and the extent to which the army catered for their religious needs.
- Chapter Four considers the extent to which the War Office made good their promise of granting full equality for the refugee soldiers within the armed forces. Was the War Office guilty of wasting the skills of the refugees?
- Chapter Five looks at the significance that the refugees' country of origin had on their treatment within the army. It examines whether Britain's military fortunes during the conflict had any correlation on the military experiences of the refugees.
- Chapter Six analyses the impact of the War Office's policy permitting the refugees to alter their 'identities.' In 1943 the refugees were encouraged to anglicise their names by deed poll and to remove evidence of their Judaism on their military papers and identity discs. Was this a major predicament for many of the refugees? If so why?

- Chapter Seven considers the extent to which the refugees were anglicised during their time in the army. Did the refugee servicemen have any desire to become British citizens and if so, was naturalisation possible during the war. What dilemmas did the refugees face if they took a British wife?
- Chapter Eight is divided into two sections. It details the patterns of relationship between the refugees and their peers in the army. Were anti-alien and anti-Semitic sentiments existent within the ranks of the army? It explores the refugees' treatment by British officers and by civilians. It also examines their treatment of German POWs during the allied advance upon Germany.
- The conclusion draws together the similarities and differences experienced by the Jewish Austrian and German refugees who served in the British Armed Forces during this period. It discusses the various 'phases' in the development of their sense of self; from German and Austrian citizens to victims of the Reich; from being stripped of their German and Austrian citizenship to becoming refugees in Britain; from their internment as 'enemy aliens' to becoming members of the British army; and finally to their naturalisation as British citizens. It surveys the legacy of these events.

In the following pages the Jewish Refugees from Germany and Austria who served in the British Armed Forces will be referred to as 'refugees' and are Jewish unless stated otherwise. To avoid confusion non-Jewish or 'gentile' soldiers will be referred to as 'British soldiers'.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Living Under the Nazi Regime in Germany and Austria, 1933-39**

The persecutions experienced by the future refugees and their families under the Nazi regime are important for understanding their sense of identity. The cumulative effects of war and displacement, and their eventual contact with a new society (Britain), were all factors which augured a profound change in the refugees' sense of their own private identity. Between 1933-39 the future refugees witnessed a dramatic and irreversible change in their every day lives. This chapter examines the status of the future refugees prior to the Nazi takeover of power. It investigates the extent to which their national and religious identities were affected by the anti-Jewish measures imposed by the Nazis. It discusses whether there were any shared motivations amongst these German Jews who eventually came to serve in the British army. What impact did Nazi racial policies have on the future refugees' identities? Did the legacy of this dramatic phase of their lives give any suggestion of inevitability that these men were to one day 'fight back' against the Nazis if the opportunity arose?

Between 1933-39 the majority of future refugees were youthful, however the full spectrum of refugee ages varied considerably. The age of enlistment into the Auxiliary Military Pioneers Corps (AMPC) in Britain in 1939-40 was between 20 to 50 years old, (the minimum age later being reduced to 18).<sup>1</sup> As a result, a German refugee who became old enough to enlist in 1945 would have been around six years old when the Nazis came to power whilst a refugee who was just under the maximum age when enlisting in the early stages of war would have been around 44 years old in

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<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 January 1940, p. 12, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 December 1940, p. 1.



1933. Indeed, some refugees interviewed for this thesis were young enough to leave Germany on the Kindertransport. Harry Brooke, for example, who was later to serve in an elite British commando unit comprising of mostly German and Austrians, was only 16 years old when he left for England on the Kindertransport in May 1939.<sup>2</sup> Many of the future refugees from Germany and Austria, whose experiences are examined in this chapter, were just entering their teenage years when the Nazis came to power. Ian Lowitt was born in 1919, whilst Ian Harris, Henry Adler and Harry Blake were born in 1920.<sup>3</sup> In contrast, some refugees who later served in the British army were old to an extent that they had also served in the German or Austrian army during the First World War. Slightly older German future refugees include Henry Van Der Walde who was born in 1907 and Bernard Sarle born in 1911. Viennese Willy Schmulinson was born in 1910 and Otto Fleming in 1914.<sup>4</sup>

It has been argued that people are born into a certain social group, but, it is not until they reach a certain age that they can make independent decisions regarding their identity and that they have a choice over the extent to which they attach themselves to a group.<sup>5</sup> It has also been argued that testimonies are greatly influenced by the “degree of maturity and judgement each had reached at the time of experience”.<sup>6</sup> These can in no way detract from the fact that experiences in youth and childhood, even if misinterpreted and clouded through the goggles of inexperience and

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<sup>2</sup> Harry Brooke, Second Interview, Sheffield, 24 November 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, Aberdeen, 28 May 2000; Ian Harris, speaking to Leigh, Wendy, ‘Churchill’s Secret Commandos’, *Daily Mail Weekend* (Associated Newspapers Ltd, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1999), p. 21; Henry Adler, Interview, London, 29 January 2003; Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview, Bury, 7 June 2000; Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000; Willi Schmulinson, British Certificate of Naturalization, 26 November 1947, held at the Jewish Museum. Dr. Otto Fleming, Second Interview, Sheffield, 23 March 2000.

<sup>5</sup> Basad, Elisha; Birnbaum, Max; and Benne, Kenneth, *The Social Self: Group Influences on Personal Identity* (Sage Publications: London), Sage Library of Social Research, Vol 144, p. 18.

<sup>6</sup> Steinhoff, Johannes; Pechel, Peter and Showalter, Dennis, *Voices from the Third Reich: An Oral History* (Da Capo Press: New York, 1994), p. x.

immaturity, will help shape, formulate and create an individual's later identity. Even if they misinterpreted events at the time, or did so 'immaturely' the recollected experience, for them, will be real and influential.

Evidence suggests that there were a number of similarities behind the upbringing and development of attitudes and identities of the future refugee servicemen. It was fairly common that many of the future refugees had lived within the major commercial cities in Germany and Austria, especially the capitals Berlin and Vienna.<sup>7</sup> The majority of the future refugees, in both Germany and Austria came from a middle class background.<sup>8</sup> It was common that the refugees' families were involved in skilled trades and professions that involved everyday interaction with the gentile population, for example, shop owners, salesmen, bankers or doctors. Henry Adler, future refugee servicemen from Germany, believed his family to have been from the upper-middle class. His father was "a brilliant man" who had been awarded a doctorate in engineering and had helped build fortifications for Germany during the First World War.<sup>9</sup> Harry Brooke's stepfather was a solicitor. Bernard Sarle's father was a hops merchant and travelled Germany dealing with clients. Hans Jackson recalled that his parents owned two textile shops whilst Harry Blake's father was a high-class gentlemen's outfitter.<sup>10</sup> One major reason why many of the future refugees came from this social background was due to their families having the finances and contacts abroad necessary to emigrate from Nazi territory to Britain.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The Jewish population in Germany in 1933 was estimated at between 510,000 to 525,000 of which two-thirds were concentrated in cities of over 100,000 inhabitants. Yahil, Leni, *The Holocaust: The Fate of the European Jewry* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1991), p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> These conclusions were derived from the interviews, autobiographies, and letters to author.

<sup>9</sup> Adler, Interview.

<sup>10</sup> Harry Brooke, First Interview, Sheffield, 26 May 1999; Sarle, Interview; Blake, Interview; Hans Jackson, Second Interview, London, March 2000.

<sup>11</sup> This assumption is based on the interviews and autobiographies. The British government had recorded the figures of refugees from Germany and Austria seeking refuge in England but there was no

After the full emancipation of the Jews within the Weimar Republic, they became an integral part of public life. During the 1920's the process of assimilation for the educated middle class Jew became more pronounced than at any previous time, allowing them to blend into the German culture "both as producers and consumers".<sup>12</sup> This was the case for the majority of the future refugee servicemen.<sup>13</sup> They came from families whose loyalties were distinctly German or Austrian. Harry Brooke, for instance, remembered that his family were very much part of the German community.<sup>14</sup> Bernard Sarle similarly explained that both he and his parents were patriotic Germans.<sup>15</sup> The future refugees' fathers, and even a few of the future refugees' themselves had served in the German or Austrian Imperial armies during the

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distinctions made between the social or religious background of the men. Sir S. Hoare stated, "in this country there is no official system of classifying people by race or religion". HC Vol 343, col 347, 2 February 1939. An increasing number of Jews sought to emigrate if they could meet the stringent conditions imposed by the Reich and by prospective host countries. Steinhoff; Pechel and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, p. 40. Initially the German authorities were interested in the idea of Jewish emigration and to some extent were even prepared to promote it. Leni Yahil explained that in the early period there were limited prospects of the German Jews finding countries that would absorb immigrants. Yahil, Leni, *The Holocaust*, p. 91. The historian Konrad Kwiet explained that emigration was very expensive as the Jews had to pay a Reich flight tax (reichfluchtsteuer) in order to leave. Kwiet, Konrad, *November 1938: From 'Kristallnacht' to Genocide* (Berg: New York 1991), p. 142. This thesis will not be analysing the British admission policy in any detail. For a potted history of Britain's admission policy 1933-39 from the refugees' point of view see F. L. Brassloff's article in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, April 1943, pp. 1-2. For a more comprehensive survey see London, Louise, *Whitehall and the Jews: British Immigration, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Peukert, Detlev J. K., *The Weimar Republic* (The Penguin Press: London 1991), p. 158.

<sup>13</sup> Most former German interviewees described that they were very assimilated.

<sup>14</sup> Brooke, Second Interview.

<sup>15</sup> Sarle, Interview.

First World War.<sup>16</sup> The future refugees were brought up to regard Germany as an advanced and tolerant nation, one that gave full equality.<sup>17</sup>

The religious and national identities of future refugees co-existed quite comfortably in Germany and Austria. Given peoples multiplicity of identities, it was never a straight choice between their identification with their German or Austrian background or their Jewish heritage. In the majority of cases they did feel both German or Austrian and Jewish at the same time.<sup>18</sup> However, the importance they personally placed on them differed somewhat, often as a result of their cultural upbringing. There was a minority of future refugee servicemen who considered themselves very much German and at the same time were practising Jews. Henry Van Der Walde, for example, had a firm belief in Judaism during this period. He was born in Emden, a small fishing town that later became a naval port for submarines during the war. He described the Jewish community at the time as “orthodox and self-contained”. He and his family regularly went to Synagogue and kept kosher. Henry also went to a Jewish primary school and Jewish boarding school near Brunswick. Henry felt very much a German citizen.<sup>19</sup>

However, the majority of future refugees and their parents believed assimilation into German society was only achieved by less involvement within Jewish spiritual life.

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<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 27 October 1941, p. 5; *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1. During World War One some twelve thousand Jews lost their lives for the fatherland. 100,000 Jews served in the German army during World War One. Kaes, Anton; Jay, Martin and Dimendberg, Edward, Ed, *Weimar Republic Sourcebook* (University of California Press-Berkley 1995), p. 248. Many of the former German and Austrian interviewees explained that their fathers had served in the respective armies during the First World War, although a number were enlisted into the army rather than volunteered.

<sup>17</sup> It has been argued that the Jews were among Germany’s best citizens. They had taken advantage of legal emancipation and an open society to make contributions in every aspect of the countries economic, cultural and intellectual life. Steinhoff, Pechel and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, p. 40.

<sup>18</sup> There were exceptions to this premise. These cases are explained later.

<sup>19</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview.

There was the “emergence of a new international, secularised culture”.<sup>20</sup> As a consequence a number of future refugees retained a closer bond towards their Germaness than Jewishness. Harry Brooke recalled that they [including himself] regarded themselves as Germans before Jews.<sup>21</sup> It is important to note that their sense of being Jewish still existed even when they had no interest in the religion itself. It would seem that their identity with Judaism was not necessarily religious based, but rather a cultural bond. They would describe themselves as German Jews but not in the sense that they regarded themselves as a national minority.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, to a considerable extent there existed a strong correlation between the middle class assimilated Jews and those who had liberal attitudes toward their Judaism.<sup>23</sup> Harry Brooke stated, “religion was not taken seriously. We were Germans in every way and I went to a German school and had mostly non-Jewish friends”.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in Austria, Peter Frean recalled that he felt more of an Austrian than a Jew.<sup>25</sup>

Although many future refugees did not embrace the religious aspects of the religion they were born into, in most circumstances, they were still aware of their Jewish roots. Peter Frean explained, “my father had been a captain in the First World War and he raised me to identify myself as a Jew, but not in the religious sense”. Louis Rudnic from Berlin explained that “I consider myself a Jew, but a non-believer, I never have been a believer from early childhood as religion was of no interest to me. I was Bar Mitzvah but we did not keep a kosher home”.<sup>26</sup> Harry Blake described a

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<sup>20</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, p. 159.

<sup>21</sup> Brooke, Second Interview.

<sup>22</sup> All interviewees from Germany expressed this opinion of how they identified themselves.

<sup>23</sup> For a detailed survey on the process of Jewish assimilation in Germany see Berghahn, Marion, *Continental Britons: German-Jewish Refugees from Nazism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Berg Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 1988).

<sup>24</sup> Brooke, Second Interview.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Frean, Interview, London, 12 April 2000.

<sup>26</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London, 8 May 2000.

similar account saying, “I came from a very liberal family in a non-Jewish neighbourhood. I was a street boy and the religious education I was given came in one ear and went out the other. I couldn’t read Hebrew. We were well assimilated; I identified myself as a Jew but was never interested in religion”. Harry also recalled that, initially he would only observe high holy days in the Jewish calendar, such as *Pesach* (Passover) or *Yom Kippur* (day of fasting). However, he regarded the prospect of going to an all-Jewish school as a form of punishment. Harry Blake stressed, “A Jewish School for me was taboo”.<sup>27</sup> Ken Overman argued that, “first and foremost we were German. We considered ourselves German. Never denied being Jewish. We felt totally Jewish and felt totally German”.<sup>28</sup> Henry Adler explained that, to a large extent, religion did not play a significant role in his early life. He recalled, “despite my father being brought up in a religious environment, my father never told us of the Jewish traditions. I went to synagogue twice in my youth. Very assimilated family, completely non-religious. Just wasn’t religious. I was aware of and never denied being Jewish. I was Anti-religious but always knew we were Jewish”.<sup>29</sup>

In some cases, however, there were future refugees who did not retain any personal identity with Judaism in any form. Two reasons seem to account for such an attitude. One was disbelief in a supreme creator. The future refugee Bernard Sarle, for example, believed himself to have been an atheist at the time. He was brought up in Fürth, near Nuremberg. Despite a large Jewish community and the presence of several synagogues his parents never embraced Judaism. His father actively discouraged the idea of a Bar Mitzvah to which Bernard happily obliged. He said, “I ate pork and everything, nobody [his family] went to synagogue”. He was evidently aware of his

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<sup>27</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>28</sup> Ken Overman, Interview (Clacton, 21 April 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Adler, Interview with Kern.

Jewish heritage but made the choice not to take any significant interest in it. He stated, “in Germany religion was regarded as part of your identity and appeared on birth certificate. It did not mean much to me, I was pretty assimilated”.<sup>30</sup>

The second reason was that some German and Austrian Jews regarded conversion as the definitive expression of commitment to their nationality and that baptism was the ‘logical conclusion’ to a process of integration into the non-Jewish world.<sup>31</sup> There were instances of this within the contingent of the future refugee servicemen. It has been argued that, as Jewishness is a “nebulous and indefinable quality”, there existed members of other denominations or atheists who accepted the verdict that they were still Jews.<sup>32</sup> However, the evidence from interviews conducted for this study suggest that, despite an awareness of Jewish heritage, most future refugees born into converted families were not at all interested in their Jewishness. Fritz Lustig’s connection with Judaism at the time was far removed. Despite their Jewish roots, his parents withdrew from the Jewish community and Fritz was baptised and later confirmed. His reasoning for his parents’ decision was because they wanted “to further the assimilation process”.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Eric Kenneth, from Vienna, was another of a Jewish background but was brought up as a Catholic. Despite having orthodox grandparents his father converted to avoid complications in a mixed marriage. Eric was baptised but lost his faith in Catholicism after taking a firm interest in science. He was only told of his Jewish heritage when he was 14 but it remained of little interest

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<sup>30</sup> Sarle, Interview with Kern.

<sup>31</sup> Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 23.

<sup>32</sup> Article by Benn W. Levy M.P., *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1948, pp. 5-6.

<sup>33</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

to him. Eric admitted, “I knew absolutely nothing about Judaism”. As a consequence Eric had no empathy with the Jewish religion or identity.<sup>34</sup>

It is evident from various sources, including my interviews, that amongst the German and Austrian Jews there was a trend of a general weakening of their ties with their Jewishness. Of this, Detlev Peukert has written,

The German Jewish community was fearful for its identity and its survival, partly due to the pull of secularisation. Jews were not so much becoming converted to Christianity as unobtrusively losing their faith, abandoning religious observance, contracting mixed marriages and bringing up their children whether under Christian auspices, or without any religious education at all.<sup>35</sup>

This matches the experiences of the majority of the future refugees who later served in the British army. They felt they had more in common with non-Jews and did not perceive themselves as being any ‘different’ from other Germans or Austrians. As a result they did not actively involve themselves in any Jewish traditions that made them stand out from their community. They dressed no differently than the gentile population, did not keep kosher and only spoke German in public and, in most cases, in the home too. Many of the future refugees could not read Hebrew. Some future refugees were aware of the Yiddish language, but it was rarely spoken.<sup>36</sup> Henry Adler exclaimed, “we didn’t speak any Jewish [Yiddish]”.<sup>37</sup> Harry Blake explained that his father went as far as giving him “a clout round the head” if he ever muttered something in Yiddish such as ‘*nebech*’ (you poor thing or loser). He recalled that the speaking of anything in Yiddish in his household was regarded as impolite.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Eric Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

<sup>35</sup> Peukert, *The Weimar Republic*, pp. 158-59.

<sup>36</sup> These conclusions were derived from the interviews, autobiographies, and letters to author.

<sup>37</sup> Adler, Interview.

<sup>38</sup> Blake, Interview.



The extent that the future refugees and their close families distanced themselves from their religion can best be analysed when compared to the orthodox (*Hassidic*) Jews in Germany and Austria. There existed great intra-group differences between the liberal, more assimilated Jews and the orthodox Jews. It was not uncommon that these contrasts between the two Jewish groups resulted, in its extreme, as a form of Jewish anti-Semitism by the assimilated German and Austrian Jews.<sup>39</sup> The orthodox Jews of Germany and Austria were often in a different social class to the more liberal Jews, including most of the future refugees. The orthodox *ostjuden* (eastern) Jews traditionally formed insular communities, which remained aloof from the rest of the society, including the liberal Jews.<sup>40</sup> The majority of refugees had no sense of common identity with the migrants from Poland and Russia. They were socially and culturally different. As a consequence of the *ostjuden*'s strict traditions and forms of worship there grew a conflict with the assimilated Jews who were worried that traditional Jews would only increase any tensions that existed with the gentile population. Indeed, it has been expressed that "with their strange accents and unfamiliar forms of behaviour they became a particular focus for anti-Semitic prejudice".<sup>41</sup> Even German Jews attacked the Eastern Jews as outsiders.<sup>42</sup> Harry Brooke recalled the embarrassment and occasional resentment aimed at the many Jewish immigrants who fled from the pogroms in the East. He explained that, "they

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<sup>39</sup> This phenomenon of "Jewish self-hatred" was classically analysed by the Hanover philosopher Theodor Lessing. He had experienced the lure of self-hatred with vicious attacks on the eastern Jews and culturally pessimistic perspective. Kaes; Jay, and Dimendberg (eds), *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, p. 249.

<sup>40</sup> Mol, Hans, Ed, *Identity and Religion: International Cross-Cultural Approaches* (Sage Publications: London, 1978), p. 43. Jews from Eastern Europe fled to Germany to escape Polish and Russian persecution, they congregated in places like the Scheunenviertel in Berlin. Less assimilated and modern than their German counterparts, they often aroused anxieties within the established Jewish communities, which feared any reminder of its ghettoised past would give credence to anti-Semitic stereotypes. Kaes; Jay, and Dimendberg, eds, *Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, p. 249

<sup>41</sup> Peukert and Lane, *The Weimar Republic*, p. 158

<sup>42</sup> Steinhoff; Pechel and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, p. 41.

only spoke Yiddish, were very religious, and looked strange. They were not a pleasant site with their beards, gowns, and hats and we did not want anything to do with them”.<sup>43</sup> The refugees saw these orthodox Jews as representing an entirely different culture and a threat to their own attempts to improve relations with the gentile population. Similarly, Harry Blake explained that his mother went as far as to wish not to attend the synagogue that was closest to their home simply because the orthodox Jews went there and “she wanted nothing to do with them”.<sup>44</sup>

Maurice Hermele, a future refugee Polish serviceman, was one of the *ostjuden* in Germany before the Nazi takeover of power. He was born in Oswiecim, Poland in 1913, which was later to become the infamous death/concentration camp Auschwitz. His family, like most *ostjuden* were very religious. His family moved to Berlin in 1922, but his father believed that the family would not “be able to survive as *Hassidic* Jews like in Poland” and so tried to liberalise their orthodox traditions, especially in public.<sup>45</sup> His parents did not always speak to him in Yiddish, as they wanted their children to speak only German.<sup>46</sup> After studying in a German mixed school Maurice explained that “living in Germany even as a Jew, we were always proud to be Germans. To our credit we were pleased to be Germans. School taught you to be patriotic. I was very pleased that I lived amongst Germans. We were all pleased because it was a great nation”.<sup>47</sup> So even though, in the eyes of the Weimar Republic, he and his parents were officially Polish, he strongly identified himself as a German. He also felt “100 per cent Jewish” and could read Hebrew, but he still tried to avoid

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<sup>43</sup> Brooke, Interview.

<sup>44</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>45</sup> Maurice Hermele, Interview, London, 6 May 2000.

<sup>46</sup> Byers, Alan (ed), *Bronia: From Auschwitz to Hampstead: The Story of the Life of Bronia Bajer, née Hermele* (Publisher Unknown, 1999), p. 63.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. p. 64.

going to synagogue as much as possible. Nevertheless, he recalled that his family only had Jewish friends and did not mix that well with the gentile German community.<sup>48</sup>

In February 1933, it was reported that the German Jews had a deep conviction that there would be no toleration of an assault upon the constitutional rights of parts of the German community; “for were not German Jews inseparably bound up with all things truly and genuinely German”. However, “then came the day, irrepressibly, when every Jew was an outlaw”.<sup>49</sup> After the Nazi takeover of power in 1933, the Jews of Germany were submitted to waves of anti-Semitic laws, the effects of which acted as a catalyst in changing their personal identities. The boycott on 1 April was a sign that the new order meant what it said about Jews having no place in Germany.<sup>50</sup> The anti-Jewish legislation and ‘actions’ were initially designed with the intention to encourage a “systematic and calculated pauperisation that was followed by measures designed to isolate and humiliate the Jews”.<sup>51</sup> As a result every future refugee felt the impact of the Nazis institutionalised prejudice and persecution, although to differing degrees.

Initially, there was a giant gulf between the perceptions of the Nazis, who hated the Jews, and the future refugees. It was written in the *Jüdische Rundschau*, “we [German Jews] stand in the midst of tremendous changes in intellectual, political, social and economic life”. As a consequence, “today the Jews cannot speak except as Jews” and

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<sup>48</sup> Hermele, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> These opinions from *C.C. Zeitung, Journal of the Jewish Citizens of the German Faith* (2 February and 30 March 1933) in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1949, p. 2. George Mosse has argued, “rejecting the Jewish past as it had evolved during the centuries, Jews partook in a culture which in a very real sense was theirs as much as it was the Germans”. Mosse, George, *Germans and Jews* (New York, 1970), p. 113. Quoted in Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 29.

<sup>50</sup> Steinhoff, Pechel and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, p. 41.

<sup>51</sup> Burleigh, Michael, and Wipperman, Wolfgang, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991), p. 87.

so “the Jews under attack, must learn to acknowledge themselves”.<sup>52</sup> However, his was not the stance adopted by most of the future refugees. As loyal patriots the future refugees and their families expected they would have their rights protected. Between 1933-35 many of the future refugees felt little difference in their Germaness despite the Nazis vehemently believing them to be un-German.<sup>53</sup> Many of the future refugees had never denied their Judaism but in the opinions of some of the future refugees there was a disbelief that the anti-Jewish laws were directed against them. To Harry Blake, for example, the whole situation did not make any sense. The Jews of Germany had done nothing to warrant dislocation from society. He fervently explained that, despite the Nazis claiming otherwise, “I was German. I was born in Germany; my parents were German, my grandparents were born in Berlin and had fought for Germany as Prussian soldiers. I was no different to the person in next flat”.<sup>54</sup>

Despite the Nazis institutionalising the removal of German Jews from Aryan society, the future refugees were slow to accept that this policy would apply to them. There were three reasons for this.<sup>55</sup> Firstly, up until at least 1935, the anti-Jewish laws did not directly affect the daily lives of all of the future refugees to any considerable extent.<sup>56</sup> Secondly, there was a belief that the Nazis were not representative of ‘their Germany’. They regarded the Nazis and Germany as two separate entities. For some this distinction continued into the war. Thirdly, before the Nazi rule, there was great

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<sup>52</sup> Article by Robert Weltsch in *Judische Rundschau*, No 27, 4 April 1933. Quoted in Arad, Yitzhak; Gutman Yisrael and Margalit, Abraham, (eds), *Documents on the Holocaust*, 5th edn (Yad Vashem 1993), p. 45.

<sup>53</sup> Every former German interviewee during this period still felt a strong kinship with his or her German identity. Only one had left Germany for Britain before 1935, (Peter Frean in 1933).

<sup>54</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> The author devised this idea based on all the evidence relating to the future refugees.

<sup>56</sup> As explained these reasons cannot be used to explain the experience of every future refugee. Harry Blake's father, for example, was rounded up by the Nazis in 1933 and murdered. This is discussed later.

success in their total assimilation into German life and so they did not represent as much of a target as the very conspicuous orthodox Eastern Jews.<sup>57</sup> Alfred Weiner, of the leadership of the *CentralVerein* (Central Association of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith) expressed the view that “before the law we are non-Germans without equal rights; to ourselves we are Germans with full rights” as the German Jews “cannot deceive our innermost [feelings]”, that of being a German.<sup>58</sup>

From 1935 there could no longer be any doubts about the Nazi regime’s interpretation of the status of German Jews. This was evident in two respects, the Nazis legal treatment of Jews and the racial definition of Jews. Between 1933 and 1935 the future refugees were slowly reduced to second-class citizens. This process culminated in the Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour, and the Reich Citizenship Law both delivered on 15 September 1935.<sup>59</sup> After 1935, any attempts by the future refugees to continue their lives in the manner of the past now became futile. As a result it was only a matter of time before their feelings of Germaness and Jewishness altered. The first supplementary law in November made concrete the future refugees’ legal and racial separation from German society.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Marion Berghahn argued that many Jews felt that anti-Semitism and Jewish behaviour are somehow interrelated. This is true in the case of the future refugees and theirs and their families attitudes towards the *ostjuden*. They tried “anxiously to avoid ‘sticking their necks out’, lest the monster of anti-Semitism be provoked”. Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 25

<sup>58</sup> The position of the German Jews as seen by Alfred Weiner in *C.C-Zeitung*, No 22, 1 June 1933. Quoted in Arad, Gutman, Margaliot, *Documents on Holocaust*, pp. 50-51.

<sup>59</sup> The decree 1.iv, declared 14 November 1935, stated that a Jew could not be a citizen of the Reich. Therefore, they lost all political rights. The laws for the Protection for German Blood and Honour put an end to any further assimilation of the German Jews. Noakes, J and Pridham, G, (eds). *Nazism: Volume Two, State, Economy and Society 1933-1939* (University of Exeter Press: Exeter, 1997), pp. 535-537.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

All the future refugees were affected by these Nazis doctrines. However, the emotional impact on each individual differed somewhat. Harry Brooke stated, “the Nuremberg laws affected us all. Before it was possible to live together but the laws divided the Germans from Jews”.<sup>61</sup> Hans Jackson similarly commented “life was getting noticeably restrictive with signs in cafes saying no Jews and open spaces that read, “the way to Palestine is not through our park”.<sup>62</sup> Louis Rudnic, born in 1917 in Kiev, had lived in Germany since 1928 but had a Rumanian passport. Louis explained, “as a foreign subject I had a certain amount of freedom of movement and was not as affected by the laws as others. However, we were unable to visit theatres, concerts and other entertainments, unless they were organised and performed by Jewish artists”.<sup>63</sup>

Henry Van Der Walde was one refugee who did not allow the radical changes of circumstances in Germany to upset him too much. He explained that it was “business as usual” in the textile shop he worked in. Even when he was “released” from work for being a Jew in 1936, and with all the increasingly numerous Nazi encroachments on daily life he still “lived in the carefree past, and with all the attractions of a highly developed cultural life in the capital”.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, Harry Blake explained that, at first, “I Just felt the Nuremberg laws do not concern me. The idea that you can not have intercourse with non-Jews was ridiculous”. However, unlike Henry Van Der Walde, Harry Blake indicated that it was during this period that he became very confused over his German and Jewish identities. His strong feelings towards his German identity were in stark contrast to the Nazi ideal and there was nothing he could do but

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<sup>61</sup> Brooke, Second Interview.

<sup>62</sup> Jackson, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000.

<sup>63</sup> Rudnic, Louis, ‘Life Story’ (No Date), p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Van Der Walde, Henry, ‘My Life’ (1993), p. 16.

accept that within the Reich he was different to the other Germans. He explained that he was offended and upset by the idea that “all of a sudden I was ear-marked as a Jew, and was told you’re not a German. I felt hurt (*sic*)”.<sup>65</sup>

Not only had the Reich Citizenship Law removed the future refugee’s nationality and legal rights, it also altered the whole concept of Jewish religious identity. Judaism was proclaimed officially as a race, designated by a scientific classification system that drew upon a person’s Jewish ancestry. This was not a radical initiative created by the Nazis at the time. Such racial theories were the culmination of a long intellectual and pseudoscientific process that was not unique to Germany.<sup>66</sup> The roots of pseudo-scientific, Nazi anti-Semitism were to be found in Social Darwinism, with the differences between cultures, genders, class and races being ascribed to fixed biological differences.<sup>67</sup> Hitler had denied that “Jewishness was a matter of religion; rather it was inherited: that is, biologically determined”.<sup>68</sup> The Jews were perceived as biologically different to the Aryans and therefore, being of different blood, they never could become citizens of the Reich, no matter how assimilated and German they felt. Nazi pseudo-science proclaimed the Jews to be the lowest caste of race and that Jewish ‘inferiority’ could be scientifically proven by the highlighting of genetic differences, such as a propensity to ‘criminality’ or their ‘Jewish’ physical appearances.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>66</sup> The study and teaching of eugenics and racial hygiene was popular in the early Twentieth Century, including America and Britain. Iwand, Mark, *The Value of the Human Being: Medicine in Germany 1918-45* (Arztekammer: Berlin, 1991), p. 11.

<sup>67</sup> Aly, Gotz, Chroust, Peter and Pross, Christian, *Cleansing the Fatherland: Nazi Medicine and Racial Hygiene* (The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 1994), p. xii; Crook Paul, *Darwinism, War and History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1994), pp. 7-8.

<sup>68</sup> Geary, Dick, *Hitler and Nazism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (Routledge: London, 2000), p. 7.

<sup>69</sup> The measuring of the head and nose were commonplace as a method of discovering someone’s level of Jewishness. Helmut Turnsek was an Austrian gentile but he recalled that he had to undergo a medical examination to determine his race. Helmut Turnsek, Interview, London, 7 October 1997.

The Reich Citizenship Law had determined that all German Jews, including all of the future refugees, were to be officially treated as an inferior people, unworthy of being citizens of the Reich. The vagueness of the law played into the Nazis' hands by enabling Jewish rights to be stripped away piecemeal in a series of supplementary decrees over the following years.<sup>70</sup> The classification system determined who was a Jew, and what level of 'Jewishness' they were. A Jew was defined as anyone who had three Jewish grandparents and a Mischling (half Jew) was defined as anybody who had either one or two Jewish grandparents.<sup>71</sup>

The future refugees were in a situation where their own sense of Jewishness was no longer relevant. Their identity was racially defined by external forces. Fritz Lustig, for example, did not identify himself as a Jew because he was brought up as a Catholic. However, according to the racial laws he officially became defined as a Jew. He explained, "once the Nazis came I was considered non-Aryan. Whether I was Christian or not did not matter".<sup>72</sup> All future refugees were categorized as Jewish irrespective of their personal attitudes towards Jewish religion and traditions. No matter how orthodox or how assimilated they were, they were all categorized the same without distinction. The implementation of anti-Jewish laws and racial classification was a more radical process in Austria than in Germany. The reactions of

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<sup>70</sup> Noakes and Pridham, *Nazism*, pp. 536-539.

<sup>71</sup> The Supplementary Decree of Reich Citizenship Law, 14 November 1935, stated IV. 1. A Jew cannot be a citizen of the Reich. He has no right to vote in political affairs and he cannot occupy public office. V.1. - A Jew is anyone who is descended from at least three grandparents who are racially full Jews. V.2 - A Jew is also one who is descended from two full Jewish grandparents if (a) he belonged to the Jewish religious community at the time the law was issued, or joins the community later, (b) he was married to a Jewish person or (c) he is the offspring of a marriage with a Jew. The law with regards to Mischlinge, those of mixed Jewish blood, II.1 - An individual of mixed Jewish blood is one who is descended from one or two grandparents who are racially full Jews, in so far as he or she does not count as a Jew to article V. Ibid pp. 536-539.

<sup>72</sup> Lustig, Interview.



the Austrian Jewish future refugees were the same. Ian Harris, from Vienna, was a Protestant. Despite having a Jewish father he was not regarded as a Jew in the eyes of Jewish religious law. Irrespective of this, after the Anschluss, he was defined as a person of the Jewish race.<sup>73</sup> Eric Kenneth also 'became a Jew' after the Nazis marched into Austria. Such an identity was forced upon him even though he had no affinity with the religion. As a result Eric was isolated from Aryan life and treated no differently to any other Austrian Jew.<sup>74</sup>

The strength of some of the future refugees' loyalty towards their German and Austrian identities, despite being treated as the enemies of their nations, is best illustrated in the case of the military forces, the *Wehrmacht* (German army). Some wished to serve their country in the army, even after the Nazis had risen to power. They regarded themselves as Germans or Austrians despite the Nazi definition that labelled them otherwise. They felt as entitled to enlist as any non-Jew. During the early years of Nazi rule Jews were still permitted to join the army, then called the *Reichswehr*. From 1935, though, Jews were no longer accepted into the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>75</sup> However, this did not prevent some future refugees from volunteering, not in an attempt to demonstrate their patriotism, but because they felt the anti-Jewish measures simply did not apply to them. Egon Bahr, born in 1922 in the small town of Toragus and who later moved to Berlin, explained that he joined the Luftwaffe and was sent to Belgium for basic training before joining an officer training school. "Then I got a

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<sup>73</sup> Ian Harris speaking to Leigh, 'Churchill's Secret Commandos', *Daily Mail Weekend*, 3 April 1999, p. 21. In Jewish religious law you are required to have a Jewish mother to be regarded as Jewish.

<sup>74</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>75</sup> Gutman, Yisrael, *Fighters Amongst the Ruins: The Story of Jewish Heroism During WW2*, (B'nai B'rith Books: Washington D.C, 1988), p. 245. Law for Reconstruction of the Wehrmacht was declared on 16 March 1935. The *Reichsvertretung* (Nations Representative of German Jews) responded a week later stating "we German Jews are confident that we will not be denied participation in military service on equal terms with other Germans". This protest demonstrated the large extent that many German Jews still felt strong in their Germaness and the disbelief in being treated as a second-class national minority. In Arad, Gutman, Margaliot, *Documents on Holocaust*, pp. 71-72.

letter from my father... 'the Gau Racial Research Office has discovered your ancestry'... officially I was one quarter Jewish. Naturally I reported to my commanding officer. He found the whole thing disgraceful. He relieved me from duty, and planned to court martial me for "attempting to infiltrate the Wehrmacht". The other officers were decent men and their requests were enough to quash court martial proceedings. My application showed from the beginning that I had a Jewish grandmother, only no one had ever noticed. According to regulations they should never have accepted me for officers' training in the first place. To save everybody face I was just discharged as unworthy to be a soldier of the Reich [*sic*]].<sup>76</sup> Helmut Scmoeckel, also from Germany, had a similar experience in the German Navy. He joined the navy in 1936 and recalled "everything was fine until one day I was informed that I had been discharged. I mean, I looked like any other blond, curly haired Hitler youth, and took it for granted. Although my grandparents had married as Christians they had come from Jewish families".<sup>77</sup>

Fascinatingly, after 1935, some future refugees were obliged to join the *Wehrmacht*. Eric Kenneth explained that, in 1938, two months after the Germans had marched into his hometown of Linz they began recruiting for the *Wehrmacht*. Eric was informed that he had to attend a meeting with a German officer about joining the army. This put Eric in an awkward situation and so he did not go. A policeman came to him the next morning and notified him he had to go. Eric explained to the officer that, despite being a Catholic, he was regarded by the Nazis as a person of Jewish blood. Eric had blond hair and was very tanned at the time. He believed that he looked "very Aryan". The officer stared at his birth certificate that stated Eric was baptised and could not

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<sup>76</sup> Steinhoff, Pechel and Showalter, *Voices from the Third Reich*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* p. 55.

understand how Eric was a Jew. Eric told the officer that he was supposed to be leaving Austria but the officer informed him, that if war were declared, Eric would have to return and report for Army duty. Eric was given a German military passport but two months later he was told to return it.<sup>78</sup>

Similar incidents were not unusual and demonstrated that the change of identities among the future refugees was not a clear-cut process neither at a personal or a national level. Fritz Lustig explained that, although Jews were exempted from military service he was still called to the recruiting office when he turned 18. He had to go through the same process as all other Aryan conscripts and it was only after the army examinations that he was informed he was excused from service.<sup>79</sup> Henry Van Der Walde also had to go to the Ministry of War to get exemption from duties. He was informed that he could not leave Germany until he had been there even though he would not have been accepted into the *Wehrmacht* anyhow.<sup>80</sup>

The disappearances of the future refugees' own personal sense of national identity was a relatively slow process that mirrored the gradual exclusion of Jews from German society. For many of the future refugees, it took years of persecution eventually to alter their perception of their national and religious identities. It was not necessarily the case that the future refugee completely lost an affinity with Germany or Austria. For many it still existed. However, many future refugees who had believed themselves to be German or Austrian before being Jewish came to reverse this attitude.<sup>81</sup> For some, this process could have been perceived as an identity crisis.

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<sup>78</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>79</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>80</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>81</sup> These conclusions were derived from the interviews, autobiographies, and letters to author.

Marion Berghahn suggests that the liberal Jews were so much part of German life that their uprooting from society and the status that was forced upon them was such a humiliation that it resulted in psychological trauma.<sup>82</sup> In some respects, this was true for some interviewees in this study. Judaism did not mean much to Ian Lowitt but life in Austria became increasingly tense after the Nazi takeover of power in Germany. Ian admitted that he had an identity problem. He had always felt Austrian and nothing more. He explained that he was being told to accept that he was something that he felt he was not. His sense of Jewishness was forced upon him and he found the idea of being persecuted for it very upsetting. He said, “I always wanted to be an ordinary chap. The greatest thing for me was when grandfather sent me for some beer and I queued up with other kids and walked back with beer in a glass, I was ordinary”.<sup>83</sup> Harry Blake believed his identity as a German was so strong that it was not until 1938, after *Kristallnacht*, that he understood things had changed.<sup>84</sup>

The future refugees’ physical separation from society slowly led to a distancing of their feelings towards Germany. This included the eventual loss of friendships with non-Jews. It has been argued that “every Jew had non-Jewish friends, and they would defend him against criticism and attack”.<sup>85</sup> For the assimilated future refugees this may have been true during the early years of Nazi rule. Nevertheless, despite loyalty from non-Jewish friends their friendships eventually became untenable. Harry Blake described that he very slowly felt a change in his non-Jewish friends. He gradually lost contact with them and felt that it eventually became clear he had to do something

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<sup>82</sup> Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 48.

<sup>83</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>85</sup> Berghahn, *Continental Britons*, p. 28.

different, as he could see no future for himself in Germany.<sup>86</sup> Eric Kenneth also talked of how his non-Jewish friends started to treat him differently until suddenly they did not speak to him anymore. However, Eric explained, “by that time he did not care, as it was the least of my troubles”.<sup>87</sup> It was not unusual for some of the refugees to feel that it was unjust that they were classified in the same grouping as people they had had nothing in common with when compared to their non-Jewish friends. Some younger refugees even felt a sense of jealousy at first towards their non-Jewish counterparts who were involved in Nazi youth groups and who were going out on expeditions and playing sports. Fritz Lustig recalled, “everybody else belonged to Nazi organisations as they had to”.<sup>88</sup> Ken Overman used to mix with non-Jews but he said that after a while everything stopped and “old friends would ignore you”.<sup>89</sup> Lustig explained that they were so much apart from the non-Jews socially that “you began to feel less and less German the longer the Nazis rule went on”.<sup>90</sup>

At different times, all the future refugees eventually began to recognise that life in Germany and Austria would never be as it once was. The future refugees acknowledged that they were no longer Germans, whether they still desired to be so or not. The common ties they had shared with the non-Jewish population were removed. This in turn had an effect on their sense of Jewishness.

While Nazi persecution and the segregation of future refugees eroded their German or Austrian identities, it began to enhance their bond with their Jewish identities. They were being persecuted because of their connection, no matter how strong or weak, to

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<sup>86</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>88</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>89</sup> Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

<sup>90</sup> Lustig, Interview.

Judaism, and so they naturally developed a greater sense of Jewishness. Fellow Jews were the only people they could now rely upon in the face of shared dilemmas. Elements of Jewish self-hatred gave way to a stoic embracement of their Jewishness. Colin Anson, from Berlin, only discovered he was Jewish when his father told him in 1934. He explained that as a result of Nazi policy his father, who never previously held any Jewish convictions, “openly proclaimed his Jewish heritage as a point of principle”.<sup>91</sup> Louis Rudnic described that “living in Berlin under the Nazis I was looked upon as a Jew by them, and so I realised I belonged to the Jewish group. This altered my position”.<sup>92</sup> Hans Jackson explained that “I was born in Germany, the German Jew is a culture. All the wonderful things created and made by Jews of Germany. We were proud of our history and then the Nazis came in and said you are just a bloody Jew, not a German”. As a result Hans began to feel more Jewish.<sup>93</sup>

Suffering together as Jews, the future refugees felt a bond with their fellow German or Austrian Jews that they had never felt so acutely. A telling example of this is evident in the fact that the future refugees became more involved with Jewish groups. Ian Lowitt explained that he always used to make fun of the Jewish youth movements but his treatment by the Nazis made him alter this outlook and he joined the Maccabi Youth movement.<sup>94</sup> Harry Blake, who had previously felt more German than Jewish, suffered a tragedy immediately after Hitler’s coming to power when his father was killed in the street by the Nazis. Harry explained that the death of his father and the progressive deterioration of life for the Jews prompted him to join a Jewish movement, the Association of Jewish Youth, which was something he would never

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<sup>91</sup> Colin Anson speaking to Leigh, ‘Churchill’s Secret Commandos’, *Daily Mail Weekend*, p. 18.

<sup>92</sup> Rudnic, Interview.

<sup>93</sup> Jackson, Interview.

<sup>94</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

have previously considered.<sup>95</sup> In Vienna, Karl Fraser was a member of the socialists rather than of any Jewish nationalist movement. Being politically minded he was aware of events in Germany and the worsening plight of the Jews. He recollected that it was only when the socialist movement became outlawed in Austria that he eventually joined a Jewish movement.<sup>96</sup> This was a precarious time for the future refugees and for all Jews in Austria and Germany. It is clear that one way to pursue a sense of security was to form a closer fellowship with other Jews.

As a result of Nazi persecution uniting Jews together, the future refugees became more self-sufficient as a Jewish community. Henry Van Der Walde explained, “we were segregated and lost our citizenship. I definitely felt more Jew and less German, and the Jews became dependent on their own resources and more involved with other Jews”. Henry became a volunteer to collect money for the Jewish needy and it was only then that he really got to know the Jewish neighbourhood.<sup>97</sup> Fritz Lustig stressed that he “didn’t believe in a specific Jewish race as Jews were made up of many different races, but I certainly belonged to that certain group of people who were persecuted. I belonged to them sure. Very much more so than when I was younger. I hated Germans. Not all of them though, as my parents still had non-Jew friends who stayed loyal to them right to the end. Couldn’t lump all Germans together”.<sup>98</sup>

Although there was a growing sense of Jewishness among all of the future refugees it did not have much impact on their attitudes towards the Jewish religion and traditions. There is no evidence to suggest that the terror experienced under the Nazis propelled

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<sup>95</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>96</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

<sup>97</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>98</sup> Lustig, Interview.

the refugees towards more religious inclinations. There was no change of spiritual attitude within the group of future refugees who had not previously had any interest in religious activities before the rise of the Nazis. Some future refugees even resented the religious side of Judaism. Harry Blake, for example, believed that God had deserted him and that he cannot thank God for surviving the Nazi regime. However, despite being a “complete non-believer, I was 100 per cent Jewish”.<sup>99</sup> Similarly, the minority of future refugees who observed the Jewish religion before the advent of the Nazis continued to practise Judaism as best they could. Ken Overman explained that in his last few years under the Nazi regime he blew the *shofar* (rams horn) in the synagogue and he took it with him when he left for England.<sup>100</sup>

While the refugees took an increased interest in their Jewishness, it seems that at the same time they developed a greater sense of resentment not only against the Nazis but also against the more religious *ostjuden*. Many of the future refugees had always felt superior to the orthodox Jews and the *ostjuden*. Some believed that the orthodox Jews’ refusal to assimilate and their determination to remain different from other Germans had only encouraged the Nazis to act against all Jews. Harry Blake explained, “German Jewry had never taken to an eastern Jew. I’d be lying to say if I did not feel a bit of resentment”.<sup>101</sup> Ian Lowitt concluded that “increasingly, there was a degree of Jewish anti-Semitism to the orthodox”.<sup>102</sup>

By the time the refugees’ escape to Britain became imminent, many felt that their national identity had completely crumbled away. Persecution and segregation had

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<sup>99</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>100</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>101</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>102</sup> Lowitt, Interview.



taken its toll and they no longer recognised themselves as being in a similar category to their former fellow gentile citizens. Ian Lowitt fled from Austria in 1938. By then he recalled that his identity had taken a huge u-turn from one of national pride to one of resentment and despair at his former nation. He said, “I did not feel Austrian, I felt nothing”.<sup>103</sup>

Ken Overman left Germany after experiencing terrible ordeals in a concentration camp.<sup>104</sup> He recalled thinking to himself: “I did not ever want to return”. He made it clear that he never wanted to be a German again and that as far as he was concerned he had cut all ties with his former nation.<sup>105</sup> Henry Van Der Walde was lucky to escape imprisonment in a concentration camp. The defining moment for Henry’s change of identity was during the *Kristallnacht* pogrom on the night of 9/10 November 1938. He was fleeing Berlin to go in hiding when he saw what he described as “the most beautiful synagogue in Berlin in flames”. Seeing this broke his heart and he noticed that the fellow passengers on the train were not concerned about the terrible happenings at all, “they just looked out. Absolutely ignorant and without feeling”. He claimed then that his feeling of Germaness was lost forever.<sup>106</sup> Eric Kenneth felt quite differently. He described that when he was leaving Austria he was regarded as a Jew but he still did not feel Jewish. He believed that, “it was an insult ‘cause they told me I was something I wasn’t. I still felt Austrian but wasn’t proud of it. Nothing to be patriotic about as Austria no longer existed [*sic*]”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>104</sup> A number of future refugees had experiences in German concentration camps, although it is difficult to estimate figures. A reporter for the *Jewish Chronicle* recorded that on a visit to a military camp containing refugee servicemen that the majority of men in the particular unit had suffered in such camps before their escape to Britain. *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>105</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>106</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>107</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

In conclusion, the Nazis' laws changed the refugees' lives. The impacts of the Nazi policies were immense. The refugees found themselves ousted from German or Austrian society, had their citizenship revoked and were genetically classified as inferior. For most, the love for their nation of birth crumbled under the weight of segregation and persecution. The Nazi Reich created a stateless people irrespective of how 'German' the refugees felt. Similarly, they imposed the status of Jew on all refugees, completely disregarding the refugees' personal sense of identity within Judaism. By 1939, the letter 'J' was stamped on the passports of all the refugees that remained and the 'Jewish' names of Sara or Israel were added.<sup>108</sup> The refugees' experiences under the Nazis brought them closer to their Jewish self-awareness, but did not have much impact on their attitudes towards the religious and cultural aspects of Judaism. Initially, there was a conflict between the Nazis' and the future refugees' attitudes towards the status of German Jews. However, within a few years of Nazi rule the differing views of Nazi and Jew had ironically aligned. By the time that the refugees had left for Britain, the Nazis and refugees alike believed that the Jews were a separate people from the rest of gentiles. It was not that the future refugee accepted that they were racially inferior, but rather they recognised that they could no longer be a part of the Germany or Austria they once knew and loved. As the refugees left their former national homes they did so with an absolute contempt for the Nazis.<sup>109</sup> Ian

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<sup>108</sup> Second regulation for the implementation of the law regarding the changing of family names and given names (17 August 1938). "1) In so far as Jews have given names, other than those which they are permitted to bear, they are required from 1 January 1939 to take an additional given name; males will take the given name Israel, females the given name Sara". From the Reich Minister of the Interior Dr. Stuckart and Reich Minister of Justice Dr. Gurtner. *Reichsgesetzblatt*, 1938, p. 1044. Quoted in Arad, Gutman, Margalit, *Documents on Holocaust*, pp. 98-99. For evidence of the name 'Israel' being added to passports, see Willi Schmulinson's passport, in possession of Jewish Museum. Also Ian Lowitt and Bernard Sarle's passports in their possession.

<sup>109</sup> Every former German and Austrian interviewee held this opinion.

Lowitt explained, “if I identified with anyone it was with those fighting against it [the Nazi regime]”.<sup>110</sup> It was not inevitable that these refugees would join the British army. Firstly, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter, many did not want their stay in Britain to be permanent. Secondly, other refugees suffered very similar experiences to those who became future British soldiers, but they did not consequently volunteer for any of the armies that fought against the Nazis. There is no doubt, however, that the future refugees bitter experiences under the Nazis fuelled a desire for revenge that was a major motivation for many of them to enlist into the British army during the conflict.

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<sup>110</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

## Chapter 2

### The Refugees' Civilian Experiences in Britain

#### (1) Before the Advent of War, 1933-39

In comprehending the multiplicity and fragility of the refugees' identities whilst serving in the British army it is necessary to examine the emotional and physical impact of their early experiences after immigration to Britain. This chapter analyses the experiences of refugees before they volunteered for the Britain army.<sup>1</sup> This specific group of Jewish refugees shared similar experiences whilst in Britain, but it is too simplistic to assume that as a result they all possessed a collective identity.<sup>2</sup> This chapter aims to demonstrate the extent that there were differences in the transformation of the refugees' perception of self. It will highlight the variety of responses and attitudes to their experiences. It will examine whether there was a conflict between their personal identity and the British institutional categorisation of refugees.

One issue to be considered is the reactions of the refugees over their 'official status' after the declaration of war on 3 September 1939, and during the threat of invasion in

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<sup>1</sup> There were two major periods of recruitment of the refugees during the war, one during the early months of 1940 and the other in the late summer and autumn of the same year. German refugee Peter Perry described that recruitment into the British army followed an erratic 'on-off' course. Perry, Peter C, *An Extraordinary Commission: The Story of a Journey Through Europe's Disaster* (Published by Author: London, 1997), p. 37. There was no recruitment in the early months of war and during the period of general internment in the late spring 1940. This is discussed in a later chapter.

<sup>2</sup> This chapter focuses specifically on the experiences of the former German and Austrian refugees who later served in the army. As a result it will not be discussing some issues that were important to civilian refugees later in the war. It is often the case that documentary evidence from this period it is not always specific to the future refugee servicemen. Hence the importance of using oral evidence, especially the interviews conducted by the author. This chapter is only considering the experiences of the refugees whilst they were civilians up until 1941 as by this time most had been released from internment and recruited into the army.

May 1940. The official classification of the refugees in this period has great significance, as their designated status directly affected the passage of their lives as did it pave their way into becoming British soldiers. To what extent did these refugees begin to feel British and did they develop a cordial relationship with Anglo-Jewry?<sup>3</sup>

About 15-18,000 German and Austrian refugees came to Britain between 1933-38<sup>4</sup> of whom 10-11,000 were Jews.<sup>5</sup> It has been estimated that seventy per cent of the 50-60,000 German-speaking emigrants to Britain arrived in the last year before the war.<sup>6</sup> Louise London believed that over 40,00 of these refugees were Jewish, although she does not state whether her definition of being Jewish was by religion or by the Nazi racial interpretation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> This thesis, however, will not concern itself in any great detail with British immigration policies in the period 1933-45 or the experiences of the future refugee serviceman in the internment camps. There have been numerous studies about British immigration policies during the 1930-1940s. The most comprehensive of which is London, Louise, *Whitehall and the Jews: British Immigration, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000). The experiences of the refugees in the internment camps have also been exhaustively written about in works such as Stent, Ronald, *A Bespattered Page? : The Internment of His Majesty's 'Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'* (Andre Deutsch: London, 1980) and Gillman, Peter and Leni, *Collar the Lot: How Britain Interned and Expelled It's Wartime Refugees* (Quartet Books: London, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Niederland, Doron, 'Areas of Departure from Nazi Germany and the Social Structure of the Emigrants,' In Mosse, Werner E (ed) *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom* (J.C.B.Mohr: Tübingen, 1991), p. 58.

<sup>5</sup> London, Louise, 'Jewish Refugees, Anglo-Jewry and British Government Policy, 1930-1940,' In Cesarani, David (ed), *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1990), p. 165. These figures can be supported by the fact that the vast majority of German and Austrian interviewees confirmed that they came to Britain between November 1938 and September 1939 and only the one, Peter Frean, arrived in Britain earlier. Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary, announced that the approximate number of German refugees who arrived before the war was at 51,000. He put the number of Austrian refugees at 4750. HC Vol 362, cols 1037-1038, 4 July 1940. Over a year later Mr Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary, confirmed such estimates putting the total at around 55,000 German and Austrian refugees. HC Vol 376, col 1711, 11 December 1941.

<sup>6</sup> Niederland, *Second Chance*, p. 58. Marion Berghahn puts this estimate at 40,000 refugees allowed to enter Britain in the last year before war. Berghahn, Marion, *Continental Britons: German-Jewish Refugees from Nazism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, (Berg Publishers Ltd: Oxford, 1988), p. 75. In 1938, 20,000 German speaking refugees arrived in Britain, whilst in 1939, 27,000 arrived. Report of the German Jewish Aid Committee, August 1939, in London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>7</sup> London, *The Making of Modern Anglo-Jewry*, p. 165. There are similar figures in Mosse, Werner E (eds) *Second Chance: Two Centuries of German-Speaking Jews in the United Kingdom*. (J. C. B. Mohr: Tübingen, 1991), p. 487. Most sources range between these figures. It is difficult to get exact figures as Mr Geoffrey Lloyd, Undersecretary of State for the Home Department stated "it is not the practice to distinguish refugees by their religion or racial origin". HC Vol 344, col 1086, 28 February 1939.

It has been argued, by the historian Doron Niederland, that only those who emigrated from the German speaking nations after November 1938 (in the aftermath of *Kristallnacht*) can be identified as refugees.<sup>8</sup> In 1938, a clear definition of the refugees' status was determined during the 'Convention Concerning The Status Of Refugees Coming From Germany'. The conclusion of this convention was that the term 'refugee' would only be applied to those who were "persons possessing or having possessed German nationality and not possessing any other nationality who are proved not to enjoy, in law or in fact, the protection of the German government".<sup>9</sup> All of the Jewish German and Austrian future refugee servicemen arriving after 1935 fitted into this category. The German refugee Fritz Lustig, for example, explained, "there no longer was a future for the Jews in Germany".<sup>10</sup> Another refugee Louis Rudnic similarly exclaimed "I couldn't stick it anymore. Jews as a whole were being persecuted. I realised that".<sup>11</sup> However, this post-1938 refugee definition excludes those Jews that left Germany and Austria before 1935. Jews had not then had their legal rights removed, nor had their "protection of the German Government withdrawn". Whilst not codified in law, the increasing anti-Jewish atmosphere no doubt added to Jewish immigration that took place during this period. Peter Freaan left Germany for Britain in 1933. By Doron Niederland's definition he would therefore not be a refugee. He was not forced out of Germany and did not feel his life to be in immediate and direct danger. However, the obvious fact remains that Freaan, like other German Jews, left for Britain solely because of the Nazi regime and the spectre of

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<sup>8</sup> Niederland, *Second Chance*, p. 58.

<sup>9</sup> Presented by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to Parliament, *Convention Concerning the Status of Refugees Coming From Germany*, Miscellaneous Number 5, (His Majesty's Stationary Office: London, 1938), pp. 3-4.

<sup>10</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London, 8 May 2000.

future troubles this spelt out. He fled the country he once loved because he felt that it would be difficult to make a life in Germany whilst the Nazis were in power.<sup>12</sup>

Those who came to England before the war found that the status given to refugees had an impact on their everyday lives for two reasons. Firstly, as in Nazi Germany and Austria, their status usually directly affected their legal rights and they were subject to specific restrictions. Secondly it would entail, although to different extents, a psychological impact on a group of refugees already unsure of their national and religious/cultural identities.<sup>13</sup> The official stance of Britain was that on arrival in to Britain, the German and Austrian refugees would be classified as ‘Friendly Aliens’, but at the same time, also defined as ‘Refugees from Nazi Oppression’.<sup>14</sup> There was some disapproval among refugees and British Jewish inner circles of these categorisations, notably over the label of ‘refugee’. It was regarded as derogatory. In January 1938, Otto Schiff, the Chairman of the Jewish Refugees Committee, felt that it was unfair to categorise the Germans and Austrians in Britain as refugees and so the name of the organisation was changed to the Jewish Aid Committee.<sup>15</sup> Given that some refugees had been living and working in Britain for up to six years before war began, (although they were not yet naturalised), it was deemed incorrect to still class them as refugees. Otto Schiff stated that “it was undesirable to label as refugees for all time such persons as had taken refuge from Germany and who, although allowed to

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<sup>12</sup> Frean, Peter, Interview, London, 12 April 2000.

<sup>13</sup> J. M. Ritchie argues that the psyches of the refugees were damaged by their given status and resulting treatment in Britain. J.M, Ritchie, *German Exiles: British perspectives* (Peter Lang: New York, 1997), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> HC Vol 362, col 1155, 30 July 1940.

<sup>15</sup> Minutes of the Alien Committee, 6 January 1938, Papers of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, ACC 3121/C2/1/6 in London Metropolitan Archives.

remain in this country were, still in receipt of assistance”.<sup>16</sup> In a recent interview. German Refugee Harry Blake expressed that the term refugee was inaccurate. He stressed that the all the German Jews had escaped rather than emigrated. He felt that refugees should in fact be defined as ‘escapees’.<sup>17</sup> German refugee Bernard Sarle disagreed with such an opinion stating, “If I was to be asked, I would have said that I was a Jewish refugee”.<sup>18</sup> It was also argued that the term ‘alien’, which was often legally used to describe the Jewish immigrants, was regarded as an unpleasant terminology.<sup>19</sup>

Upon arrival in Britain few refugees immediately identified themselves as being British. There were a number of reasons for this. The majority of Jewish refugee future servicemen did not believe that they were going to stay permanently in Britain, especially if they only had a temporary visa. The vast majority were in transit and were expected to move on to other regions of the world within a short period of time. An estimated 79,652 Germans landed in Britain in 1938, for example, but 72,358 of them embarked for other destinations.<sup>20</sup> Harry Blake confirmed recently that many refugees came on the understanding that they were to emigrate onwards.<sup>21</sup> Henry Van Der Walde had a visa for a temporary stay. Such visas had the condition that the holder was not permitted to enter into paid work pending emigration. In Henry’s case this was to be to the United States of America.<sup>22</sup> Fritz Lustig recalled that he was under obligation to re-emigrate to one of the British colonies once a visa was

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

<sup>18</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000.

<sup>19</sup> Kushner, Tony and Knox, Katharine, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide: Global, National and Local Perspectives During the Twentieth Century*, (Frank Cass: London, 1999), p. 128.

<sup>20</sup> Minutes of the Alien Committee, 4 December 1939, Papers of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, ACC 3121/C2/1/6 in London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Blake.

<sup>22</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview, Bury, 7 June 2000.



secured.<sup>23</sup> Similarly, Hans Jackson was expected to emigrate to Australia once he got his entry visa.<sup>24</sup>

Soon after arrival in Britain many of the younger refugees were initially sent to the camp at Richborough, near Sandwich, Kent. This was a receiving centre for those waiting to move on to other destinations. It consisted of the Kitchener Camp, which was mostly living and eating quarters, and the Haig Camp, which became the centre of education and entertainment.<sup>25</sup> The historian Bob Moore estimated that about 1700 people were still resident at these Camps during the outbreak of hostilities.<sup>26</sup> Many were to be sent to a variety of destinations from Richborough. On 3 August 1939 it was estimated that 1500 refugees were being trained to go to Palestine with about 400 of them based at the Richborough camps.<sup>27</sup> German refugee Martin Goldenberg explained that he was one of these youths under training at the Kitchener Camp with fellow refugees in preparation to go to Palestine.<sup>28</sup>

Marion Berghahn argued that all the refugees from Germany and Austria were grateful for having reached relative safety and security of Britain.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Hans Jackson has recalled that he, and many of the refugees he knew, were very

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<sup>23</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>24</sup> Jackson, Hans, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000. Mr. Geoffrey Lloyd said, "a number of refugees from Austria have been allowed to come here on conditions that they emigrate and they will be required to leave as soon as the arrangements are made. Also the majority of refugees have been allowed to come here on a temporary basis, pending emigration to another country". HC Vol 344, col 1086, 28 February 1939.

<sup>25</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War*, (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 27.

<sup>26</sup> Moore, Bob, 'Reception in the United Kingdom', In Mosse, *Second Chance*, p. 72. A month after Britain declared war there were 3,500 refugees at Richborough Camp. *The Times*, 10 October 1939, p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 179, 3 August 1939.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Ronald Channing reporting on Marion Berghahn's speech to the Jewish Museum, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 2003.

appreciative to have been accepted into Britain and that they realised that being allowed in had saved their lives.<sup>30</sup> However, this still did not always auger a bond with Britain. Some of the newly arrived refugees who had temporary permits to stay in Britain had no desire to pursue British nationality. Hans Jackson, for example, claimed that he was part of the last batch of 6000 Jews to escape from Germany. He was granted access to British shores with a transmigration permit. As a consequence, Hans recalled that he had no plans to remain in Britain permanently and so, at least initially, did not feel any emotional attachment with Britain or an interest in becoming British.<sup>31</sup> Harry Brooke recalled that he only considered two possible courses of action. Harry accepted the fact that he was poised to go to South America, "I did not envisage becoming a British citizen. It was not my intention to stay here".<sup>32</sup> However, he believed that he would, one day, return 'home' to Germany. Despite his feelings of Germaness being severely weakened, he still had faith that the community of Germany would not tolerate a war, and as a result a new government would emerge and end the Nazi domination.<sup>33</sup> This demonstrated that Harry still did not consider the Nazi regime to be representative of the people of Germany. It was only with the coming of war that it became likely that most of the Jewish refugees were to remain in Britain.

The academic Louis London has cited the fact that before the war, the home Office adopted the approach of having a slow selection process abroad in order to allow Britain to admit suitable refugees. London suggested that this course of action led to a

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<sup>30</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Brooke, Second Interview, Sheffield, 24 November 1999.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

belief that their stay would be permanent.<sup>34</sup> However, it is evident that the majority of Jewish refugees were aware of what they felt to be their temporary residential status on arrival in Britain and this in turn had a huge effect on their initial indifference towards identifying with Britain.

The refugees had left behind some or all of their relatives in Germany and Austria. The majority were on their own to face the challenge of adapting to a new country.<sup>35</sup> Despite the fact that some of the refugees had a familiarity with Britain it is wrong to presume that they felt at ease on arrival.<sup>36</sup> It was during this time that they were first able to reflect fully on their experiences in Germany and Austria and as a consequence “complex questions of identity had to be faced and dealt with”.<sup>37</sup> Their lives were in turmoil and, initially, many of the refugee’s felt that they did not belong in Britain. It has been argued that “if ‘home’ was where one went to school and whose mother tongue you spoke, these pillars were now lost. A German name and a German accent were only too revealing to the natives”.<sup>38</sup>

To a significant extent, many of the future refugee servicemen initially felt no common bond with the British people. Harry Blake jokingly explained, “I was a complete bloody foreigner”,<sup>39</sup> whilst Ian Lowitt recollected that, “I felt a bit of an outsider, mainly because we were outsiders”. He added that no one in Britain seemed

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<sup>34</sup> London, Louise, *Whitehall and the Jews: British Immigration, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000) p169.

<sup>35</sup> Information derived from Interviewees formerly from Germany and Austria.

<sup>36</sup> Some interviewees explained that they had been to Britain before either on holiday or a training course. Bernard Sarle, for example, recalled that he had previous experience in England on a commerce course in London for two months a few years earlier.

<sup>37</sup> Channing, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 2003.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Blake, Interview with Kern.

to show any interest in his background and why he was in Britain.<sup>40</sup> The refugees had previously been assimilated into German and Austrian society, so it was difficult to quickly acclimatise into everyday British life. Although many were due to leave Britain for other destinations, many refugees' made great efforts to adapt to life in Britain as best they could. Evidence of such can be seen in the case of the refugees' great efforts to overcome the language difficulties they experienced. One of the first major barriers to integration was their need to speak and write in English. The improvement of their linguistic skills was to play an important part in helping them to settle into army life when they later joined the AMPC.<sup>41</sup>

A number of German and Austrian refugees had learnt a little of the English language during their education and so they had a basic working knowledge. Some of the refugees, especially the older ones, were quite fluent, however the majority still struggled to communicate upon their arrival.<sup>42</sup> Martin Goldenberg proudly stated, "my English was quite good".<sup>43</sup> Bernard Sarle was also confident in his abilities at the time and said, "I knew English quite well as I learnt it at school and had a good teacher that took care in pronunciation. So very soon on arrival in Britain I got hold of English efficiently".<sup>44</sup>

The refugees who were not intending to stay in Britain, especially those in the receiving camps, were often taught Hebrew or Spanish in preparation for their impending journey to South America or Palestine.<sup>45</sup> However, they still made efforts

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<sup>40</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, Aberdeen, 28 May 2000.

<sup>41</sup> This issue is discussed in Chapter Four.

<sup>42</sup> These conclusions are derived from the interviews and autobiographies.

<sup>43</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>44</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>45</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 29.

to improve their linguistic skills in English whilst they remained in Britain.<sup>46</sup> Most of the refugees were also given lessons on English customs and culture. They were encouraged to attend daily two-hour English lessons either conducted by formal teaching in class or by listening to Linguaphone records.<sup>47</sup> These English lessons were regarded as being of such importance that they were often the very first task the refugees were given in the Kitchener Camp. Eric Kenneth commented that it was a requirement that they should learn to speak and write English.<sup>48</sup> Henry Van Der Walde recalled that his vocabulary was very poor but after attending the English courses he quickly improved. However, even when he learnt English competently he still had, “a very thick accent of course”.<sup>49</sup> Ken Overman remembered, “I hardly spoke a word of English”. As a result Ken was put in holiday camp with other refugees for two to three months until the summer season began, and there he undertook an intensive course of English lessons.<sup>50</sup>

Not all of the refugees attended courses to improve their English. For those who were not based in receiving camps there was ample opportunity for them to pick up the language through their interaction with British people. Karl Fraser, who was working in London under a Jewish boss, developed a command of the language through his work place. He explained that even though he quickly picked up the English language people used to make fun of his attempts, “although not in a nasty way”.<sup>51</sup> Harry Blake had a different method for learning English. He described that he eventually picked up the language, not just by speaking with the English, but also by going to the cinema

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<sup>46</sup> Information derived from interviews.

<sup>47</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 29. Reported in *The Times*, 10 October 1939, p. 10.

<sup>48</sup> Eric Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

<sup>49</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>50</sup> Overman, Ken, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

<sup>51</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

almost every evening over a period of many months.<sup>52</sup> Henry Van Der Walde utilised offers from the local Jewish community to help his command of English. He first attended English lessons in a synagogue in Golders Green. However, these lessons were not very successful so he went to the Hampstead Garden Suburb Institute for lessons that he later said, “I badly needed”.<sup>53</sup>

The refugees’ relationship with the British public, particularly the Anglo-Jewry, requires comment. Howard Cooper and Paul Morrison in their book *A Sense of Belonging* support the idea that there was little recognition from the British public of the traumas the refugees had been through. Once the refugees had arrived there was a certain ambivalence in the attitude of the communal leadership towards them.<sup>54</sup> It has been explained that, with very few exceptions, all the refugees felt a strong sense of displacement.<sup>55</sup> Bernard Sarle was one who felt this. He later observed that “everyone recognized me as a foreigner but people didn’t really ask questions”.<sup>56</sup> Cooper and Morrison came to the conclusion that the refugees felt themselves to be unrecognised and unvalued despite individual acts of kindness by the British. Their unexpressed rage and grief at being separated from their parents probably amplified their sense of distance from those who met them or took care of them.<sup>57</sup> They commented that “habits of silent suffering that originated in Germany were compounded in Britain”.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>53</sup> Van Der Walde, Henry, ‘My Life’, 1993, p. 22.

<sup>54</sup> Lipman, V.D, *A History of the Jews in Britain Since 1858* (Leicester University Press: Leicester, 1990), p. 196.

<sup>55</sup> Cooper, Howard, and Morrison, Paul, ‘*A Sense of Belonging*’: *Dilemmas of Jewish Identity*, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson: London, 1991), p. 85.

<sup>56</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Cooper and Morrison, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 86.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 85.

Such feelings resulted not only in feelings of insecurity among some refugees but also a strengthening of their survival instincts. One refugee explained,

it isn't easy to establish yourself here. You become a little nobody and do not have any money. The English were like a different world. They spoke a language you couldn't understand, they'd say "do come to tea", or whatever, in a very polite way, and you knew they didn't mean it. You were so baffled and bewildered, and you felt very pushed out. You were the foreigner. It took me years and years to acknowledge that I was a refugee; I suppose I didn't want to be in a special category.<sup>59</sup>

A number of refugees had similar experiences in the early days of their residence in Britain. They found it difficult to adapt to the British way of life, especially without their family to support them. Surprisingly, it was in most cases the British Jewish population, rather than the gentiles, that made life even more awkward for the refugees. The German refugee Harry Blake entered the "completely different world" of the Manchester Jewish community. Harry explained that he was living in a fairly religious area, which had a large number of eastern Jews who had emigrated much earlier. He often overheard comments about him that were tinged with jealousy from the relatively poor eastern Jews such as, "he's better dressed than our children". Harry explained, "I was received as a novelty by the Jews. There was no pity, no love, and no affection. The majority completely ignored me". Harry said that he wanted to involve himself in Jewish life but the Jewish population generally kept themselves to themselves. He said the Jewish Lad Brigade and Waterpark Club (Jewish youth groups) were less than welcoming to foreign Jews. "We were a different society and spoke a different language. We still wore plus fours and had no money to buy British clothes."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Unnamed refugee testimony, Ibid, p. 93.

<sup>60</sup> Blake, Interview. Some of the British public expressed antipathy towards the refugees. "It is, therefore, the more regrettable that at the moment we suffer so deeply from the ill-mannered and

The Anglo-Jewry who had originated from Eastern Europe had assimilated only to a very small degree into British society. They had preserved a sense of communal identity founded on religious observance and the Jewish practices and customs associated with it. This provided conditions for hostility between eastern and western Jews to be recreated in Britain.<sup>61</sup> So, it was a cruel irony that an indigenous orthodox Jewish population rejected, sometimes with contempt, the foreign Jewish element, a situation that mirrored the refugees' experiences before emigration. During the Nazi regime the more middle class assimilated Jews of Germany and Austria showed little interest in interacting with the poorer religious Jews from Eastern Europe (*ostjuden*) and sometimes blamed them for the increasing levels of anti-Semitism.<sup>62</sup> The situation was now reversed and it was the refugees who were the 'Jewish problem' and they became the '*ostjuden*'. One refugee from Germany commented that:

we had a very uncertain attitude towards Judaism and Jewish people. There was quite a lot of anti-Semitism in the German Jews, which was wrong but I do realise it. The Jews I met all seemed so orthodox and that was something we found very difficult to accept. They had all sorts of customs and we just couldn't relate. And I was really resentful because I wasn't going to let Hitler tell me who I was. I have a particular memory of people saying to me "well you abandoned Judaism and that's your punishment".<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, it was not uncommon for the refugees to be treated as though they were not entirely faultless for their ill treatment in Germany.<sup>64</sup>

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unsocial behaviour of a percentage of foreign Jews. Somehow or other they continue to have money, and use it to the detriment of the ordinary English family. If goods are in short supply they always manage to get them". Written by Eugenie Fordham, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, April 1943, p. 5.

<sup>61</sup> Dr Anthony Grenville writing in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 2001, p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> Discussed in the last chapter.

<sup>63</sup> Cooper and Morrison, *A Sense of Belonging*, p. 93.

<sup>64</sup> Lebzelter, Gisela. C, *Political Anti-Semitism in England 1918-1939* (The Macmillan Press Ltd: London, 1979), p. 175.



In a number of cases the refugees felt just as culturally different and less interested in bonding or socialising with the British eastern Jews as the British eastern Jews did with the refugees. Karl Fraser, for example, admitted that he identified strongly with the other Jewish refugees, not the Anglo-Jewry. He discovered that he could not relate to the British Jews or gentiles and as a result he just remained in a circle of refugee friends. There was little in common between the two groups culturally even though they were of the same religion. The eastern British Jews spoke Yiddish and were very orthodox whilst the refugees on the whole tried to learn English and speak in English and were not particularly interested in religion.<sup>65</sup> Marion Berghahn's research has shown that this was a common attitude among the refugees. She explains that, perhaps, the most that the refugees could have hoped for was to be accepted as British and to make new friends, yet most refugees selected friends from similar backgrounds.<sup>66</sup> However, Karl Fraser has commented that not all the British Jews were hostile to all the refugees. He said that even though he did not mix with any of them, he had no negative feelings towards the British Jews.<sup>67</sup> Ken Schindler supported this view and claimed that he never had any difficulties settling in England because of his good relationship with people he knew from the Jewish community. "I felt comfortable settling in area of London where there were many other Jews".<sup>68</sup>

An important issue that faced the refugees once they were in Britain was the complications that arose over their Jewish identities. Before their arrival in Britain, for

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<sup>65</sup> The Board of Deputies issues a booklet for general consumption entitled *The Refugee; The Plain Facts*, which defended and praised them. Another booklet issued in 1939 entitled *Helpful Information and Guidance for Every Refugee* told refugees to remain loyal to Britain, not to criticise British institutions and ways, and to refrain from speaking German in public or being conspicuous in manner or dress. Lipman, *A History of the Jews in Britain*, p. 196. The issue of their religious identities is discussed in Chapter Three.

<sup>66</sup> The refugees naturally kept together for social purposes. Channing in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 2003, p. 13.

<sup>67</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>68</sup> Ken Schindler, letter to author, 27 April 2000.

many refugees, Jewish identity was almost forced upon them. From the moment the refugees entered Britain they soon faced a new dimension to their evolving and brittle religious, cultural and racial identities. In Nazi Germany and Austria they were classified racially as Jews but in Britain there was no such comparable action by the state.<sup>69</sup> It can be suggested that Britain's official perception of the refugees' identities was similar to that of the Weimar government and the Austrian administration before the Nazi era. The British Jews had the freedom to practise their religion without fear of likely reprisals because of anti-Jewish legislation. In Britain, the refugees lived under the auspices of a religiously tolerant environment. Although many scientists in Britain had, like in Germany, embraced the study of eugenics and racial hygiene since the late nineteenth century<sup>70</sup>, there was no national policy that stigmatised being Jewish as a racial, genetically defined identity.<sup>71</sup> In Britain 'Jewishness' was determined solely upon religion. There was no definition of who was and was not a Jew other than that of the Jewish community's own religious interpretations. A person born of a Jewish mother was by Jewish law a 'Jew'. However, if a person did not feel particularly Jewish there was no state law that claimed otherwise. This was an important change for the refugees. It had the greatest impact on the refugees who were not regarded as Jews in the opinion of the Jewish religion, but were defined and treated as Jews in Germany and Austria as a consequence of the Nuremberg Laws.

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<sup>69</sup> Sir S. Hoare stated "in this country there is no official system of classifying people by race or religion". HC Vol 343, col 347, 2 February 1939.

<sup>70</sup> David Cesarani argued that the notions of race and eugenics were in expansion within Britain, although not on the huge scale as in the Nazi Reich. Cesarani, David, and Kushner, Tony, eds, 'The Internment of Aliens in Twentieth Century Britain', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol 11, No 3, (Frank Cass: London, November 1992), p. 43. One Pamphlet entitled 'Refugees Before Britain' utilised the invalid pseudo scientific argument that the alien Jewish population was somewhat inferior both physically and mentally compared to the native population. Pro Patria Pamphlet, *Refugees Before Britons*, p. 2, in Wiener Library.

<sup>71</sup> Although there still existed the stereotypes which create "clichés by imposing 'typical' Jewish appearance and behaviours on Jews". It is also argued that Britain had long time administered a minority policy but not to only the Jews but all minorities, especially because of the doctrine of racial and moral cultural superiority emerging from colonial rule. Lebzelter, *Political Anti-Semitism in Britain*, p. 174.

This can be best illustrated by examining two individual, yet similar case studies. Eric Kenneth and Fritz Lustig both were baptised in Austria and had no Jewish upbringing or connection with Jewish communities of any kind. They both expressed that they had no identification with the Jewish faith and had no interest in their Jewish roots, although Fritz claimed he was glad his father informed him of his Jewish ancestry. In direct conflict with their personal identity the Nazi regime categorised both Fritz and Eric as Jews.<sup>72</sup> As a result they suffered the same fate as the Jewish refugees and had to flee to safety. However, once they were in Britain they were no longer deemed to be legally Jews, yet, interestingly, they were still treated in a similar vein to all other Jewish refugees.

Also, further complicating matters, despite the fact that they had suffered the same experiences as the other Jewish refugees, they were still regarded as outsiders in Jewish law. As a consequence, the religious Jews did not accept Fritz and Eric as fellow Jews in Austria and the situation did not change in Britain.<sup>73</sup> Eric Kenneth recalled some bitter memories concerning his treatment by some of the orthodox Jewish refugees despite having had left his homeland for similar reasons to them. Eric commented that he had many “problems with some Jews”. As war approached, one of his jobs in the receiving camp was to be on watch during blackout. Eric recollected that one evening a Jewish refugee came along with his torch shining, “I said, “what are you doing? Stop that”. As I told him off he called me a damn *goy*”.<sup>74</sup> Eric recalled that, as far as he was aware, he was the only person in the receiving camp who was a

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<sup>72</sup> Kenneth, Interview and, Lustig, Interview.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Yiddish slang for non-Jews, sometimes said in a pejorative sense. Rosten, Leo, *The Joys of Yiddish* (Penguin Books: London, 1971), pp. 143-144.

Catholic. The orthodox refugees used to taunt Eric by telling him “you’re alright its not your fault, your father’s fault [for having Eric christened], your not to blame [*sic*]”.<sup>75</sup>

In spite of this rejection from orthodox Jews, Eric, having been labelled and treated as a Jew for such a long period of time, had developed of a greater sense of ‘Jewishness’ and a closer bond with the more liberal Jewish refugees. Both Eric Kenneth and Fritz Lustig admitted that they still had very little knowledge of the Jewish faith and remained uninterested in religion but their feeling of being Jewish quickly became an important part of their identities. Eric even became quite curious about some of the Jewish traditions. He explained, “I was interested to see them put on a strap on arm and head (*tefillin*). It was alien to me. I had never seen this before in my life [*sic*]”.<sup>76</sup>

Those who practised religious Judaism in Britain were refugees who had involved themselves in religious life before emigrating. Henry Van Der Walde, for example, continued to keep to some of the Jewish religious traditions and went to pray at the synagogue in West London.<sup>77</sup> However, most of the refugee servicemen came from backgrounds where there was little involvement in Jewish traditions and religious culture. On the whole whilst they were based in Britain their interest in the spiritual elements of Judaism remained very weak. Alfred Fleischhacker explained that in relation to his faith he “didn’t feel Jewish at all”.<sup>78</sup> Ian Lowitt explained that whilst living in Aberdeen before the war he never went to synagogue nor made any other

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<sup>75</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>78</sup> Dwvork, Deborah, transcript of interview with Alfred Fleischhacker, Berlin 1995, p. 15, in Alfred Fleischhacker’s possession.

attempts to embrace religion.<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Karl Fraser described that he felt very much Jewish but that he also did not feel religious.<sup>80</sup> Harry Blake explained that, “I didn’t go to *Shul* [Synagogue]. I did not have *capel* [skull cap] or put on *tefillin* [holy parchments in boxes that are strapped to the head and arm] or have *tallis* [prayer shawl]”. While living among the orthodox Jews of Manchester he had little choice but to keep to some of the Jewish traditions, but such activities did not interest him. He explained, “*Shabbat* [Sabbath] observance was completely strange to me but I was young and accepted the changes”.<sup>81</sup>

This was in contrast to the refugee servicemens’ strengthened feelings of a generic Jewish identity.<sup>82</sup> Fritz Lustig, for example, explained that he did not regard himself as Jewish by faith, but he felt strongly Jewish in the context of belonging to the group of people who had been persecuted by the Nazis.<sup>83</sup> Alfred Fleischhacker recalled that a Jewish identity was very important to most of the refugees at the time. He explained, “you must belong to a group otherwise you are lost in this [British] Society. You must organize yourself or get in contact with others who’ve got common experiences and the common idea of how to survive”.<sup>84</sup> This common sense of Jewishness existed particularly amongst the formerly assimilated German and Austrian Jews, arising as a result of their shared experiences. The refugees included people of all possible variations and permutations of age, social, political and religious background. They were united in their passionate hope for the destruction of

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<sup>79</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>80</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>81</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>82</sup> Conclusion derived from interviews with author.

<sup>83</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Dwvork, transcript of interview with Fleischhacker, p. 15.

the Nazi regime.<sup>85</sup> This did not necessarily mean that they shared an immediate bond with the native British Jews.

Jewish agencies did make efforts to integrate refugees into British Jewry. For some of the younger refugees there was help from British Jewish authorities to receive a Jewish education. However, in many cases there remained a lack of interest. Steven Mendelsson, who came on the Kindertransport, remembered that teachers were sent to them to provide some religious education and spiritual comfort. He said, “we went to synagogue on Friday and on Saturday some bloke came to give religious lessons and take services which, quite honestly, we did not enjoy”. His reasoning for their lack of interest during the religious lessons was that, “we were just about fifteen years old and just branching out into life with all the conflicts it brings. The religious thing was not that appreciated. In hindsight it was a wonderful effort and we have got to be grateful for it”.<sup>86</sup>

## (2) The War Years, 1939-41

The advent of war did not come as a shock to the refugees. They had witnessed at first hand the fearsome Nazi war machine and they believed that it was inevitable that it would bring Britain into war with Germany.<sup>87</sup> The declaration of war on 3 September 1939 had a huge impact on the refugees’ identities. Although the refugees may not have anticipated it at first, as a direct consequence of the war they were to remain

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<sup>85</sup> Stent, Ronald, *A Bespattered Page?*, p. 13.

<sup>86</sup> Steven Mendelsson, Interview, Sheffield, 30 April 1999.

<sup>87</sup> This opinion was expressed in most interviews with former Germans and Austrians.

permanently in Britain. Although emigration from Britain was initially still an option, all the refugees chose to stay in their place of refuge, at least for the war period. Fred Pelican, a refugee from Germany, commented that when he found out about the cancellation of his departure to Shanghai he was “not sorry in the least, I was overjoyed”.<sup>88</sup> As the refugees originated from nations that Britain was at war with, this led to changes in the attitudes towards the refugees by both the British government and British people. Naturally this affected the refugees’ developing relationship towards Britain. On an institutional level the refugees found themselves to be judged not by their religion or race as they had previously under the Nazis, but by their nationality, or in their own perception - their former nationality. It was during this period that the refugees were offered their first opportunities to volunteer for the army and ‘fight back’ against the Nazis.

At the outset of war all German and Austrian refugees over the age of 16 who did not intend to leave the country by 9 September 1939 had to report immediately to the police. They were instructed to bring their passports and documents of identity and were subjected to certain restrictions.<sup>89</sup> At the beginning of war German and Austrian refugees had to attend alien tribunals.<sup>90</sup> They were all classified by the tribunals into the category: ‘Refugees from Nazi Oppression’. At first, this title was specific to refugees emanating from Germany and Austria.<sup>91</sup> At the same time that they were regarded as ‘enemy aliens’, the tribunals classed them also as ‘friendly’.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Pelican, Fred, *From Dachau to Dunkirk* (Vallentine Mitchell and Co Ltd: London, 1993), p. 39.

<sup>89</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 205, 4 September 1939, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> Sir John Anderson announced the steps he intended to take with aliens during the war. HC Vol 351, cols 366-370, 4 September 1939.

<sup>91</sup> Mr. Morrison speaking in the House of Commons. HC Vol 376, col 1711, 11 December 1941.

<sup>92</sup> Those legally defined, as ‘friendly aliens’ were those from allied or neutral nations such as Poland or America.

The use of the word 'enemy' painted an inaccurate picture of who the refugees were. They had originated from 'enemy nations' but it was accepted by the government that they were refugees that fled from these nations for their own safety. Winston Churchill, in support of the refugees questioning of their odd status, explained that "the expression 'enemy alien' merely means a foreigner who is subject of a state at war with His Majesty [George VI]. It fully recognises that such persons are not hostile to this country and that in referring to them it is better to use such a phrase as persons of enemy nationality, but is not always possible to avoid the term enemy alien which is the legal description used in certain statutory enactments".<sup>93</sup>

The Jewish refugees were innocent victims who were persecuted by the Nazi regime now at war with Britain. They had nothing but "mistrust, dislike, hostility and even an understandable hatred" for the nation they once had been proud to be a part of.<sup>94</sup> They no longer had any allegiance to Germany, especially to the Nazi State, and many feared that they would one day be forcibly repatriated there.<sup>95</sup> The refugees wanted the British to defeat Nazism and were willing to contribute in any possible way in aiding the British cause, ultimately through service in the British army. To be labelled as German in the same category as the Nazis was held by many to be absurd, especially when taking into account the fact that the Nazis did not want the Jews to be part of Germany and had officially stripped them of their German citizenship in pursuance of this ideal. It has been argued that the Jewish refugee was "not merely a refugee as such, but a stateless person".<sup>96</sup> This being the case, it seemed wrong to some of them that the government should have classified them as German 'enemy

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<sup>93</sup> HC Vol 362, col 1155, 30 July 1940.

<sup>94</sup> Channing, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 2003.

<sup>95</sup> The British government's decision whether to repatriate the German and Austrian refugees is discussed in the Conclusion.

<sup>96</sup> Bramwell, Anna C (ed), *Refugees in the Age of Total War* (Unwin Hyman Ltd: London, 1988), p. 53



aliens'. However, it was a maxim of English public international law not to recognise foreign law in so far as it is incompatible with fundamental English principles.<sup>97</sup> The Nazi removal of the Jewish refugee citizenship was of no consequence to the British government. In Nazi Germany the refugees had been told they were not Germans despite many of them fully identifying with Germany. Now in Britain they were told that they were German despite the fact that few of them felt such identification. The majority of Jewish Refugees no longer felt any kinship with Germany or Austria and had no intention ever to return.

Alfred Fleischhacker recollected that he had not felt German for a number of years.<sup>98</sup> Fritz Lustig also recalled that once he had settled in Britain he no longer felt in the least bit German.<sup>99</sup> The fact that these refugees had no identification with their former homelands increased the irritation they felt when the British people failed to comprehend that they were no longer German, and most definitely were not Nazi sympathisers. Harry Blake found this ignorance very frustrating and as a consequence he decided to remain aloof from the non-Jewish community.<sup>100</sup> Ken Overman was another refugee who experienced an awkward relationship with the British people he encountered. Although he was a Jewish victim of Nazi oppression the local people did not recognise the difference between him and a Nazi. He explained, "my condition of entry was not to accept paid work but when war started they needed workers. It was when I got my job that I first really mixed with ordinary English people. I realised how little they knew, they had no idea. I was still a bloody German in those days and it was worse being a German than a Jew to them". Ken also added that during the war

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<sup>97</sup> Letter from the Spokesman of Camp Eight, Eastern Command, Sydney, Australia, 24 December 1940, in the Jewish Museum.

<sup>98</sup> Dwvork, transcript of interview with Fleischhacker, p. 15.

<sup>99</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>100</sup> Blake, Interview.

some of the British people could not understand why his loyalties were with Britain and not Germany.<sup>101</sup>

This issue of identification is important to help our understanding of the reasoning behind the treatment of refugees during the Second World War. The British imposed status on the refugees also had repercussions on the refugees' treatment by the government and the public.

Despite the refugees having their status changed to 'enemy alien' it was announced in the House of Commons that this alteration would not have any negative effect on their treatment. This was because they were also deemed 'Refugees from Nazi Oppression'.<sup>102</sup> Sir John Anderson stated that there would be no unnecessary interference with the refugees. He expressed that; "there would be a general desire to avoid treating as enemies those who were friendly to the country which had offered them asylum" and who were, "anxious to help this country".<sup>103</sup> However, it transpired that such promises had a troubled practical implementation. It is evident that the status of the civilian refugees did affect their quality of life to a substantial extent. It was also later to have serious repercussions on the conditions of the refugees' military life in the AMPC.<sup>104</sup> Despite Sir John Anderson's previous assurances his first act of policy was for "an immediate review of all Germans and Austrians in this country",<sup>105</sup> and to this end the majority of refugees were obliged to attend tribunals.

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<sup>101</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>102</sup> Almost all of the 3000 refugees in the Kitchener Camp were classified as 'Refugees from Nazi Oppression' and exempted from most restrictions imposed on 'enemy aliens'. *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 20.

<sup>103</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 206, 5 September 1939, p. 2.

<sup>104</sup> This is discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>105</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 206, 5 September 1939, p. 2.

Tribunals decided the identity and eventual fate of the refugees. The vast majority of refugee ex-servicemen over sixteen years of age had to attend.<sup>106</sup> The refugees were allocated a status after a brief series of questions and anyone that was allotted with category 'A' was regarded as a Nazi sympathiser and immediately interned. When the officials at the tribunals came to the conclusion that they were unsure as to the loyalties of a refugee, a category B identity was given and the refugee was subject to certain restrictions. Those put in category C was seen to be of no danger to British security and were exempted from internment and most restrictions. The bulk of the refugees were given a C status.<sup>107</sup> Eric Kenneth, for example, said, "I was given category C which meant friendly alien. I was in there for only 20 minutes". Eric believed that the decision to grant him the status of a friendly alien was made easier by the fact that he was Austrian, not German and secondly, that in Austria he was registered under the Catholic Church.<sup>108</sup> Henry Van Der Walde was also designated the status of 'friendly alien'. He disagreed with any suggestion that religion played a part in the decision to grant refugees a category C status, although he did recall being asked some questions about his parent's religion as well as their political background.<sup>109</sup>

It was felt by some future refugee servicemen that even though the tribunal had 'cleared them' of being in sympathy with the Nazi state; they were still under scrutiny by the British people they encountered. The future refugee serviceman Henry Van

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<sup>106</sup> Information derived from interviews with refugees.

<sup>107</sup> Cesarani, *Immigrants and Minorities*, p. 44.

<sup>108</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>109</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview. 64,000 aliens were placed in category C and designated as Refugees from Nazi Oppression. Ritchie, *German Exiles*, p. 24. There were some reports of criticism of the refugees' treatment in the tribunals but on the whole they seemed to be most sympathetic. There were some hardships for the refugees because of their classification. Minutes of the Council for German Jewry, 3 April 1940, Papers of the Board of Deputies, ACC3121/C2/1/6, in the London Metropolitan Archives.

Der Walde explained that as soon as hostilities began many of the refugees felt that they were held in incensed suspicion by the British public. Henry recalled that there was a certain level of caution, and even hostility when the British dealt with refugees. He stressed, “they didn’t quite trust us; you could feel that you were not particularly welcome”. Although he no longer identified himself as being a German, it was often the case that the British did. He recalled that when the first alarm was sounded in September 1939 his landlady went hysterical and gave all the German Jews on her premises a notice of eviction. Henry explained that apparently she was under the belief that they were all German spies.<sup>110</sup> Ian Lowitt explained that in an atmosphere where the public mistrusted the German-speaking refugees it was inevitable that there would be some cases of mistaken identity. He recalled that someone once mentioned to him something about the war and how terrible it was to which Ian replied, “anything is better than the Germans coming here”. Ian explained that his innocent reply was completely misunderstood by a nearby civilian and he was reported to the police and arrested. He later discovered that someone had claimed that Ian said, “everything will be better when Germans come here”.<sup>111</sup>

Indeed, during the early days of the war, despite a general liberal attitude towards the refugees, there still remained a strain of hostility towards them. One writer in the *Daily Mail*, G. Ward Price, warned of the, “danger of aliens in our midst”. He made no distinction between any refugees and identified them all as enemy agents in disguise. In some cases the tribunals were criticised in the press because they did not deal with the refugees severely enough!<sup>112</sup> Sir John Anderson was one Member of

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<sup>110</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>111</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>112</sup> Kushner, Tony, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1989), p. 143.

Parliament who began to acknowledge that there was a growth of anti-alien sentiments. He mentioned in a letter to his father that, “the newspapers are working up feeling about aliens. I shall have to do something about it or we may be stampeded into an unnecessarily oppressive policy. It is very easy in wartime to scare”.<sup>113</sup>

Harry Brooke stressed how rapidly and awkwardly the refugees’ official status changed. He recalled that, “initially we were aliens; then on the outbreak of war we were enemy aliens; then it was decided to establish what kind of enemy aliens we were”.<sup>114</sup> Ken Overman expressed a similar opinion but also criticised what he believed to be the nonsensical rationale behind the decisions to hold the tribunals. He said, “technically we were enemy aliens, but to determine what degree of enemy alien was a joke”.<sup>115</sup> Some refugees believed that it was understandable that the government would have to make checks on former German and Austrian refugees but the majority found it difficult to comprehend the behaviour of the government given that they were all innocent victims of the Nazis. They hated the Nazis with a passion, greater than most British people, and felt that they represented no danger whatsoever to British defence. As far as they were concerned there were no divided loyalties.<sup>116</sup> They were anxious to do whatever was in their power to help Britain in the struggle.<sup>117</sup> The majority of refugees were from skilled professions and wanted the British government to make the most of their talents in aiding the war effort.

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<sup>113</sup> Wasserstein, Bernard, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Leicester University Press: London, 1999), p. 78.

<sup>114</sup> Brooke, Second Interview.

<sup>115</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>116</sup> Stent, *A Bespattered Page*, p. 13.

<sup>117</sup> It was reported that when war came “a register of volunteers for National Service was opened, and it is safe to say that practically every refugee in a position to render service has enrolled himself or herself”. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 225, 2 October 1939, pp. 2-3. The issue of whether the refugees’ talents were utilised in the British army is discussed in Chapter Four.

There were a number of negative consequences as a result of the refugees' 'enemy alien' categorisation. It was announced that the 'enemy aliens,' even with 'C' status, were not permitted to travel more than five miles away from their registered residence. They were not allowed to change address, and if they were to be away from their place of residence for more than 24 hours they had to notify the police.<sup>118</sup> The historian Bernard Wasserstein has written that not only were the refugees without rights of movement but also that under British regulations they were not permitted to have possession of cameras, motor vehicles and weapons.<sup>119</sup> Later the refugees were excluded from being armed whilst they served in the British army.<sup>120</sup> Such regulations only encouraged divisions between the refugees and the British. In respect of this problem Colonel Wedgwood believed that the government should help the refugees' predicament by encouraging greater assimilation rather than creating more differences. He suggested "I think they ought to be told by the government that they are on their way to becoming British citizens, that they must fit themselves into the community".<sup>121</sup>

In contrast, it has been suggested that there was a positive reaction in the treatment of the Jewish refugees in the aftermath of the tribunals. John Fox argued that the tribunals may have helped the refugees.<sup>122</sup> Before the tribunals there was still some confusion and lack of clarity over the identity of the Jewish refugees, which may have raised suspicion of them from some parts of the public and government. Fox

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<sup>118</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 205, 4 September 1939, p. 3.

<sup>119</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, p. 75.

<sup>120</sup> This issue is discussed in Chapter Five.

<sup>121</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 48, 24 February 1940, p. 2. After 1942 Colonel Wedgwood became 1<sup>st</sup> Baron of Barlaston. For more on Lord Wedgwood see, Wedgwood, Josiah Clement, *Memoirs of a Fighting Life* (Hutchinson: London 1941).

<sup>122</sup> Fox, John P, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), p. 25.

explained that as a result of the Jewish refugees being given a class 'C' status they were shown much approval by some who hitherto had been unsure.<sup>123</sup> It has been argued that the setting up of the status of "Refugees from Nazi Oppression" was an unprecedented step, which made a clear distinction between victim and aggressor.<sup>124</sup> As well as the general public being reassured, another advantage of the 'friendly alien' status was that it "acted as an internal passport for the refugee". They were allowed to travel more freely, work for money and were allowed to assist Britain in the war effort.<sup>125</sup>

Not all refugees experienced antipathy from the local British population. Fritz Lustig recalled that he had been treated in a friendly manner in his small community during the first year of the war. He said that he did not suffer any kind of awkward relationship with the British non-Jews. Fritz indicated that he was treated as an equal notwithstanding that the local people were very aware of his German background.<sup>126</sup>

Steven Mendelsson also spoke in defence of his local non-Jewish British community in Staffordshire. He said,

even though they did not know what a Jew was and as far as they were concerned we were German, they were lovely people. These people were the salt of the earth. They were fantastic but of course it took some time. At first they looked upon us in a kind of hostile sort of manner. They asked me how many times did I meet Hitler? What sort of Gestapo officer was my father? It was incredible and it took a hell of a long time to explain to these people, yes nationality wise we were German but we were on their side fighting the war the same way, more so perhaps than they were 'cause we [had] lost everything [sic].<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, Vol 5, No 6, June 1950.

<sup>125</sup> Fox, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers', p. 25.

<sup>126</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>127</sup> Mendelsson, Interview.

These examples suggest that, to a large degree, the refugees' persistence in demonstrating that they were not the 'enemy' did have a positive impact on the British public. The reason why many of the British public mistrusted the Jewish refugees was often through an ignorance of the refugees' backgrounds. However, after time, more of the British public began to understand the refugee's plight and a closer bond was created. Unfortunately, this relationship was often to be tested by events leading up to the anticipated imminent invasion of Britain.

The tribunals and classification of the refugees paved the way for the War Office uniquely to allow 'enemy aliens' to join the fight against Nazism and become British soldiers. The War Office agreed that after being vetted by the tribunals, the category C 'enemy aliens' could join the struggle against the Nazi menace.<sup>128</sup> The *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin* predicted that the refugees would win sympathy from the British public because many of them were anxious to join the army. It was even suggested that if the refugees were not permitted into the British Army then it was possible that a foreign legion, similar to that of France, would be created.<sup>129</sup>

Before the declaration of war, although not yet deemed to be enemy aliens, it had been impossible for the refugees from Germany and Austria to get accepted into the army. However, it did not deter some refugees from making the attempt. Ken Schindler tried to offer his services to the British Army when he felt that war was looming as early as April 1939. He remembered that he received a letter acknowledging his application but it stated that the War Office was unable to accept

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<sup>128</sup> Fox, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers', p. 25.

<sup>129</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 206, 5 September, p. 3.



non-British volunteers. Ken recalled that he made the gesture because he felt, “it was my duty to volunteer. The fight against the Nazis was paramount”.<sup>130</sup>

During the early days of war, Lord Reading, who was Chairman of the Council of German Jewry, tried to encourage the refugees to contribute to the British cause through military service. He stated that they were all, “victims of grossest Nazi oppression and brutality, and their great desire is to be allowed to help the country which has given them refuge from their sufferings, in whatever way the government may decide to be the most advantageous in the national interest”.<sup>131</sup> Hans Jackson recalled that the army began recruiting from the refugee camps as early as two months after war began. Lord Reading was appointed to command the Training Centre. The Kitchener Camp actually became one of the Corps training depots.<sup>132</sup>

The academic John Fox has expressed the opinion that, given the rather obvious manifestations of anti-Semitism and the strong xenophobia existing within British society, it was surprising that a large number of Jewish refugees volunteered for military service.<sup>133</sup> Hans Jackson estimated that about a third of the 3000 refugees in the Kitchener Camp applied.<sup>134</sup> Norman Bentwich confirmed that after Lord Reading’s first address to the refugees a large number of German and Austrian refugees in the camp volunteered immediately. The volunteers accepted into the army

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<sup>130</sup> Schindler, letter to the author. It was not uncommon for cases of British Jews also having their attempts to join the army thwarted if they had foreign parents. Minutes of the Council for German Jewry, 9 February 1937, Papers of the Board of Deputies, ACC3121/C2/1/6; Letter by H.L Nathan to Sir Walter Kirke, August 1939, Papers of the Board of Deputies, ACC3121/C2/2/2. Both sources in the London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>131</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 208, 7 September 1940, p. 4.

<sup>132</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p31. Jackson, Interview.

<sup>133</sup> Fox, ‘German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers’, p. 24.

<sup>134</sup> Jackson, Interview. Mr Mander announced that 905 refugees had been accepted for service in January 1940. HC Vol 356, Cols 7-8 (16 January 1940).

were formed into separate companies solely within the AMPC and although promised as such, were not entitled to the same conditions of service as the British because of their status as enemy aliens. Such a policy suggests that the refugees were not yet fully trusted by the authorities. Many refugees felt that volunteering for the army was the greatest gesture of loyalty to Britain that they could possibly make. These issues are investigated and analysed in Chapters Four and Five.

Although, a considerable number of refugees joined the British Army within the first nine months of the war the majority tried to settle into British civilian society. Many had acquired a job, whilst some had even got married, often to British women.<sup>135</sup> However, the opportunity to start a peaceful fresh life was once again disrupted after the invasion of France and the British evacuation of Dunkirk in May 1940. The Jewish refugees once again saw their official status altered as the government decided upon a new radical direction in enemy alien policy - mass internment.

During late spring 1940 there was a period of intense fear surrounding the possible threat of a German offensive on Britain. As a consequence the refugees were regarded as possible espionage agents and were treated with a greater degree of suspicion by the government, the British press and by much of the British public. Hans Jackson believed that the press was very influential and swayed the general public into a state of xenophobia, or more specifically Germanophobia. Hans stressed that from the outset, “the press had always been our enemy”.<sup>136</sup> There can be no doubt that the

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<sup>135</sup> Information from interviews with refugees by author. The status of British women married to enemy aliens is analysed in chapter Seven.

<sup>136</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

press's anti-alien attitude intensified radically during the threat of invasion.<sup>137</sup> Hans explained that, in May 1940, the anti-German way of thinking was abundant and was based solely on myths rather than facts. It was his opinion that some of the information the newspapers provided was so invalid as to be ridiculous. He recalled that some articles told "stories of Germany dropping parachutists disguised as nuns to infiltrate the infrastructure of the country so when Germany invaded they will turn around and open the gates to the invaders".<sup>138</sup>

Many of the other refugees had similar opinions regarding the behaviour of the British press. Harry Blake, for example, had no doubts that British propaganda was at fault for causing and increasing the intense suspicion of the refugees by the warnings to be alert to the dangers of a fifth column. He remembered seeing posters with slogans such as the 'walls have ears' and 'careful you don't know who might be listening'.<sup>139</sup> While such propaganda aimed at making people aware of the importance of being vigilant during wartime was a sensible and justifiable measure, many of the refugees nevertheless interpreted the intentions of the propaganda differently. In the opinion of some of the future refugee servicemen, it promoted an atmosphere of distrust of anyone perceived as an 'outsider'. Harry Blake even claimed that he felt the impact of propaganda much more in England than he did whilst living in Nazi Germany.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> It was stated that in the face of the increasing anti-alien press campaign it was inevitable that there would be fresh tribunals to review cases and "even a genuine refugee from Nazi oppression might find it difficult to prove that he was an anti-Nazi if the fact of being a refugee was not considered sufficient. Minutes of the Council for German Jewry (3 April 1940), Papers of the Board of Deputies, ACC3121/C2/1/6, in London Metropolitan Archives.

<sup>138</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>139</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

The public's attitude towards the refugees changed for the worse after the fall of France.<sup>141</sup> In a Gallup Poll in May 1940, 64 per cent of those interviewed believed that the government was being "too lenient" with the refugees.<sup>142</sup> Opposition to internment withered away. Even the press that had defended the refugees, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, *The Daily Herald* and the *Jewish Chronicle*, began to support the idea of internment.<sup>143</sup> Tony Kushner explained that the government was alert to changing attitudes of the press and the public towards the refugees. The opinions of the press had an effect on the reactions of the public, and in turn, public opinion was an important factor in the government's decision to implement internment.<sup>144</sup>

Fears of imminent invasion created a wave of anti-alien feeling to which the government felt bound to respond.<sup>145</sup> In addition it has been suggested that a further major contributor to government policy was the Department of Military Intelligence (MI5), which was responsible for internal security, detection of espionage and subversive activities. It was they who alerted and alarmed all other government departments and it was their persistence and urgent requests that resulted in mass internment.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice*, p. 144.

<sup>142</sup> Cesarani, *Immigrants and Minorities*, p. 45.

<sup>143</sup> Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice*, p. 145.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid*, p. 146.

<sup>145</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, p. 7.

<sup>146</sup> Stent, *A Bespattered Page?*, p. 252.

Some refugees felt that the policy emanated from the top. Henry Van Der Walde believed that it was ultimately Winston Churchill's idea to 'intern the lot' after he formally became Prime Minister on 10 May 1940.<sup>147</sup> Churchill was indeed determined to pursue a strategy of mass internment despite resistance from the Home Secretary and other officials who claimed such action was, "unnecessary on security grounds and inexpedient on grounds of general policy".<sup>148</sup>

As a result of the near public hysteria and the concerns of the government, the refugees, regardless of their original classification at the tribunals, were now treated no differently from the Nazi sympathisers who were categorized as class A and interned at the outbreak of war. The refugees were seen to be a danger to the defence of Britain and the government decided not to take any chances, deciding to intern them all. All the refugees between the age of 17 and under the age of 60 who were categorised previously as category B aliens were immediately interned. By the beginning of June all of the category C refugees were also incarcerated.<sup>149</sup>

Tony Kushner suggested that the internment measures had been generally guided by widespread prejudice against the refugees, especially due to the fact that the majority were Jewish. The security forces were not convinced of the refugees' disloyalty to

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<sup>147</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview. For more on Winston Churchill's dealings with the refugees see Gilbert, Martin, *Churchill: A Life* (Pimlico: London, 2000); Gilbert, Martin, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume*, 'The Coming of War 1936-39', Volume V, Part 3 (Heinemann: London, 1982); Gilbert, Martin, *Winston S. Churchill: Companion Volume*, 'Finest Hour', Volume VI (Heinemann: London, 1983); Rabinowicz, Oscar K, *Winston Churchill on Jewish Problems: A Half-Century Survey* (Lincolns-Prager LTD: London, 1956).

<sup>148</sup> London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 170.

<sup>149</sup> Kushner, Tony and Knox, Katharine, *Refugees in an Age of Genocide*, p. 173.

Nazi Germany, partly as result of a long held distrust of Jews as a whole.<sup>150</sup> However, it is clear that the aliens were not interned because of their cultural identities, their fate was not determined by religion or race as it was when they lived in Nazi Germany and Austria, but it was instead determined by their national identity. There might have been elements of anti-Semitism expressed within the anti-alien sentiments, but the government's decision for general internment derived out from the fact that the refugees were former inhabitants of Germany and Austria and nothing more.<sup>151</sup> Ian Lowitt insisted that religion had nothing to do with his internment while conversely the issue of being a Jewish victim of Nazism was of no help in preventing him and others from being imprisoned in an internment camp. He said, "we were Jewish refugees but the people who arrested us were not interested. They had their orders".<sup>152</sup> The fact remains that the Jewish refugees from other nations such as Czechoslovakia and Poland were not included in the mass interment.<sup>153</sup> This illustrates that internment was based on national identities, not cultural or religious identities.

The refugees were not responsible for their sudden change of status from a 'friendly enemy alien' to a hostile 'enemy alien'. They were not involved in any activities to warrant such accusations and they firmly denied any association with Nazi sympathisers. The premise that the refugees were dangerous to Britain was regarded as something preposterous that could not have been farther from the truth.<sup>154</sup> In trying to justify the policy, Sir John Anderson explained, "after the invasion of Holland,

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Issue of anti-Semitism and anti-alienism is investigated in Chapter Eight.

<sup>152</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>153</sup> Interviews with Jewish Czechoslovakian and Polish refugees by author.

<sup>154</sup> A refugee in internment explained, "it seems that to us an impossibility that a refugee could act otherwise then be loyal to the British cause". Letter from the Spokesman of Camp Eight, Eastern Command, Sydney, Australia, 24 December 1940. In the Jewish Museum.

Belgium and France and with the knowledge of what had happened in those countries, it was necessary to reconsider the position in the light of the military situation here, it was decided that a policy of general internment must be adopted".<sup>155</sup>

Not surprisingly, there was general unhappiness among the refugees at how their identity had been misunderstood, and that they had been categorised in a way which contradicted their personal identities.<sup>156</sup> It was argued,

it is paradoxical to regard us of German nationality and that no doubt can exist as to our loyalty to England. We are racial or political refugees from Nazi oppression. 95 per cent of us are of the Jewish race. We are not German 'subjects' if 'nationality' is interpreted in the sense of international public law, which facts prove that we have only one allegiance viz. to the British cause. The corollary to one's nationality is one's allegiance. We owe no allegiance to Germany. We are her bitterest enemies. But above all, our outlook is fundamentally opposed to Nazi ideology, and we hate this system of persecution, injustice, cruelty and mendacity. On the other hand we find ourselves in complete agreement with the ideology of this country. We know that apart from the oppression of its internal enemies, the Nazi system if victorious would bring suffering to the entire world. That is why we regard it as our first and noblest duty to fight for the victory of freedom. That is why so many refugees felt it was their duty to volunteer for His Majesty's Forces and why the response for the AMPC has been extraordinary.<sup>157</sup>

Yet there was some understanding from among the refugees as to why internment occurred. Henry Van Der Walde stressed that it was not a very wise decision to intern all the refugees and that it "was in fact a big mistake". However, like many refugees he conceded, "In a way you could understand it as the danger of invasion was so great. So any decision (to intern) would soften the blow and reduce dangers of

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<sup>155</sup> HC Vol 363, col 587, 23 July 1940.

<sup>156</sup> "We feel humiliated and are deeply depressed by the continuous misunderstanding of our true position". Letter from a Jewish refugee representative entitled 'An Appeal for Justice and Humanity' (16<sup>th</sup> May 1941), in the Jewish Museum.

<sup>157</sup> Letter from the Spokesman of Camp Eight, Eastern Command, Sydney, Australia, 24 December 1940, in the Jewish Museum.

espionage”.<sup>158</sup> Ian Lowitt held a similar opinion and, despite being interned without any tribunal, he believed that most refugees were not angry and felt that there was nothing they could do about it. Harry Blake, on the other hand, was outraged and upset at the way the refugees had been treated but agreed with Lowitt that the decision-making was out of their hands and so they just had to accept it. He said, “what could I do about it; I was just a kid of 19”.<sup>159</sup> Ken Overman was just 16 at the outbreak of war and escaped internment due to his young age. He said that he had to carry an Alien Certificate of Registration on him at all times and he was subject to restrictions and a curfew. He still did not feel, however, that such hardships imposed on the refugees were particularly fair, but that the refugees just had to deal with it.<sup>160</sup>

Some of the refugees had suspected that there was always the possibility of mass internment and so were not surprised when they were arrested. Fritz Lustig recalled that, since September 1939, he had believed that it was only a matter of time until he could be interned; “when it finally came I was ready for it with my suitcase packed”. Fritz even found the situation amusing because the detectives who arrested him had to follow him to the toilet in case he tried to escape. He accepted that the government had set the policy and the police had to execute it. However, like all the Jewish refugees who were interned Fritz hoped that that the government would quickly come to their senses and let them out.<sup>161</sup>

Interestingly, some refugees, in fact, wanted to be interned. Winston Churchill, in defence of his mass internment policy, argued that the removal of refugees from British

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<sup>158</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>159</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>160</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>161</sup> Lustig, Interview.



society was in the interest of the refugees just as much as it was to appease the nervous general public. Churchill claimed that internment “would probably be much safer for all German speaking persons themselves”.<sup>162</sup> Karl Fraser was one refugee who hoped he would be interned. Karl explained that he had been worried as to what would happen to him if the Nazis successfully invaded Britain. Karl recalled that he was living in Welwyn Garden City and the local Chief Constable, whom he was a friend with, told him to stay and not to report to London and get interned. However, despite the constable’s plea, “I went to London as wanted to get interned and get out of here”. Karl wanted to be interned abroad as he believed that Britain would not be able to withstand a Nazi onslaught if invaded. He felt that he would be much safer if removed to Canada or Australia, far away from the Nazi war machine. Karl explained that, “I had just come out of a concentration camp and I did not want to fall into German hands again”.<sup>163</sup>

However, the vast majority of refugees did not want to be interned and were not at all understanding regarding their unfortunate predicament. Although there was nothing the refugees could physically do to prevent their internment there still remained much resentment at their treatment. Hans Jackson explained that when he was interned he was very angry. He could not understand how one-day they were regarded as a ‘friendly alien’ and then all of a sudden they were seen to be in league with the much-feared enemy.<sup>164</sup> The refugees had been grateful for their admission into Britain but it seemed unreasonable for the nation that allowed the refugees residence to then take an aggressive stance towards them through no apparent fault of their own. For instance, Eric Kenneth felt indignant and bitter about the unjustified detention. He said, “I felt I

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<sup>162</sup> Kushner, *Age of Genocide*, p. 175.

<sup>163</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview.

<sup>164</sup> Jackson, Interview.

had been let down by a country in which I had faith and trust".<sup>165</sup> Another example is that of Martin Goldenberg. He had been very keen to prove his worth to Britain and join the fight against the Nazis but was turned away when he volunteered for the army at the outbreak of the war. It appeared to Martin that the government repaid this gesture of loyalty by having him interned for being a hostile 'enemy alien'. When his papers were examined he was informed that the reason he was arrested so quickly was because he had earlier applied for the army and so they already had his name and details to hand. Martin recalled that they took his German passport when he was arrested and informed him that he could have it back at the end of the war even though Martin had no desire to get his passport back.<sup>166</sup>

The refugees' brusque treatment did not help the development of a British identity. There was a feeling of shock that having been categorised as aliens friendly to Britain, they suddenly came to be seen as the enemy. There was apparently no distinction made between the Jewish future refugee servicemen and Nazi sympathisers whatsoever.<sup>167</sup> Yet the government remained aware of the possible future value of the refugees and so "suggested measures for maintaining the morale of aliens in this country so as to bind them more closely to our common cause".<sup>168</sup> In some cases the refugees still hoped to be incorporated into Britain, despite being indignant at their

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<sup>165</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>166</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>167</sup> "Meanwhile the neurotic attack upon German and Austrian refugees continues upon its course as indiscriminately as ever". *The New Statesmen and Nation*, 6 July 1940, pp. 2-3. There were a number of cases of Jewish refugees and Nazis being placed together in internment camps with unfortunate consequences. Such occurrences have been well documented in a number of studies of internment. See Gillman, Peter and Leni, *Collar the Lot: How Britain Interned and Expelled It's Wartime Refugees* (Quartet Books: London, 1980); Stent, Ronald, *A Bespattered Page? : The Internment of His Majesty's 'Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'* (Andre Deutsch: London, 1980).

<sup>168</sup> One such measure was to set up the Council of Aliens. Mr. Morrison speaking in the House of Commons. HC Vol 365, col 1990, 20 November 1940. In parliament Mr. Sorenson M.P assured refugees from Nazi oppression and friendly aliens that internment need not be interpreted as a reflection on the sincerity of their sympathy with and support for the British cause. HC Vol 363, col 587, 23 July 1940.

current treatment. It was argued, “we have found a second home in England, mentally no less than materially. We have no more ardent desire than to establish ourselves again permanently in the country where we found asylum, to become useful citizens and to carry on our family life”.<sup>169</sup>

The Jewish refugees were sent to various camps located around Britain. However, the government came to the conclusion that the refugees were still a threat to the defence of Britain whilst they remained in close proximity and so many were shipped abroad to areas of the Commonwealth such as Australia and Canada. At its peak 27,000 refugees were incarcerated in Britain and a further 7000 sent overseas.<sup>170</sup>

In conclusion, this period 1939 to 1941 continued to shape the future refugee servicemen's identities. As ever, despite a growing sense of Jewishness, there was little alteration in their attitudes towards religion itself. It was most frequently the case that the refugees maintained a similar religious consciousness as to that which they had in their lands of origin. As a result, there was little involvement in the practice of religious activities. This attitude contributed to a strange recreation of the internal Jewish divisions that had existed in Germany, but this time between the non-religious refugees and their religious Anglo-Jewish counterparts. There were a number of cases of antipathy shown by the English Jewish community towards the refugees although not all the refugees experienced such a phenomenon. The different status given to the refugees by the British government, other than the category of 'Refugees from Nazi Oppression', were largely found to be in conflict with the refugees' personal identities. They were deemed to be enemy aliens, yet the refugees felt little

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<sup>169</sup> Letter from the Spokesman of Camp Eight, Eastern Command, Sydney, Australia, 24 December 1940, in the Jewish Museum.

<sup>170</sup> Kushner, *Persistence of Prejudice*, p. 145.

connection with the German nation, and besides, had their German citizenship removed by the Nazi dictatorship. At the time of internment the refugees were generally unhappy that no distinction was made between them and Nazi sympathisers. However, this treatment affected the psyches of the individual refugees in different ways. In spite of everything they remained loyal to Britain. A considerable proportion of the refugees volunteered for the British army before internment. One option open to the majority of those who were interned was enlistment into the AMPC.<sup>171</sup> As we shall see, this option was taken up with enthusiasm by a large number of the refugees.

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<sup>171</sup> Presented by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, *German and Austrian Civilian Internees: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release From Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release* (His Majesty's Stationery Office: London, July 1940). In the Wiener Library.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Refugees and Religion in the British Army, 1939-45**

In September 1939 a New Order in Council under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act permitted aliens to join the British Army.<sup>1</sup> Recruitment of refugee soldiers was abruptly halted during the government's policy of national internment after the fall of the Low Countries and France. However, in the summer of 1940 Government policy once again shifted in favour of the refugees. Certain categories of 'enemy aliens' were deemed eligible for release from internment. The academic Louise London explained that the Home Office adopted tactics that encouraged the interned refugees voluntarily to join the AMPC. The option of military service provided the refugees with the advantage of an almost immediate release.<sup>2</sup> However, it is wrong to assume that the offer of freedom was the only motivation behind the decision of many refugees to join the British army. This will be the first issue to be discussed. The prime remaining focus of this section will be the examination of the experiences of Jewish refugee servicemen and how their attitudes towards Judaism evolved whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps and the fighting units from 1939 to 1945.

The previous chapter gave an account of the evolution of the refugees' identities on their arrival in to Britain. This did not just look at the issue of self from the refugees' personal perceptions, but also from the institutional viewpoint of the British Government and the British public. This chapter will investigate the significance of religion to the refugee servicemen, particularly in the AMPC. It will explore the

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<sup>1</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 October 1939, p10; *The Times*, 10 October 1939, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> London, Louise, *Whitehall and the Jews: British Immigration, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000), p. 171.

extent to which their 'Jewishness' continued to evolve throughout the war years – a period during which they were faced with another series of dilemmas and hardships, both physical and mental. To what extent did the refugees identify themselves as Jews both culturally and spiritually? Was there an element of interest in actually practising their religion whilst serving? If so, was it catered for in the army?

The issue of the refugees and religion in the British army will be examined by an analysis of the similarities and the contrasts found between the refugee servicemen's experiences as recalled in numerous recorded interviews, written recollections and Jewish newspapers and bulletins. The use of such sources is integral to this study because of the poor survival of any other records detailing Jewish religious activities within the army, particularly as it relates to the Jewish refugees.<sup>3</sup>

The rationale behind the refugees' decisions to join the British army varied. Although it would be naïve to dismiss as a motive the opportunity to regain their freedom by joining the army as a better alternative to life in an internment camp, it was not the only reason. Sir Herbert Emerson, League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, later put great emphasis on gaining release from internment as a reason for enlisting. He wrote, "for various reasons, the Pioneer Corps has not made a strong appeal to the refugees. A fair number joined in the early days of war, but since then the majority of recruits have come from those who enlisted in order to obtain release from internment".<sup>4</sup> However, the historian Tony Kushner argues that, in fact, many refugees did not favour such a method of gaining release from internment and so they

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<sup>3</sup> There are very few surviving records on this subject within the Office of the Chief Rabbi, United Synagogue and the Board of Deputies of British Jews.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum by Herbert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO321/10676.

refused to join the AMPC as they believed that they were being forced unfairly into buying their freedom.<sup>5</sup>

The first shortcoming in the theory that refugees enlisted to earn this freedom is the fact that many refugees had enlisted into the British army before the period of internment. Some had even tried enlisting before war was declared. This demonstrates the huge level of enthusiasm shown by refugees from Germany and Austria in wanting to join the army for reasons other than release from restrictions or incarceration.<sup>6</sup>

Secondly, all the Jewish refugees were eventually freed from internment regardless of whether they had signed up for the military or not. Although volunteering for the army did accelerate the release process it was not the only avenue for in gaining an early release from internment. There were, initially, 18 conditions for release. Categories included skilled workers in agriculture; those about to embark for emigration overseas, doctors and dentists authorised to exercise their profession in the country and those engaged in refugee organisations. Category 12 was “internees who

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<sup>5</sup> Kushner, Tony, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Antisemitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1989), pp. 148- 149.

<sup>6</sup> The refugees' desire to join the fight against Nazism was reported on a number of occasions within the Jewish press just before and during the early days of war. See *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin* on the dates of 30/8/39, 5/9/39, 6/9/39, 7/9/39 and 2/10/39 to name a few. It was reported, “almost without exception these refugees are anxious to do all that they can to help the country that has given them shelter. Many are eager to fight and have the qualifications, which make their offer of their services more than simply a gesture of gratitude”. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 200, 29 August 1939, p. 4.

are accepted for enlistment in the AMPC".<sup>7</sup> By mid 1941, an estimated total of 14,250 refugee internees had been released from internment, of which 2020 volunteered for the Pioneers Corps.<sup>8</sup> These figures demonstrate that considerable numbers of refugees were able to gain their freedom without volunteering for the Pioneer Corps.

Thirdly, Herbert Morrison felt inclined to encourage internees to pursue the opportunity of joining the army to help facilitate a speedier release. He stressed, "I want to make it clear that the government regard this opportunity as the appropriate method of providing for such men. They should not therefore deter offering their services to the corps in the expectation that there may be enlargements affecting them of the existing categories set out in the White Paper".<sup>9</sup> However, another reason that discouraged refugees from joining the army simply for a way out of internment was the speed of the Home Office and War Office in facilitating the transfers. The process of granting freedom from internment via the Pioneer Corps was sluggish. The Alien Committee went as far as to claim that the slow transfer of internees into the army was having a detrimental effect on the refugees' morale and enthusiasm in volunteering. The Committee was initially disappointed with the number of refugee volunteers for the army, but believed that "where volunteering had taken place there

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<sup>7</sup> Presented by the Secretary of State for the Home Department, *German and Austrian Civilian Internees: Categories of Persons Eligible for Release From Internment and Procedure to be Followed in Applying for Release* (His Majesty's Stationery Office: London, July 1940). In the Wiener Library. The number of categories was later expanded to include those who had applied for the army but were rejected because of medical grounds. Enlistment into the Pioneer Corps was the second most common method of gaining release from internment. The invalid and infirm was the largest. Mr. H. Morrison giving figures in Parliament, HC Vol 367, col 1111, 17 December 1940 and HC Vol 368, col 180 (22 January 1941).

<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 April 1941, p. 5. The total number of aliens within the Pioneer Corps in May 1941 was at 5069. Numbers of aliens in the Pioneer Corps compiled by General Ismay, 29 May, PRO PREM 3/42/1.

<sup>9</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 November 1940, p. 1. He had the full backing of the Alien Committee which "regarded with favour, the suggestion that volunteering be encouraged with a letter to those eligible, signed by prominent members of the Jewish Community". Minutes of the Alien Committee, 30 October 1940, Papers of the Board of Deputies, ACC3121/C2/1/6, in London Metropolitan Archives.



had been long and dispiriting delays between volunteering and enrolment and this delay may have acted as a deterrent".<sup>10</sup>

Lastly, Fritz Lustig, a refugee from Austria, made a further point when stating that he was aware that joining the army may have quickened his achievement of freedom, but that it in no way improved his or other refugees' chances of becoming British citizens.<sup>11</sup> This issue was discussed in Parliament throughout the war. The refugees, in fact, were never officially promised naturalisation if they joined the army.<sup>12</sup> Morrison declared in early 1940 that the consideration of applications was suspended.<sup>13</sup> He responded to calls to escalate a process of naturalisation for refugees by stating that,

there are many foreigners who are giving direct and valuable help to the war effort either by service in H.M. Forces or in other ways; and the consideration of applications from all such persons would involve so much work both from my department and the police that I should not feel justified in undertaking it at a time when everything possible must be done to economise manpower. It would be wrong for me to commit myself now as to what would happen after the war to refugees who were permitted to come to this country in order to escape from oppression.<sup>14</sup>

Such evidence suggests that there was little chance that refugees who volunteered for the army as a means to gain British citizenship would be successful. However, despite the Government endeavouring not to encourage the idea of possible naturalisation, the Refugee Board did suggest that there would be a more favourable attitude towards becoming a British subject for those who volunteered for the army. One Refugee Recruiting Circular claimed that, "after the war, every man who has served this country will have his future very carefully considered, that is to say so far as his

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

<sup>12</sup> The issue of naturalisation is analysed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>13</sup> HC Vol 367, col 1060, 12 December 1940.

<sup>14</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, April 1943, p. 4.

permit to remain in this country is concerned, and even perhaps his naturalisation".<sup>15</sup> So in light of such a document that contradicts the government's official position, it is reasonable to suggest that there existed the ambiguous incentive of possible naturalisation as a reason to join the army. However, it still remains unlikely that this was one of the most important motivations for volunteering. This is so, given the mixed views among the refugees about wanting to become British subjects at the time.<sup>16</sup> There were alternative motives for joining the fight against Nazism.

Motivated by their experiences under the rule of the Nazis, the opportunity to resist the Third Reich meant a great deal to many of the refugees. Refugee serviceman Peter Frean argued that years of persecution under the Nazis and the desire to 'fight back' were powerful impetuses to fight in the war.<sup>17</sup> For some it was for revenge, for others, the possibility of saving their families still trapped in Europe. For others still it was a desire to rid Germany of Nazi rule and replace it with a democratic system giving full equality to Jews. Many were willing to lay down their lives if need be to help to destroy the Nazi regime.<sup>18</sup> It has been suggested that the refugees' feelings of wanting 'to get even' resulted in a special 'Jewish' contribution to the British Armed Forces.<sup>19</sup>

Some refugees also joined the British army out of a sense of duty to the nation that had given them refuge. Refugee serviceman George Lane explained, "I didn't just want to fight against the Nazis. I wanted to fight for Britain, the country I loved. When war was declared I was determined to fight for Britain against the Nazis".

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<sup>15</sup> 'A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army', *Recruiting Circular Number 2A*, The Central Office For Refugees, Summer 1940, in possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>16</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Seven.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Frean, Interview. London, 12 April 2000.

<sup>18</sup> This conclusion was derived from the interviews with the refugee servicemen.

Similarly, Colin Anson recalled “I wanted to take a more active part in the war because I craved revenge on the Nazis. More than that, I wanted to fight for Britain. I had a very strong sense of obligation to the country which had saved my life”.<sup>20</sup> Peter Frean later commented that despite many refugees feeling that the British had earlier incarcerated them for no good reason, they were still willing to prove their undivided loyalty to England by joining the army and aiding the war effort.<sup>21</sup> Their enthusiasm to join fighting and technical units, examined in Chapter Five, clearly exhibited the refugees’ commitments to the Allied cause.

It is important to remember that all of the German and Austrian servicemen were volunteers. John Fox argued that, in comparison, the majority of Britons who served during the Second World War did so because they were conscripted. They had no legal or other choice in the matter. His opinion was that, “this situation likewise determined whatever emotions were felt about serving King and country”. Therefore, “most [British born soldiers] simply got on with the job of military service and duty”.<sup>22</sup>

Chapters One and Two highlighted the extent to which the refugees’ attitude towards their ‘Jewishness’ changed as a direct result of their experiences. Before the Nazi takeover of power, many of the refugees had been non-committal towards their faith. It was often the case that many refugees were not interested in the religious aspects of

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<sup>19</sup> Fox, John P, ‘German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain’s Armed Forces 1939-1945’, *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup> George Lane and Colin Anson speaking to Wendy Leigh, ‘Churchill’s Secret Commandos’, *Daily Mail Weekend*, (Associated Newspapers Ltd, 3 April 1999, p. 18 and p. 21.

<sup>21</sup> Frean, Interview with Kern. Such an attitude was expressed within two letters from representatives of internees in Canada and Australia. Letter from the Spokesman of Camp Eight, Eastern Command, Sydney, Australia, 24 December 1940, and a Letter from a Jewish refugee representative entitled ‘An Appeal for Justice and Humanity’, 16 May 1941. Both located in the Jewish Museum.

<sup>22</sup> Fox, John P, ‘German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers’, *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, pp. 23-24.

Judaism. It was also common that their Jewish identity was relatively frail compared to their patriotic bond with Germany or Austria. After the refugees' escape to Britain, it was clear that the significance of their Jewishness had changed greatly. The anti-Semitic persecution they experienced had slowly reduced their feelings of identification with Germany and Austria, whilst strengthening their, (not necessarily religious), Jewish identity. Peter Frean agreed that his treatment by the Nazis, and even by the British during internment, had given extra meaning to his identity as a Jew. He believed the majority of refugees felt the same way.<sup>23</sup> To consider this further, there will be an investigation into the role religious Judaism played within the refugees' army experiences. This is followed by an examination of the efforts made by the army and other organisations to cater for the refugees' religious needs.

There are differing views as to whether the refugees took any particular interest in religious affairs. There is also disagreement over the extent to which the refugees in the British army, especially while based in Britain, could practice their Judaism.<sup>24</sup> According to refugee servicemen Ian Lowitt, the Pioneer Corps catered for the Jewish religion, if a person so desired. Ian admitted, though, that he never had any intention to get involved with any of the Jewish activities, such as celebrating high holy days, as he was not interested in the religious side of Judaism.<sup>25</sup> Like Ian Lowitt, many of the refugee servicemen were non-practising Jews. Ian believed that the refugees' experiences as British soldiers had little effect on changing their attitudes towards their faith.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> There was a conflict of opinion between the interviewees over this issue.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, Aberdeen, 28 May 2000.

Henry Van Der Walde gave an example of how little religious observance there was in the Pioneer Corps when he recalled that “even the rabbi I knew in the corps ate everything, whether it was kosher or non kosher”. Henry, who felt he was more religious than most of the refugee servicemen, believed that, “we lost touch with religion definitely”.<sup>26</sup> Ken Overman tried to retain his faith and explained that initially he used to go to the local synagogue in Notting Hill and even carried *tefillin* (holy parchments in boxes used for prayer) on him, “but quite frankly as things developed I lost my faith. When I saw what was happening in Germany to my people, I got very disillusioned. Sure there would have been opportunities by then to practise religion but I wouldn’t”.<sup>27</sup>

Martin Goldenberg was of the opinion that making a contribution towards the defeat of the Nazis was more important than the observance of the Jewish religion. With regards to keeping the Jewish faith he revealed, “I personally did not care. Most of us did not care”.<sup>28</sup> It is evident that many Jewish refugees made few efforts to keep to their faith. The Jews who tried to practice their Judaism were in the minority. Fritz Lustig explained that, to his knowledge, no religious Jews from the internment camps signed up for the Pioneer Corps.<sup>29</sup> Refugee serviceman Harry Blake also did not recall encountering any pious Jews in the army. He believed that, “practically none of the refugees were religious in any case”. Harry claimed that the reason for this was that the “religious ones were not known to put themselves out for anything else bar religion”.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview, Bury, 7 June 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Ken Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

<sup>29</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

Despite some of the refugees claiming otherwise, there were observant Jews who did serve in the Pioneer Corps. However, their numbers were sufficiently small that their presence often went unnoticed by many other Jewish refugees. Hans Jackson carried religious garments, such as a *tallis* (prayer shawl) and *capel* (skullcap), with him whilst serving in the army.<sup>31</sup> Bernard Sarle knew of two rabbis in his company. He recalled only one incident when a fellow refugee questioned the non-kosher life style in the Pioneer Corps. He said, “There was a *rebe* (rabbi understudy) amongst us fellow privates. Once we were eating sausages and he asked if they were pork but I told him you couldn’t get pork then. That was how it went”.<sup>32</sup>

Martin Goldenberg recollected that a small minority of Jews did attempt to keep their religion as much as possible. He believed that extreme piety in the forces was in some circumstances inappropriate. He remembered one incident in particular that angered him. He encountered a group of religious Jews at a table who refused to eat the meal prepared. He described how they were using army biscuits to eat sardines out of tins rather than using the utensils provided. Martin questioned what the refugees were doing and they replied that most of the food was not kosher. Martin in exasperation said, “for God’s sake the Chief Rabbi Herzog<sup>33</sup> said that while this holy war was happening the dietary laws may be relaxed”. Martin remembered that they answered

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<sup>31</sup> Jackson, Hans, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000.

<sup>33</sup> Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Ha Levi (Isaac) Herzog represented the Jews of Palestine and the whole world during the Second World War.

back saying that, “the Chief Rabbi. He’s not a Jew like we are Jews”. It is Martin’s contention that during the war an element of “common sense” regarding the practice of religion should have prevailed.<sup>34</sup>

Reverend Leslie Hardman, Jewish Chaplain to the British Army, also talked of a small number of very religious refugees in the army, but added, “there were religious Jewish soldiers in most of the armies”. He did not recall having had any problems or hearing of any issues regarding the refugees. He recalled, however, that he knew of some British Jewish soldiers who refused to eat their meals. Although Reverend Leslie Hardman did not always agree that a Jew should go hungry rather than eat non-kosher food he said, “I have got to respect their courage and their faith”.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, tribute was sometimes paid to the minority of observant Jews who tried their utmost to preserve their kosher dietary habits. Dayan Gollop, Senior Chaplain to the Forces,<sup>36</sup> stated that on, “conscientious grounds”, these Jews were making, “tremendous sacrifices in adhering to the traditional Jewish dietary laws”. It was suggested that the most practical way to deal with the situation was to distribute kosher food parcels to the orthodox soldiers.<sup>37</sup>

Hardman admitted, however, that in some cases the extremely religious position of some of the Jewish soldiers would make him feel uncomfortable. He recalled one incident when a commanding officer in Great Yarmouth called him to investigate a case. He was told a certain British Jewish soldier would not put his light out at night

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<sup>34</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman, Interview, London, 28 January 2003.

<sup>36</sup> Reverend Dayan Gollop was Senior Chaplain to the British Army for the majority of the Second World War. He resigned through illness in early 1944 and was replaced by Rabbi Israel Brodie.

<sup>37</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 March 1941, p. 1.

when instructed and there were objections from the other soldiers. Hardman spoke to the Jewish soldier and discovered that he was staying up late at night to study the Torah.<sup>38</sup> When asked why he was unshaven the soldier explained that he would not use a razor, as the shaving oil was not kosher. Hardman could do nothing but instruct the soldier to get an electric razor, relatively new at the time, otherwise he would get into trouble.<sup>39</sup>

Bernard Sarle believed, in contradiction to what some religious Jews may have believed, that during the war the Jewish religion was very flexible. He explained that he was friendly with two rabbis who were serving with him in the Pioneer Corps. Even though they were orthodox, they both believed that practicality had to come first in certain situations and, as a result, they did not cause too much fuss over religious issues.<sup>40</sup> A number of refugees and British Jewish soldiers were under the impression that the religious authorities had applied a more liberal interpretation of the Jewish dietary laws during wartime. As was shown earlier, Martin Goldenberg argued with the religious Jews that the Chief Rabbi Herzog had given reassurance that some non-kosher activities were permitted due to the difficult circumstances faced by Jews who wished to remain observant during the conflict.<sup>41</sup> However, the premise that the dietary laws had been relaxed is debatable.

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<sup>38</sup> The Torah is the focal point of Jewish worship and the source of Jewish teaching, custom and practice.

<sup>39</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>40</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>41</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.



At the outbreak of war Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz,<sup>42</sup> not Chief Isaac Rabbi Herzog, had a declaration read on the BBC concerning the issue of dietary laws. It was announced that during the national emergency, all that was required to carry out the observance of food laws was to refrain from eating forbidden meats and shellfish. However, this broadcast was directed at Jewish children from religious homes who were evacuated to new surroundings. It was not intended as confirmation that Jews in the British army could eat non-kosher food and at the same time be regarded by Jewish law as kosher Jews.<sup>43</sup> The rumours had even convinced Reverend Leslie Hardman that permission had been granted for the Jewish rules to be liberalised. He believed that the Jewish soldiers were only not permitted to eat bacon, but could eat any other meat.<sup>44</sup>

Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Chaplain to the British Army, questioned the validity of this opinion.<sup>45</sup> He recalled that there were many rumours in circulation, which asserted that Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz had given exemption to certain religious laws. However, he stressed it was a fallacy that the Chief Rabbi relaxed the dietary laws. He felt that many Jews used such a claim for their own benefit and that in reality the Chief Rabbi had no right to make such a decision in any case as such exemptions could not be given.<sup>46</sup> The confusion surrounding this issue reached such levels that it prompted Chief Rabbi Joseph Hertz himself to make a statement reiterating the official position to all Jews in Britain. He strenuously denied that the Jewish laws had been relaxed. He stated,

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<sup>42</sup> Chief Rabbi Joseph Herman Hertz represented the Jews of Great Britain during the Second World War.

<sup>43</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 September 1939, p. 16.

<sup>44</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>45</sup> Reverend Dr Isaac Levy was Senior Chaplain to the Middle East Forces and British Army of the Rhine during the Second World War. After the conflict he became Senior Chaplain to the whole British army.

<sup>46</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

today there is in certain quarters a revolt against religious authority, and some lay administrators are consumed with the ambition to *pasken*, i.e., to pronounce religious decisions. This is wartime they tell you. In certain quarters wartime was the all-sufficient justification for suspending religious law. That attitude was quite untenable and un-English. In times of war, Englishmen put forward not less but greater efforts to remain true to their ideals.<sup>47</sup>

In spite of this official line, a general feeling still remained that those who wished to remain religiously observant should do so to the best of their ability in their given circumstances.<sup>48</sup> There were examples of observant Jewish refugees who decided not to observe strictly the religious laws whilst serving in the army. Henry Van Der Walde talked of one refugee, Rabbi Cassel, who was in his unit. Henry recalled that Rabbi Cassel was always willing to adopt a more liberal stance to his beliefs during his service; and Henry believed that as a result, “he fitted in quite well”.<sup>49</sup> Such a case can be cited as typical of a large proportion of British born observant Jews serving in the army. In 1941, it was reported that the vast majority of British Jewish soldiers accepted that they had to eat *treifa* (non-kosher food) because there was no alternative other than to go hungry.<sup>50</sup> However, such a report also suggests that, two years into the war, the army had still not adequately provided enough food to cater for the dietary needs of religiously observant British Jews. Did the Jewish refugees, whether they wanted to follow in religious activities or not, feel that the army adequately provided for their religious welfare?

Henry Van Der Walde believed that the Jewish refugees did not have their spiritual needs sufficiently catered for by the British army. He supported his statement by

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<sup>47</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 Feb 1942, p. 16.

<sup>48</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 March 1941, p. 1.

claiming that, to his knowledge, there was never any provision for *kashrut* (Kosher food).<sup>51</sup> Henry Adler also did not recall having any kosher food provided during his army career, although, he added that he was not particularly interested in any case.<sup>52</sup> Henry Van Der Walde explained that it was sometimes the case that, “we knew when the religious festivals were but there was not much we could do about it”.<sup>53</sup> Ian Lowitt similarly recalled that even during Jewish festivals such as *Pesach* (Passover), the army did not provide the refugee Jews with unleavened (without flour) food stock, as the festival requires.<sup>54</sup> Louis Rudnic remembered that, although the army did not adequately accommodate Jewish dietary laws, such as providing kosher food, it was sometimes the case that Jewish organisations would help provide hospitality. He explained that these organisations volunteered to cater for the *Pesach* meal if Jewish soldiers so wished.<sup>55</sup>

Evidently, there was a limited amount of discontent concerning the lack of attention to the needs of Jewish servicemen regarding kosher food. However, the impact this had on the refugees during their army career appears trivial, especially in comparison to their concerns regarding their own safety, the plight of their families, and the desire of many to be transferred out of the labour-intensive Pioneer Corps. Evidence clearly indicates that a large number of the refugees took the religious issues in their stride, demonstrating a pre-existing degree of apathy towards faith. These refugees remained largely unaffected because the spiritual side of religion, did not play a significant role in their lives. Both Henry Van Der Walde and Ian Lowitt agreed that most refugees

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<sup>51</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Adler, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>53</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>54</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>55</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London, 8 May 2000.

were not particularly bothered if religion was catered for in the army. Henry Van Der Walde explained that even when the Jews did not receive any special religious attention by the army, “the refugees were not upset by this. No one protested. Everyday was a working day”.<sup>56</sup> Ian Lowitt similarly stated that, “you worked on Jewish holidays such as *Yom Kippur* like any other day and you did not fast”.<sup>57</sup>

While there is some truth in the view that refugees did not have their religious needs adequately catered for, nevertheless it does seem that the army made great efforts to provide hospitality. Overwhelming evidence suggests that the British army and Jewish organisations worked hard to cater for all the Jewish servicemen’s religious requirements if they expressed a need for them. Martin Goldenberg’s recollections contradict criticisms of the army’s intentions. From his experiences he believed that the “British [army] would fall over backwards to accommodate religion”.<sup>58</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman confirmed that he received very few complaints over the army’s treatment of Jews and to his knowledge very few refugee soldiers required kosher food anyhow. He pointed out that he was not aware that the refugees in particular had any religious predicaments in the forces.<sup>59</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy also recalled that he had no problems with those refugees that were kosher. He said that they were more than happy with life in the army and the religious hospitality provided.<sup>60</sup>

The army made huge efforts to provide the refugees, British Jewish soldiers, and even most Jewish serviceman of other nationalities based in Britain, with the opportunity to

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<sup>56</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>57</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>58</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>60</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

participate in religious activities surrounding religious occasions, especially during the major Jewish festivals. Different methods were adopted to make sure the Jewish soldiers could enjoy Jewish holidays such as *Rosh Hashanah*, *Chanukah* and *Purim*. Special, and often quite unique arrangements were made to ensure that the refugees would have food provided for Passover at their base (for the refugees, this was more likely when they were all grouped together within the (alien) pioneer companies). If this was not possible, then the option of leave was made available so refugees could spend religious festivals with friends or with Jewish families located within the nearest civilian communities. If both options proved impractical, then there was a kosher canteen service and hospitality parcels available on request.<sup>61</sup>

Despite a number of refugees claiming earlier in the chapter that there was a general lack of interest in Judaism within the army, it can be seen that there was still considerable activity from a number of refugees around important dates in the Jewish calendar. Henry Van Der Walde remembered attending two religious ceremonies in 1940 and in 1944 which his whole company in the Pioneer Corps attended. He recalled of the second of these, whilst based in the Oswestry Training Camp in Shropshire, that it was “to my great pleasure” when he saw on the regimental notice board under the heading ‘church parades’ that all the Jewish members of the regiment were to assemble on the parade ground and were to be taken by army transport to the assembly hall of Shrewsbury Grammar School to partake of a service on *Yom Kippur*

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<sup>61</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 October 1940, p. 12.

(the Day of Atonement). He said the service was “well attended and a great success”.<sup>62</sup>

Many refugees did in fact attend synagogue when big religious services were organised. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy’s first army appointment was as the Jewish chaplain of the Alien Pioneer Corps camp in Richborough.<sup>63</sup> He recalled that the first *Pesach*<sup>64</sup> of the war was probably the most dramatic of them all. He described that 750 men sat down to Seder.<sup>65</sup> Hans Jackson pointed out that because some of the Companies in the Pioneer Corps were composed entirely of Jewish refugees the army did send in *matzo* (unleavened bread) for *Pesach*.<sup>66</sup> Martin Goldenberg also remembered how in the Pioneer Corps during *Pesach*, “the whole kitchen was provided with new equipment uncontaminated with any leavened materials”.<sup>67</sup>

Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy explained that he was delighted that so many Jews, nearly the vast majority of the Jewish refugees in the camp, wanted to take part in religious gatherings. He believed that generally, “we had a thriving Jewish community whilst they [the refugees] were in training”.<sup>68</sup> At one undisclosed (alien) pioneer camp the refugees had consecrated a little building as a synagogue and held a *minyan* (prayer session that requires ten men over bar mitzvah age present) every morning with the service being taken by a member of the camp rather than a chaplain. Reverend I. Chait was reported to express his feelings of “gratification at the facilities for

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<sup>62</sup> Walde, Henry Van Der, ‘My Life’, 1993. p. 26.

<sup>63</sup> As discussed earlier, the Kitchener Camp, Richborough, had been the reception camp for German and Austrian refugees from Nazism before the war.

<sup>64</sup> The festival of *Pesach* usually takes place at the end of April and lasts for seven days.

<sup>65</sup> Religious service usually accompanied with a meal.

<sup>66</sup> Jackson, Interview. The sending of *matzo* to the troops was not specifically for the refugees but a common practice for all Jews in the British army.

<sup>67</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>68</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

religious observance, which were provided, and paid tribute to the co-operation and sympathy of the Commanding Officer and all those under him”.<sup>69</sup>

It is important to note that such a considerable Jewish refugee involvement does not necessarily indicate a huge population of observant Jews, but rather that such gatherings presented opportunities for the refugees to get together with fellow Jews and demonstrate the strength of their Jewish identity and feeling of togetherness. The religious celebrations were regarded also as a social event, but more importantly, it offered a chance for them to reflect on their families left behind. Reverend Dr Isaac Levy felt that the Passover service in 1940 was particularly moving because they “all obviously felt this was a seder away from the family. God knows where their families were and how many were still in Germany”. He believed that such religious services acted as an important “morale boost” for the refugees.<sup>70</sup> The academic Norman Bentwich explained that as the bulk of men in the (alien) pioneer companies were Jews, religious observance did have a fresh appeal and was, indeed, a substitute for home. As a result, the religious requirements of those who were determined to keep observance of Jewish rituals were sometimes a matter of concern to some gentile commanding officers, who strove to meet the needs of such Jews to the best of their abilities.<sup>71</sup> Such successful organisation of religious ceremonies for all Jews in the British army, although usually on a smaller scale, was not uncommon throughout the war.

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<sup>69</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>71</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 44.

When it came to religion, a large extent of the refugee Jews were given similar treatment to British Jews serving in the army. Most instructions issued by the army, which related to religion concerned all of the Jews serving Britain. As the war progressed, Jews within the Polish, Czechoslovakian and even American armies also were to receive religious assistance from the British army and civilians. In fact, it can be argued that, before 1943, the refugees received a greater degree of religious assistance than the British as the vast majority of refugees were grouped together within (alien) pioneer companies. This made provision for religious needs a less complicated task for Jewish authorities as contrasted with British Jewish soldiers, who would have been spread out over many different units.

A large collection of agencies, organisations and individuals considerably aided the British army in paving the way for Jewish servicemen, including the refugees, to receive hospitality and to attend religious services. The Jewish War Services Committee<sup>72</sup> stressed that the Chaplaincy Office worked hard to provide all Jewish soldiers in the British army with spiritual comfort. At the same time, the Chaplaincy Office worked to deal with, “the many material problems that beset the soldier”. It was reported that the Chaplaincy Office was inundated with letters from soldiers who requested assistance.<sup>73</sup> Jewish organisations also received considerable assistance from non-Jews, especially Christian chaplains. Added to this was the ample cooperation provided by private families who offered their hospitality to soldiers during festival times. In 1943 the Jewish Hospitality Committee was formed

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<sup>72</sup> Reverend Dr. Joseph Hertz set up the Committee to deal with problems affecting members of the Jewish faith in H.M. Forces. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 245, 27 October 1939, p. 4.

<sup>73</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 March 1940, p. 1.



specifically with the intention of organising religious fare throughout the year.<sup>74</sup> The cooperation of the army, including a number of commanding officers who had Jewish soldiers within their units, was often praiseworthy. This manifested itself most especially when it came to the granting of leave or funding, and to the transportation of provisions across all of Britain, and later the battle zones in the rest of the world.<sup>75</sup>

The festival of Passover was one of the main religious focal points of the year for Jews in the British army. Special Passover arrangements were often organised for the (alien) pioneer companies with great success, especially in 1940.<sup>76</sup> The refugees and a considerable number of British Jews received *matzo*, wine, *worsht* (sausage), a *Haggadah* (Religious text) and a wine container. It was reported that the Czechoslovakian and Dutch Jewish servicemen in Britain also received similar items, whilst the Polish Jews were supplied separately by the Polish Jewish Relief Fund.<sup>77</sup> When American troops were based in Britain, the Jewish soldiers contained within those regiments also received Passover fare supplied by British organisations.<sup>78</sup>

Sometimes criticism accompanied what was seen by some as a lack of provision of Passover hospitality. Not every soldier was always catered for.<sup>79</sup> However, such criticism, although valid, paled in comparison with the overwhelming gratitude

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<sup>74</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 October 1943, p. 1.

<sup>75</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 April 1940, p. 13.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 April 1941, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 September 1942, p. 1.

<sup>79</sup> Examples of complaints made in *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 August 1941, p. 7, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 May 1942, p. 15.

expressed by Jewish soldiers of all nationalities.<sup>80</sup> It can be seen that the popularity of *Sederim* (Passover service) increased with every year of the war. It was claimed that in 1944 record numbers of Jewish soldiers of all nationalities attended seder services at their bases. These were held in specially arranged centres or with local communities. Even a synagogue was constructed for the Jews of the Royal Air Force (RAF). Others were supplied with parcels of *matzo* and wine.<sup>81</sup> It was not just the festival of Passover which brought large numbers of Jewish servicemen together for services and celebrations. It was claimed that the *Chanukah* services held in London at the end of 1943 brought together the largest number of men and women of home and allied forces ever to have attended military service in London, including American, Canadian, French, Dutch and Czechoslovakian soldiers.<sup>82</sup> At the turn of 1944 it was estimated that during holy days at least 40,000 Jews took advantage of arrangements made for celebrations.<sup>83</sup>

Such figures suggest the mammoth task of organisation and the large amount of cooperation needed for the celebration of Jewish religious festivities. As stated earlier, in many cases the provision of Jewish hospitality was often impossible due to practical reasons such as a lack of transportation and the constant movement of troops and soldiers involved in battles. These obstacles did not, however, indicate a lack of effort on behalf of the agencies or the British army. Once refugees joined fighting and technical units after 1943 it was often the case that they were the only Jews within

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<sup>80</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 April 1941, p. 17; 30 April 1943, p. 1; 8 October 1943, p. 121; 14 April 1944, p. 1. More letters of thanks and appreciation can be found sporadically within the *Jewish Chronicle* throughout the war.

<sup>81</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 April 1944, p. 11.

<sup>82</sup> There were no reports of former German or Austrian refugees being present. *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 December 1943, p. 1.

<sup>83</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 February 1944, p. 7.

their units.<sup>84</sup> They were therefore faced with the increased likelihood of obstacles to restrict the amount of Jewish hospitality received. As a number of the refugees were also sent with the invasion forces into Europe, the possibility of holding religious celebrations or of eating kosher food if required, diminished even further.

There were some cases, however, where hospitality was successfully provided even under difficult circumstances. In 1944, a Passover service was organised with over 700 men in attendance. The seder was quite unique as it actually took place on a battlefield in Italy.<sup>85</sup> Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz also managed to organise a service close to the front line, whilst fighting continued not more than 10 miles away near Arnhem. He recalled that prayers were conducted as German shells landed near the abandoned synagogue. He was saddened, however, as he could not reach the British Jews and a fair number of German refugees, as they were directly involved in the battle against heavy odds.<sup>86</sup>

To help give Jewish servicemen, including the refugees, the opportunity to take part in religious celebrations, the War Office stated that special requests of leave for religious purposes were to be granted at times of major Jewish festivals.<sup>87</sup> The initial order stated that,

provided the exigencies of the service permit, and subject to operational requirements, leave may be granted to officers and other ranks of the Jewish faith who are desirous of observing the New Year and the Day of Atonement,<sup>88</sup> but periods of leave in excess of those available to personnel of other faiths for general purposes will

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<sup>84</sup> All of the refugee interviewees who transferred to fighting and technical units often found themselves to be the only refugee, and usually the only Jew, in their unit.

<sup>85</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 April 1944, p. 1.

<sup>86</sup> *Jewish Forces Booklet* (Agudas Israel Organisation of Great Britain: London, Spring 1945), p. 6.

<sup>87</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 September 1940, p. 1.

<sup>88</sup> Similar orders were announced before all the major Jewish festivals.

not be given. In each case the celebration of the festival commences at sunset on the previous day, and those who are granted leave will be afforded facilities to reach their destination by that time.<sup>89</sup>

Other national armies located in Britain adopted a similar policy. It was announced that Jews in the American army based in Britain were to be given leave wherever practical in order to observe *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*. United States Army commanders were authorised to issue 24-hour passes for soldiers to be away from the station to attend these Services.<sup>90</sup> It was reported that even the Polish military authorities granted leave so that a number of Jewish soldiers could spend Sabbath in towns near their Scotland base so as to allow them the opportunity to conduct religious services.<sup>91</sup>

British army soldiers were informed that they had to apply to their commanding officers to receive leave.<sup>92</sup> Similar notices were published each year to remind the Jewish soldiers of their special rights.<sup>93</sup> Occasionally, there were questions concerning the co-operation of certain commanding officers. One soldier angrily asked that “with the approach of high festivals and leave of forces are we again to rely on good nature of the commanding officer or on his so called discretionary powers to rule as whether or not we should be permitted to observe the most important days of the Jewish calendar?”.<sup>94</sup> However, it was also recalled that the commanding officers were

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<sup>89</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 September 1940, p. 1.

<sup>90</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 September 1942, p. 1.

<sup>91</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 September 1941, p. 11.

<sup>92</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 September 1940, p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Posted in the *Jewish Chronicle* every year in advance of High Holy Days, 30 January 1942, p. 15; 19 February 1943, p. 1; 11 February 1944, p. 6.

<sup>94</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 August 1941, p. 7.

generally quite accommodating to Jewish soldiers' requests for leave.<sup>95</sup>

Martin Goldenburg believed that, when it came to religious festivals, the British army was, "totally strict in honouring religious belief".<sup>96</sup> Louis Rudnic recalled that on religious festivals such as *Rosh Hashanah* (new year) the Pioneer Corps gave people leave to go to Synagogue but not all at the same time. He added though, "I wasn't into this. It didn't bother me".<sup>97</sup> Peter Frean recently agreed and said that "like any soldiers you got your leave and some did choose to go to Synagogue on festivals". However, Peter did not recall himself doing so.<sup>98</sup> The war diaries of the 74 and 93 (alien) pioneer companies reveal that the refugees were given the day off work on Jewish holidays. A British Jewish chaplain held religious services on the high holy days.<sup>99</sup>

The cases of Louis Rudnic and Peter Frean both demonstrate a typical mindset held by the refugees in relation to their religion and the army. Even though many were not interested in practising religion they were still grateful to know that the opportunities were there. Those refugees who retained an interest in the spiritual aspects of Judaism were not surprisingly more involved in religious life.<sup>100</sup> Most refugees knew however of services for Jews organised by the army or nearby civilian communities irrespective of their interest in religion. As with the case of the first Passover held at Kitchener Camp, whether religious or not, the majority of refugees attended the

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<sup>95</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview; Reverend Hardman, Interview; *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>96</sup> Goldenburg, Interview.

<sup>97</sup> Rudnic, Interview.

<sup>98</sup> Frean, Interview.

<sup>99</sup> The chaplain, Captain Ammias, who was later the Rabbi of Edgware United Synagogue, held services on the Day of Atonement. War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, July 1940-December 1941, PRO WO 166/5560; War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1942, PRO WO 166/9974; Later these Jewish divine services became compulsory for all Jewish personnel. War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1943, PRO WO 167/1309; War Diary 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1941, PRO WO 166/5578.

ceremony. In the case of refugees taking leave during religious festivals, this was only possible if the individual soldier had applied within good time. If certain refugees were not interested in celebrating Passover or other festivals, then they may not have taken advantage of the special order granting leave. This can account for the claims of some refugees who assert that they did not have any leave around holy days. They simply may not have applied for such leave. The order from the War Office applied as much to the refugee Jews as the British Jews.

Hospitality for Jewish refugees did not solely accompany festival periods. Provision was made all year round if circumstances allowed. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy described how in the Richborough Camp, “we had a kosher kitchen for those who needed it, and we had regular services”. He added that some of the men were very capable of conducting the service themselves in their own German style.<sup>101</sup> The conducting of their own religious services by refugees was not uncommon in the army.<sup>102</sup> Czechoslovakian refugee servicemen also had a small but lively religious Jewish contingent in their camp. The Federation for Czechoslovakian Jews even made appeals for their own Sefer Torah for their services.<sup>103</sup>

Norman Bentwich has written that on occasions the commanding officers would provide the refugees with as many utensils or as much flexibility as was required in order to preserve their religious beliefs. During the war various meetings were held at Woburn House, in London, to organise and to obtain the necessary funds for the

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<sup>100</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>101</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>102</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 September 1942, p. 10.

<sup>103</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 April 1943, p. 13.

provision of a kosher parcel service for Jewish soldiers.<sup>104</sup> These food parcels were targeted, not just at Jews serving in the British army, but also for those serving in other national armies based in Britain, such as the Polish and Czechoslovakian armies. In one (alien) pioneer company, pay day was moved to Thursday instead of Friday so as to avoid the coming of the Jewish Sabbath.<sup>105</sup> This gesture was only made whilst the refugees were together in the Pioneer Corps up to 1943.<sup>106</sup>

Hans Jackson recalled that leave to attend religious services was not simply restricted to major festivals. Jewish refugees in the Pioneer Corps were allowed to attend synagogue on Saturday mornings. However, he added that of the Jewish refugees, “not many went. I only went from time to time”.<sup>107</sup> Martin Goldenburg explained that he sometimes went on church parade despite the fact that he was Jewish. He claimed one of his reasons for doing so was that, “I liked it. Liked the hymns. It was lovely music”.<sup>108</sup> Ken Overman made clear though that the Jewish refugees were exempt from church parade, whilst for the non-Jews it was compulsory.<sup>109</sup> Even though he was not required to attend church parade, he did not make use of his free time to practise Judaism. “I was excused but just lounged around. I wasn’t interested in religion by then. Quite frankly, never felt anything but Jewish, just not orthodox”.<sup>110</sup>

Comparisons can be made with the Jewish refugees in the British army and those in the Czechoslovakian and Polish armies based in Britain. In the case of the

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<sup>104</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 March 1941, p. 1.

<sup>105</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 45.

<sup>106</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> Goldenburg, Interview.

<sup>109</sup> PRO WO 32/14687, 1943.

<sup>110</sup> Overman, Interview.

Czechoslovakian Jews, there existed a claim that there was no opportunity for Czechoslovakian Jews to go to a synagogue. It has also been argued that there were difficulties in trying to observe Judaism within the mostly Catholic orientated military camps.<sup>111</sup> However, the Czechoslovakian military authorities did affirm that they were concerned with the welfare of the Jewish soldiers in the Czechoslovakian army stationed in Britain. It was stated “there are some 800 co-religionists in the various Czech army camps and we are endeavouring to afford them welfare facilities”. The Federation of Czechoslovak Jews made particular appeals for prayer books and offers of Jewish homes where the Jews could spend their leave.<sup>112</sup> Heszal Klepfisz, Jewish Chaplain to the Polish Free Army, also believed that the Jews in the Polish army in Britain were generally catered for. He said that he arranged services and developed a good relationship with the local Jewish population. He also made stringent efforts to make sure that the Jews were provided with kosher tinned food if required.<sup>113</sup>

One of the most contentious issues relating to the provision of Jewish hospitality in the army centred on the Jewish chaplains themselves. The debate over whether there were enough Jewish chaplains in the British army persisted throughout the war.<sup>114</sup> Arguments were raised which criticised the Jewish authorities for this shortcoming. At the same time there was much support and sympathy articulated for the difficult

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<sup>111</sup> Laci Bock, Interview, Silverdale, 11 March 2000, and Paul Bock, Interview, Warrington, 10 March 2000.

<sup>112</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 November 1940, p. 17.

<sup>113</sup> Reverend Dr. Heszal Klepfisz, Second Interview, Jerusalem, Israel, 21 November 2000.

<sup>114</sup> Initially, this was an issue that also concerned the Christian chaplains in the British army. It was reported in the *Times* that the numbers of chaplains in the army remained “lamentable incomplete”. *The Times*, 7 October 1939, p. 7.



tasks faced by the chaplains. This was a debate which the refugees were aware of. Hence there will follow an examination of whether the refugees felt that they had adequate support from Jewish chaplains. There will also be consideration of the obstacles the chaplains faced and their contributions to the Jewish servicemen, specifically the refugees.

There are differing recollections among refugee ex-servicemen as to whether they received any visits from a Jewish chaplain.<sup>115</sup> The Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy was based with the (alien) pioneer companies for a number of months in 1940.<sup>116</sup> At this time the majority of refugees who served in the forces were still civilians and were interned as enemy aliens. Many of these refugees joined the army immediately after internment and by then the (alien) pioneer companies had no resident chaplain. One such refugee, Ian Lowitt, did not recall any visits from Jewish chaplain officers,<sup>117</sup> not just whilst in the Pioneer Corps but throughout the entire war.<sup>118</sup> Harry Blake also had no memory of seeing a Jewish chaplain and believed it was another example of how little the Jewish refugees were catered for in the army. He remembered that it was only after the war that he saw a Jewish chaplain. He recalled that Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy conducted a *Pesach* ceremony in September 1945. Harry explained that this was

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<sup>115</sup> The Jewish chaplains were not independent of the other religious military ministers. However, they were permitted, with the King's approval, to wear a special badge that departed from the standard of the Royal Army Chaplains. The Jewish symbol (Star of David), replaced the cross and the motto "in this sign we conquer" was omitted. Letters between the War Office and Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, 1939-40, PRO WO 32/9455.

<sup>116</sup> Levy, Isaac, *Now I Can Tell: Middle Eastern Memories* (Dalkeith Press Ltd: Northants, 1978), pp. 1-2.

<sup>117</sup> All Jewish chaplains were made officers on their appointment to the British army. They initially were given the rank of captain. The Polish army followed the same procedure. See Levy, Hardman, and Klepfisz, Interviews.

<sup>118</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

only service he ever attended whilst in British uniform.<sup>119</sup> This was an issue not only of concern to the refugees and Jewish soldiers of the British army. Laci Bock, of the Czechoslovakian army in Britain, also stated that he never encountered a Czechoslovakian or a British Jewish chaplain visiting the soldiers.<sup>120</sup>

Hans Jackson adds that the limited presence of Jewish chaplains was coupled with the refugees never being provided with any form of Jewish prayer book as compensation.<sup>121</sup> Although there is evidence that Hans Jackson was not the only refugee who did not recall being furnished with any Jewish literature,<sup>122</sup> it is the case that the supply of Jewish handbooks was usually a common procedure throughout the army. At the time, it was claimed that an important part of the religious provision given to Jewish soldiers was that the Jewish Chaplaincy Office dispatched the *Handbook for Jewish Prayers and Thoughts*<sup>123</sup> and also a “little handy sized pocket book called *Prayers for Trench and Base*”.<sup>124</sup> By mid-1942 nearly 10000 copies of the Jewish pocket handbook had been distributed without charge to members of H.M. Forces. The *Jewish Chronicle* recorded in 1942 that in view of demand a fourth edition was to be printed.<sup>125</sup> The book of Jewish Prayer was almost identical to the issue given to Jewish servicemen during the First World War but with some updated material by the Senior Jewish Chaplain, Dayan Gollop. It contained a number of prayers in Hebrew and English for possible situations the Jewish soldier may face in wartime such as a prayer before a battle or prayers for a burial service.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>120</sup> Laci Bock, Interview.

<sup>121</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>122</sup> All the refugee interviewees did not know anything about a Jewish prayer book for soldiers.

<sup>123</sup> Malcolm Weisman, Interview, London, 30 January 2003.

<sup>124</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 March 1940, p. 1.

<sup>125</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 August 1942, p. 6.

<sup>126</sup> *Book of Jewish Prayer for Trench and Base* (Office of the Chief Rabbi: London, February 1940, in the Office of the Jewish Committee for H.M. Forces.

Many Jewish soldiers were also provided with religious booklets throughout the war. Eric Freedman was one British Jew who remembered receiving the Jewish forces booklet.<sup>127</sup> This booklet supplied by the Forces Welfare Committee gave information on the practice of religion in the army, such as the procedures for the celebration of festivals. It also gave reports with news of the war effort from Jewish troops and chaplains.<sup>128</sup> Another booklet that was issued to Jewish troops was a publication from the Association of Jewish ex-Servicemen and Women (AJEX), *Jewish Pocket Handbook*, that was also distributed free of charge.<sup>129</sup>

It is difficult to explain why so many refugees did not recall receiving the handbook or pamphlets given that the *Handbook for Jewish Prayers and Thoughts* was supposed to be issued to all Jews in the British Army. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy suggested however, that in the case of the (alien) pioneer companies, the refugees did not need army issued service prayer books because they already had standard prayer books in the military camps.<sup>130</sup> Reverend Malcolm Weisman, present Senior Jewish Chaplain to H.M Forces, recalled that it was usual practice for a Jewish soldier to be given a handbook on his enrolment into the army, usually at attestation.<sup>131</sup> However, considering the difficult and confusing set of circumstances under which many of the refugees were attested, straight from the internment camps, the issuing of a prayer book may not have occurred. It was not just many of the refugees who probably did not receive any Jewish literature. Despite the huge supply, many British soldiers also

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<sup>127</sup> Eric Freedman, Second Interview, London, 19 November 1999.

<sup>128</sup> *Jewish Forces Booklet*.

<sup>129</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 April 1940, p. 16.

<sup>130</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>131</sup> Weisman, Interview.

did not receive the books. At the time the Reverend Dayan Gollop was not unaware of this problem. He responded to the matter with an explanation of the difficulties that were faced. He also outlined the tireless efforts that were made on the Jewish servicemen's behalf. He wrote,

my attention has been drawn to a letter in which the writer asks whether the soldier's prayer book is being circulated during the present war, and if not, why not. I can assure the Jewish community that every effort humanly possible is being made to ensure that every man and woman serving in H.M. Forces is in possession of the soldier's prayer book. All chaplains and officiating ministers issue a book to all the men whom they see. From my office I send by post a prayer book to those who by chance haven't got one. Owing to the scattered nature of Jewish personnel, and difficulty of contacting them all personally, it is inevitable that there are isolated cases or men who have not yet received the prayer book.<sup>132</sup>

After 1943 the majority of refugee servicemen were serving in separate units. As a consequence regular visits of Jewish chaplains was unlikely. This was a huge obstacle, for the Jewish chaplains to overcome. This situation worsened as the war progressed with the deployment of Jewish soldiers all over Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. However, Dr. Isaac Levy, Leslie Hardman and Malcolm Weisman, all stressed that the chaplains in the British army fulfilled their role to the best of their ability, acting often beyond the call of duty. They were the first to admit that there were major difficulties and that the complaints of lack of spiritual service were not without foundations.<sup>133</sup> There was a lack of army Jewish chaplains made available to the troops. During the first year of war there were 166 chaplains in the regular army and one senior chaplain general. The vast majority (117) were Church of England, but also represented were the Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Methodist

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<sup>132</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 August 1941, p. 17.

<sup>133</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Reverend Hardman, Reverend Weisman, Interviews.

denominations. However, there was not one Jewish chaplain.<sup>134</sup> Reverend Malcolm Weisman explained that initially the War Office declared that Jewish chaplains were only to be appointed on a ratio basis of about 1200 Jewish soldiers per chaplain.<sup>135</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman concurred and revealed that it was because of this reason that he was not permitted to become a Jewish chaplain during the early years of the war. He said, “I applied but was told there was no room. Not enough Jews. So I waited and the war was going on and more and more Jewish boys were called up and so they would need more chaplains”.<sup>136</sup> Hardman was only eventually allowed to take up duties as chaplain to H.M. forces in 1942.<sup>137</sup>

Reverend Leslie Hardman said that there were always complaints from soldiers that they had not seen or heard of any Jewish chaplains.<sup>138</sup> This shortage of chaplains did not escape the attention of the Jewish media. The Jewish national paper, *The Jewish Chronicle*, was inundated with letters from unhappy Jewish soldiers during the entire conflict. Many of the angry letters pointed specifically to the lack of religious support to soldiers serving abroad. One such letter was from Major William Schonfield who felt compelled to complain about the lack of activity from the Jewish Chaplaincy Office. He wanted the issue to be raised because, “as to the spiritual needs of our men complaints have also reached me that no chaplains had been seen or heard of at certain stations or training centres and on enquiry the answer received has been that

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<sup>134</sup> Letter from Chaplain General Hughes on the recruitment of chaplains in the regular army, 20 October 1944, PRO WO 32/12038.

<sup>135</sup> Reverend Weisman, Interview.

<sup>136</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>137</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 August 1942, p. 10.

<sup>138</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

no Jewish chaplains were available in those districts”.<sup>139</sup>

There was a shortage of Jewish chaplains with the British Expeditionary Forces (BEF) in France during the early stages of the conflict. This was also a problem for many of the refugees as five of the (alien) pioneer companies were attached to the BEF as manual labour support to the British troops.<sup>140</sup> There were claims that the numbers of Jews within the BEF warranted at least one chaplain and contradicted the defence that chaplains would be allocated when there was specific number of Jewish men. It was argued that the only reason for having no chaplains in France was that not enough were being trained. The report called for more to be done to cater for the increasing numbers of Jewish servicemen’s religious needs.<sup>141</sup> This contentious issue was raised in parliament. The politician Mr. Lipson requested that the Secretary of State for War should appoint a Jewish chaplain to the BEF, pointing out the need for soldiers of the Jewish faith to have a minister.<sup>142</sup> The *Manchester Guardian* reiterated this expression of discontent, emphasising that there was a reported 207 British army chaplains in France but not one of them was for the Jews. It pointed out that having no chaplain present caused extra distress to Jewish troops during burial services.<sup>143</sup> In 1944, the lack of chaplains remained a problem all over the world. It was expressed that there was a “sorry state of affairs” regarding the religious welfare of the troops stationed in India. Similar to the situation in France in 1940, it was claimed that there was a deficiency of chaplains in India despite thousands of Jews being stationed there. It

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<sup>139</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 November 1939, p. 8.

<sup>140</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 190, 16 August 1940, p. 3

<sup>141</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 November 1939, p. 15.

<sup>142</sup> Mr. Lipson was successful in his requests and was informed that a chaplain was nominated and was to be quickly posted to France. HC Vol 357, col 564, 13 February 1940 and HC Vol 358, col 233, 5 March 1940.

<sup>143</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 December 1939, p. 16.

took four years of war before a chaplain finally arrived in India.<sup>144</sup> Arrangements and supplies were eventually made for services to be conducted in India.<sup>145</sup> However, it was still stressed that it was “impossible for one chaplain in India to do it all in such a vast territory”.<sup>146</sup>

The British army was not alone in having a problem with a lack of Jewish chaplains, especially during the early stages of war. There were questions raised with the Dutch government over not allocating any Jewish chaplains at all, even though an estimated 4000 Jews had been called up. The Dutch Secretary State of War, Heer Dijxhoorn, announced that no chaplains were to be appointed by the Dutch War Office, even though it was reported that the Jews were very keen to provide for the spiritual welfare of soldiers.<sup>147</sup> Laci Bock, who served with the Czechoslovakian army based in Britain, also claimed that he never had any contact with a Czechoslovakian Jewish chaplain.<sup>148</sup> There were also complaints in France that there were not enough qualified Jewish chaplains within the French army, with only 25 being available.<sup>149</sup> This figure however made the British shortage appear even more desperate. The American army, initially, also had a lack of Jewish chaplains. When Rabbi Bernard Segal was appointed Jewish chaplain to the United States army at the end of summer 1940, he was the first full time Jewish chaplain to have been appointed since the First World War.<sup>150</sup> However, it must be noted that at this time America was not at war. When a comparison of time scales is made, it can be seen that the American army was

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<sup>144</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 April 1944, p. 14 and 21 April 1944, p. 16,

<sup>145</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 April 1944, p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 April 1944, p. 16. An almost identical complaint was made over the chaplain situation in the Middle East. *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 September 1943, p. 15.

<sup>147</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 December 1939, p. 10.

<sup>148</sup> Bock, Interview.

<sup>149</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 December 1939, p. 13.

<sup>150</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 August 1940, p. 9.

well ahead of the British in terms of provision of chaplains. A year into the conflict Britain had just eight commissioned Jewish chaplains with the home forces.<sup>151</sup> Less than a year into the conflict the American army had 60 Jewish chaplains on active duty, more than twice the number they had in World War One.<sup>152</sup>

Despite a relatively slow increase in the number of British Jewish chaplains and a more than satisfactory system of religious hospitality that developed as the war progressed, there were still valid criticisms of shortages. It was reported that, “the very justified complaint he [a Jewish serviceman] makes has been aired again and again by soldier correspondents and certainly the Chaplaincy authorities have seriously considered the problem. There is only one stumbling block: scarcity of men suitable to be chaplains; and all are agreed that an unsuitable chaplain is worse than none at all”.<sup>153</sup> Not all the discontent came from Jewish soldiers. In March 1940 disappointment was expressed by many non-Jews at the funeral of a young Jewish soldier in Willesden, London. It was deplored that although the Chaplaincy Office was notified of the death and particulars of the burial, and while non-Jews were ready to pay a last tribute, there was no Jewish chaplain to officiate.<sup>154</sup> The problem of chaplains not visiting Jewish military burials continued throughout the war.

In May 1944, one fusilier poignantly asked “why can’t we have more Jewish chaplains to serve with us overseas than there are at present? The acute shortage of Jewish chaplains is badly felt. I feel, and so do my colleagues, how badly we have been let down by the people responsible for failing to give us a chaplain during these

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<sup>151</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 September 1940, p. 15.

<sup>152</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 11 September 1942, p. 1.

<sup>153</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 April 1944, p. 16.

<sup>154</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 March 1940, p. 32.



hard and strenuous times in Italy. If you had seen our boys dying and longing for a word from a Jewish chaplain, a wish so promptly and easily fulfilled in the Christians case but practically an impossibility in ours". The writer did concede, though, that during the Tunisian campaign he was "fortunate" enough to receive two visits from Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz.<sup>155</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recognised that this was a problem facing the chaplains but suggested that it was not possible for a Jewish chaplain to have been present at every funeral: "there were Jewish casualties but we couldn't always be there".<sup>156</sup>

Another obstacle that reduced the chances of some Jewish servicemen being visited by a Jewish chaplain was procedural. Jewish chaplains were usually allocated to an area rather than a company. Reverend Leslie Hardman was initially posted as chaplain to the Home Counties.<sup>157</sup> There were rare exceptions to this such as when Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy was briefly attached to the (alien) pioneer company at Richborough and Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz was attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy explained, "what the chaps don't realise was where as a Christian chaplain is attached to a regiment and stayed with it, [while] we were posted to a large area and were always on the move. So, it may well be that the chaps didn't see a chaplain for months and months and some say they never saw one. It could be that they were going one way and me another". He admitted, however, "we never had enough

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<sup>155</sup> At that time Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz was attached to the 8<sup>th</sup> Army. *Jewish Chronicle* (5 May 1944, p. 12.

<sup>156</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>157</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview. "Jewish chaplains were attached to area commands, and travelled widely in order to meet their "flock" and cater for their religious needs. As the war progressed, and units moved on with increasing frequency, it was increasingly hard for Jewish chaplains to keep up with their Jewish servicemen and women". Text from Jewish Museum Exhibition entitled 'The Jewish Experience in the Second World War'.

chaplains".<sup>158</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman completely supported this opinion stressing that he too was always on the move looking for men in units. He explained at one point [in 1945] there was only two chaplains to cover the whole of Germany.<sup>159</sup>

Some soldiers (specifically the refugees) did not encounter a chaplain because they were registered with the army as being Church of England or agnostic. This decision was made at their attestation or before they were to be sent with the invasion forces to Europe or Africa. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy explained that the chaplains were given a secret list of Jews in each unit and where they could find them, although the location information was not very accurate when the troops were advancing or retreating.<sup>160</sup> If a soldier was not registered as a Jew, he would not be down on the list, and at the same time would not have received any Jewish hospitality.

Appeals were often made for the relatives of Jewish soldiers to make their presence in the army known to the Chaplaincy Office and to explain if the soldier required anything. At the outbreak of war Reverend Dayan Gollop posted a notice specifying, "we are making every endeavour to get in touch with all Jews serving in the army, navy and air force, but, in spite of our efforts, our lists are far from complete. I would therefore wholeheartedly appeal to all concerned to cooperate with this office by sending us full particulars of any of their relatives or friends who are in the fighting services. It would considerably help the work of the Chaplaincy Department, and at the same time be of service to the Jews who are scattered throughout H.M. Forces".<sup>161</sup> It is evident, though, that this method of rectifying the problem of lack of hospitality

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<sup>158</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>159</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy was the other chaplain in Germany. Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>160</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>161</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 September 1939, p. 7.

and contact with chaplains was not much help to the refugees who did not have many civilian friends or relatives in Britain who could make the army aware of their presence.

Another reason why some refugees never encountered a Jewish chaplain was because they were not interested in attending any services organised for them. As explained earlier, many of the refugees had more immediate concerns, especially regarding their discontent at only being allowed to serve in the Pioneer Corps. This issue is discussed in the next chapter. Reverend Leslie Hardman described how he arranged for a *Yom Kippur* service for a number of Jews, including the refugees in the Pioneer Corps, in the Home Counties area. He said that he had to get as many Jews as possible together in Hertfordshire. He went to Slough and was permitted to use the base at the main site for the religious festival. The commanding officer was most helpful and asked for a letter from Hardman that he would send to the other units to invite Jewish servicemen to the ceremony. Reverend Leslie Hardman exclaimed “Lo and behold only his boys turned up. He [the commanding officer] played merry hell. I said I couldn’t understand it, why haven’t they come?” Hardman felt that the reason why the men did not attend was because they did not want to come to a service.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the fact that a number of refugees had no recollection of any contact with a chaplain, not one letter of criticism was made from a refugee soldier to the *Jewish Chronicle* or reported in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*. Both Reverend Leslie Hardman and Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy also stated that they did not hear of any complaints made specifically by the refugees over religious issues.

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<sup>162</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

While there was a lack of Jewish chaplains serving the refugees and British Jews alike, this bears little reflection on the “superhuman”<sup>163</sup> efforts of the Jewish chaplains that were in the army. It is evident that the Jewish chaplains received just as much praise for their efforts from British and refugee Jews alike as they did criticism.<sup>164</sup> Louis Rudnic and Peter Frean contradicted the belief that there were no visiting chaplains to the refugees recalling a great number of visits by Jewish chaplains whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps.<sup>165</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, for example, was a well-known and popular figure among the refugees. The Passover ceremony he conducted in 1940 has been portrayed as one that lingered long in the memory of the many men who took part.<sup>166</sup> British Jewish servicemen discussed the issue of Jewish chaplains at the Balfour Club in London. They came to the conclusion that they were aware there were difficulties for the chaplains having to cover large areas to find Jews in one or two scattered units, and “hence occasions for meeting and discussion [with a chaplain] are not nearly sufficient”. Nevertheless, they recognised that the Chaplaincy Department was “doing splendid work in maintaining Jewish consciousness and smoothing over difficulties arising from the fact that Jews are different at least in religion”.<sup>167</sup> Reverend Israel Brodie gave a similar statement on BBC radio regarding the efforts that were made by the chaplains. He acknowledged that there were Jews who “for one reason or another are not usually in contact with our Jewish chaplains”. But he explained this was not due to a lack of effort as, “our chaplains endeavour energetically to reach as many of you as possible”.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 May 1944, p. 16.

<sup>164</sup> Many letters and reports of praise in *Jewish Chronicle*, 1939-45.

<sup>165</sup> See Rudnic and Frean, Interviews.

<sup>166</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, pp. 44-45.

<sup>167</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 June 1943, p.12.

<sup>168</sup> *Jewish Forces Booklet*, p. 8.

In the British army, some Christian chaplains also received praise from refugees for their help in providing Jewish hospitality. Henry Van Der Walde recalled that the *Yom Kippur* service in 1944 proved to be quite unusual. He recalled how the Jewish Chaplain to the British Forces was unable to attend and there was no suitable Jewish substitute. Although the Chaplaincy Office could be criticised for not providing a rabbi it was applauded for making sure that the army provided an American Roman Catholic Priest to lead the service.<sup>169</sup> Despite his initial doubts Henry believed that the priest, who wore a *tallis* and conducted the service in fluent Hebrew, captured wonderfully the, “feeling of the significance of the day”.<sup>170</sup> It was not that uncommon that a non-Jewish chaplain would have to give a Jewish service or perform a Jewish burial. Occasionally Jewish chaplains had to say prayers over non-Jews if the situation required.<sup>171</sup>

In conclusion, Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy believed that for many of the refugee pioneers, especially in the Kitchener camp, religious life was highly organised and provisions of kosher food were ordered whenever necessary.<sup>172</sup> There were refugees who were not interested in practising their religion but at the same time a number of refugees always took full advantage of the hospitality provided. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy said that the refugees held services regularly on Friday night and the Sabbath morning. It can be seen that there most often was attendance from the majority of refugees during the services for the high holy days. Levy also explained that leave was granted to all refugees who requested them for religious purposes, unless of

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<sup>169</sup> Van Der Walde, Henry, ‘A Yom Kippur with a Difference’, No Date, p. 1.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

<sup>171</sup> Klepfisz, Interview.

<sup>172</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

course, they were needed for military duties. He stressed that it was amazing how many facilities for the Jewish religion were made available to the refugees and that the army was particularly careful when dealing with all Jews.<sup>173</sup> On a visit to an (alien) pioneer company a correspondent of the *Jewish Chronicle* was informed by the commandant that the religious needs of all the men was “scrupulously respected”. It was reported that a chaplain did in fact visit the camp once a fortnight to conduct service.<sup>174</sup> He was described as being very efficient, helping the men with any problems they may have had, and he was generally well received. It was added that there was also a consecration of a little building that some of the refugees had erected for use as a synagogue.<sup>175</sup> Although the army enlisted many chaplains in the British army, their number was still never enough to cater for every Jew’s religious needs. Yet it is quite clear that every effort was made by Jewish authorities and the chaplains to provide spiritual welfare to all Jewish servicemen and that this included the refugees.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Reverend I. Chait was the Jewish chaplain for South East Midland area.

<sup>175</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Frustration in the Pioneer Corps, 1939-43**

Despite their status as ‘enemy aliens’ the refugees were permitted to join the British army within the first few months of war. In November 1940 Herbert Morrison, Home Secretary, declared that it was an opportunity for the refugees to clearly demonstrate their friendliness to the allied cause.<sup>1</sup> It also presented a chance which many of the refugees had been hoping for, to fight back against the Nazis. Earlier, Leslie Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War, declared that all distinctions in the army had been abolished and that the refugees were guaranteed equal treatment with British born soldiers.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will assess the extent to which the refugees were treated as equals or whether their treatment reflected an uncertainty within the military authorities as to the loyalty of the refugees. The focus of this analysis is on the years 1939 to 1943. During this period the vast majority of refugee soldiers served within alien companies of the Pioneer Corps.<sup>3</sup> Comparisons will be made with the experiences of refugees who served within the armies of other allied nations that were based in Britain for much of the war.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 79-81, 26 November 1940; Fox, John. P., ‘German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers in Britain’s Armed Forces During the Second World War’, *American Historical Association Conference*, San Francisco (1994), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 234, 14 October 1939, p. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The majority of refugees served in the Pioneer Corps because they were not permitted to join any technical or fighting units. The refugee servicemen W. W Brown recalled, “would the likes of me be allowed to enlist in the British Army? Would there be an Austrian Legion? I enquired everywhere; the answers were non-committal; eventually it became clear that only the Pioneer Corps was open to us [aliens from Germany and Austria]”. W. W. Brown in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, August 1988, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Particularly Poland, Czechoslovakia and the United States of America.

Even before the outbreak of war it was reported that many refugees had ‘flocked’ in large numbers to register for national service.<sup>5</sup> Appeals were made to the government to use the “first victims of the tyranny” in the fight against the Axis powers. It had been recognised that many ‘refugees from Nazism’ were “eager to fight and have the qualifications which make the offer of services more than simply a gesture of gratitude [to Britain]” and that to “waste so much talent and eagerness would be folly”.<sup>6</sup> This charge of ‘wasting available talent’ haunted the War Office for the first four years of the war.

The declaration of war on Germany was a pivotal turning point in the refugees’ fortunes. Although Britain had experience dealing with German and Austrian ‘enemy aliens’ during the First World War, they were faced with a new situation in the Second World War: thousands of refugees from Germany and Austria wanted to fight alongside Britain. The government was well aware of this situation. In October 1939 Sir John Anderson, Home Secretary, stated, “I understand that many refugees are anxious to volunteer for military service”.<sup>7</sup> Taking into account the status of the refugees, the government had to decide whether they would be allowed to join the British army. The government was faced with a situation where it had to deal with “an entirely new and in many ways delicate task in allocating refugees to suitable posts”.<sup>8</sup> Initially, despite their enthusiasm, the refugees were not permitted to join the British army. The refugees were reclassified as ‘Refugees from Nazism’ but at the same time

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<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 August 1939, p. 8.

<sup>6</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 200, 29 August 1939, p. 4. The eagerness of the refugees to enlist in the event of war was raised by Mr. Mander in Parliament. “Is the Minister aware that a number of these aliens are only too anxious to offer their services in the armed forces of this country, and cannot they be given the opportunity of doing so?”. HC Vol 348, col 2436, 22 June 1939. Also reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, No 201, 30 August 1939, p. 4.

<sup>7</sup> HC Vol 352, col 2096, 12 October 1939.

<sup>8</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 208, 7 September 1939, pp. 3-4 and *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 205, 4 September 1939, p. 3.



were regarded as ‘enemy aliens.’ Accordingly a number of refugees were to register with the police and were restricted in their movement. This was a questionable measure as the Jewish refugees were not German citizens, they were technically stateless Jews.<sup>9</sup> Sir John Anderson dismissed this fact.

Refugees from Germany and Austria who were nationals of those countries are registered as either Germans or Austrian and must, therefore, be so classified for the purpose of the review of all German and Austrian cases notwithstanding that they may have been deprived of German nationality by some German law.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the majority of refugees being Jewish victims of Nazism and therefore anti-Nazi, the government initiated a system of tribunals to confirm all of the refugees’ status. Sir John Anderson hinted that the tribunals were a mere formality for a large proportion of the friendly German and Austrians in Britain. However, the process was not that simple. It was reported that the tribunals were not only needed to confirm the friendly status of many refugees, but also to sift out the minority of those “who might not be friendly”.<sup>11</sup> The vast majority of refugees were regarded initially as ‘friendly enemy aliens’. The academic Norman Bentwich has written that of the 4000 refugees in the Kitchener camp, only two were interned.<sup>12</sup> As the tribunal process approached completion the government debated whether to use the offer of help from the ‘friendly enemy aliens’ for the war effort. After being questioned in parliament Sir John Anderson stated, “after this has been done [the tribunals] it will be open to those who

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<sup>9</sup> Jews were stripped of their German citizenship with the passing of the Reich Citizenship Law in 1935. This was later reinforced under the 11<sup>th</sup> Order of the Reich Citizenship Law of 5 November 1941. It confirmed that a Jew who has a permanent abode abroad could not be a German national. This adds weight to the argument that the refugees should have been categorised as stateless Jews, not ‘enemy aliens’.

<sup>10</sup> HC Vol 351, col 548, 6 September 1939.

<sup>11</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 206 (5<sup>th</sup> September 1939), p. 5

<sup>12</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 30.

are exempted from the restrictions applicable to enemy aliens to offer their services to the defence forces".<sup>13</sup>

By the end of September 1939, under the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act, the refugees were permitted to volunteer for the British army.<sup>14</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Jewish Chaplain to the British army, recalled that the recruiting drive was massive and very successful.<sup>15</sup> Over half of the refugees based at the Richborough Camp volunteered for the army.<sup>16</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy explained that hundreds of refugees joined the army having been promised that their qualifications and talents would be valuable for the war effort.<sup>17</sup> Henry Van Der Walde volunteered for the Pioneer Corps in April 1940. He recalled that, "I was still an alien. I wasn't British of course, however, under the Ministry of War Department we were accepted as full-scale members of the forces. I was proud to be in the British Army".<sup>18</sup> Initially, there were still some reservations over allowing the Jews of former German nationality into the British army. It was reported, "there is a marked disinclination among the British authorities to employ them [refugees from Germany] in any military capacity".<sup>19</sup> In the case of refugee Louis Rudnic, he did not hesitate to join the British Army and volunteered the day the Germans invaded Poland.<sup>20</sup> Despite fleeing from Germany his passport indicated that he was Rumanian. However, as he recalled, because he had fled from Germany the military authorities "got a bit confused and did not know what

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<sup>13</sup> H.C Vol 351, col 1476, 28 September 1939. Sir John Anderson reiterated his stance on the issue. "The first step is for the tribunal to consider whether the aliens can properly be relieved of the restrictions in question". HC Vol 352, col 2096, 12 October 1939.

<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 October 1939, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Levy, Isaac, *Now I Can Tell: Middle Eastern Memories* (Dalkeith Press Ltd: Northants, 1978), p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Dear, Ian, *Ten Commando 1942-45* (Leo Cooper Ltd: London, 1987), p. 84.

<sup>17</sup> Levy, *Now I Can Tell*, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview 7 June 2000.

<sup>19</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 October 1939, p. 10.

<sup>20</sup> Rudnic, Louis, 'Life Story', June 1999, p. 4.

to do with me". After much difficulty he was eventually permitted to enlist in the army.<sup>21</sup> Complications such as these were not uncommon. Nevertheless, by January 1940, almost a thousand refugees from Germany and Austria had been accepted into the British army.<sup>22</sup>

Britain was not the only allied power which contained a sizeable contingent of Jewish refugees who had escaped from Germany and Austria. Others included France, Holland, and later the USA. These nations followed similar strategies to that of the British Government. France accepted refugees, enemy or otherwise, into their army within the first weeks of war. In early September 1939, it was announced that the foreign Jews in France were volunteering for the army at a very rapid rate. Almost every able-bodied Jew of the 10,000 refugees based in Paris had already enlisted and were accepted to wear the French uniform. This prime demonstration of loyalty and courage was all the more exceptional as these refugees were offered the opportunity to leave France for safety in the face of the imminent invasion yet the majority decided that they would rather stay and defend France.<sup>23</sup> The French Prime Minister, M. Daladier even paid tribute to all aliens who were volunteering.<sup>24</sup> The French position of using rather than interning the refugees prompted Lord Wedgwood to urge Hore-Belisha to follow the example, despite early claims that Britain had "all the men we need".<sup>25</sup> In Holland, many refugees from Germany and Austria applied for enrolment into the Dutch army, but as with the British and French governments there

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<sup>21</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London 8 May 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Mr Stanley M.P answering a question by Mr. Mander announced that as of 6 January 1940, 905 refugees had been accepted for the British army. HC Vol 356, col 8, 16 January 1940. This figure was reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 16, 18 January 1940, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 211, 11 September 1939, p3.

<sup>24</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 September 1939, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> HC Vol 351, col 150, 7 September 1939.

was an initial delay in the decision over whether to accept them or not due to their 'enemy alien' status.<sup>26</sup> There was a similar wait, (albeit slightly longer than in Britain), over the decision to admit enemy aliens into the American army once she had entered the war. The refugees were admitted into the United States army two months after Germany's declaration of war in 1941.<sup>27</sup> By way of contrast, South Africa only began accepting enemy alien recruits a year after entering the war<sup>28</sup> whilst Australia did not begin admitting any refugees into its forces until May 1941, a year and a half after being at war with Germany.<sup>29</sup>

The refugees from Poland and Czechoslovakia were classified differently to the former German and Austrian refugees. In France they were not 'enemy aliens' and were permitted to join the French Foreign Legion. They were later enlisted into their own national armies in exile.<sup>30</sup> The creation of a foreign legion composed of Czechoslovakians or Poles was not a policy that the British army initially sanctioned, although it welcomed the idea of the Polish and Czechoslovakians refugees leaving Britain to enlist in France.<sup>31</sup> Polish nationals were initially able to volunteer into any branch of the British army and, despite questions over the Czechoslovakian status in the early stages of war, they too were eventually permitted to enlist in the British army.<sup>32</sup> Sir Victor Warrender M.P explained in parliament: "Polish nationals are

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<sup>26</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 September 1939, p. 11.

<sup>27</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 February 1942, p. 17. It is interesting to note that before America's entry into the conflict, American nationals were allowed to enlist into the British army. See HC Vol 360, col 531, 30 April 1940.

<sup>28</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 716, 16 September 1940, p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 1941, p. 6.

<sup>30</sup> Paul Bock, Warrington, 10 March 2000; Laci Bock, Silverdale, 11 March 2000; Maurice Hermele London, 6 May 2000; and Heszel Klepfisz, Jerusalem, Israel, 21 November 2000, Interviews.

<sup>31</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 October 1939, p. 10. See also HC Vol 356, col 8, 12 December 1939; HC Vol 356, Col 8, 16 January 1940; and HC Vol 356, col 353, 23 January 1940.

<sup>32</sup> HC Vol 357, cols 573-574, 13 February 1940. For a favourable opinion over the admission of Czechoslovakians into the British army see, *The New Statesman and Nation*, 3 August 1940, p. 102.

eligible, equally with other aliens, for enlistment in the British army".<sup>33</sup> However, in the summer of 1940, after large numbers of Czechoslovakians and Poles fled to Britain during the retreat from France, British policy changed in favour of the formation of independent national armies on British soil.<sup>34</sup> By 1940, Anthony Eden, Minister of War, declared that Polish, Czech, Norwegian, Dutch and Belgian nationals could serve in forces of their own country. Edward Grigg, Joint Parliamentary Secretary to the War Office, said nationals of countries which had their own forces in Great Britain, namely Poles, Czechs, Belgians, Dutch and Norwegians, were not accepted for enlistment into the British army, as they had the opportunity to join their own national armies. French nationals not wishing to join General De Gaulle's forces could be accepted for enlistment into any corps in the British army. Grigg stated "whilst German and Italians considered suitable may be accepted for enlistment into the AMPC, nations of neutral countries are eligible for enlistment into any corps of the British army".<sup>35</sup> The Free Austrian Movement lobbied the government for an independent national army but this never came to fruition.<sup>36</sup> So, to a considerable extent, the British policy of allowing the German and Austrian refugees to volunteer for the British army can be seen as quite favourable. The decision to allow the German and Austrian refugees to join the fight against the Nazi war machine demonstrated that the British government had considerable faith in the loyalty of these former German and Austrian Jews. This would suggest that the War

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<sup>33</sup> HC Vol 355, col 1048, 12 December 1939.

<sup>34</sup> For an explanation of the British stance on the Czechoslovakian nationals see HC Vol 363, col 1208, 31 July 1940.

<sup>35</sup> HC Vol 365, col 1861, 19 November 1940; HC Vol 365, col 1176, 5 November 1940. This is reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 256, 8 November 1940, p. 4.

<sup>36</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 December 1940, p. 18; *Jewish Chronicle* 19 December 1941, p. 18; letter by Peter Von Albert, Chairman of the Free Austrian Movement in Great Britain, to Major-General A. J. K. Figott, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation, 25 May 1943, PRO WO321/10676; Peter Von Albert stated, "we are convinced that apart from the useful service which such a unit could render in the event of a front being established near to or in Austria, the mere existence of a Free Austrian

Office had no reason to treat the refugee servicemen any differently to British born soldiers. However, as we shall see, the opportunity to whole-heartedly employ these troops was handicapped by a degree of wavering and ongoing uncertainty.

The Order in Council on 28 September 1939 stated that any alien could hold a commission or be entered or enlisted in any of His Majesty's Forces as if he were a British subject.<sup>37</sup> Months after this order Captain Davidson, officer in charge of the Central Recruiting Depot at Bloomsbury House, made it perfectly clear that the policy on refugees was that they would be admitted into the army "on exactly the same terms as any soldier in the British forces".<sup>38</sup> In practice, despite many similarities in their experience, the refugee soldiers, nevertheless, were often singled out in some ways. This was a consequence of their Jewish religion, their alien status, and most importantly, the fact that they had come from enemy nations. Their religion and alien status led to some differences in treatment within the army compared to that of gentile British soldiers; such discrimination, however, was not unique to the refugees. British Jews and refugees from neutral or friendly nations, such as France or Poland, were sometimes treated by the War Office in a similar fashion to the enemy aliens. However, that the refugees were originally from Germany and Austria led to the army imposing a number of conditions on them which were distinct from most British soldiers. What were these differences? Did War Office suspicion of the 'enemy aliens' lead to pointless discrimination throughout the period 1939-43?

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combat unit would have enormous value from the point of view of political propaganda". Letter by Peter Von Albert to Major-General A. J. K. Figott, 8 June 1943, PRO WO321/10676.

<sup>37</sup> This was reiterated by Mr. Stanley in HC Vol 356, col 353, 23 January 1940.

<sup>38</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 January 1940, p. 12.

The first contentious issue that will be analysed is whether the refugees were to enjoy equal status in the forces. The refugees believed that the War Office intended to utilise their potential and skills to the fullest.<sup>39</sup> These hopes failed to materialize during most of the refugees' army careers until 1943. Every refugee recruit had to join the Pioneer Corps. They were not permitted to enlist into any other army service or unit.<sup>40</sup> Polish refugees were not under this restriction during the period that they were permitted to volunteer for the British army.<sup>41</sup> The German and Austrian refugees had been assured that they would receive equal treatment to the British.<sup>42</sup> Yet, unlike British born soldiers, they were not permitted even to transfer to technical or fighting units if qualified. The refugees who joined the French army before the German invasion, found themselves in a similar situation to the refugees in the British army. Notwithstanding any specialist qualifications they may have had, they were restricted to serve only within the ranks of the foreign legion.<sup>43</sup>

Although the refugees were undoubtedly pleased to be contributing to the British cause in any way, many had no wish to serve or remain permanently in the Pioneer Corps. The Central Office for Refugees attempted to encourage the refugees to join the Pioneer Corps, emphasising that the rate of pay was the same as that of the British soldiers. They also advised the refugees that, although they could not join fighting units, they should "be cheerful, don't grumble and obey your officers smartly and

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<sup>39</sup> This issue was raised by the majority of former German and Austrian interviewees.

<sup>40</sup> Lord Croft, Joint Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for War, stated in the House of Lords, "for the present enemy aliens are restricted to the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps". HL Vol 116, cols 992-993, 17 July 1940. Reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 166, 19 July 1940, p. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Sir Victor Warrender M.P stated, "Polish nationals are eligible, equally with other aliens, for enlistment in the British army". HC Vol 355, col 1048, 12 December 1939.

<sup>42</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 234, 14 October 1939, p. 5 and *Jewish Chronicle* 19, January 1940, p. 12.

<sup>43</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 October 1939, p. 10.

efficiently”.<sup>44</sup> Peter Masters recalled later that they were happy just to do their bit for the army and take part in the war effort. However, many of the refugees perceived the Pioneer Corps as the “dumping ground for the colonial and uneducated, unskilled soldiers”.<sup>45</sup> It was believed to be the natural home of illiterates and former criminals.<sup>46</sup> Refugee serviceman Paul Streeten echoed this opinion that the Pioneers were indeed recruited from mental defectives, criminals, and enemy aliens, “some of the best and worst of human material”.<sup>47</sup>

The AMPC clearly had a very negative reputation. It was regarded as the place where the War Office put, “all the human dross”.<sup>48</sup> It was also quite an elderly and unfit corps. When recruiting for the AMPC began in 1939 the government made clear that the corps was open to men between the ages of 30 and 50.<sup>49</sup> As a consequence, Mr Stanley confirmed that “our experience when recruiting was first started for this corps was that a number of men went to France with this corps who were not physically fit for it, and a large number had to be returned to England”.<sup>50</sup> Refugee serviceman Ken Schindler later stated, “I do recall, however, that the British men, who on account of health reasons were unsuitable for even semi skilled activities of any type, were usually employed in the Pioneers Corps for simple labouring tasks”. Ken argued that

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<sup>44</sup> *A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army*, Recruiting Circular Number 2A, The Central Office For Refugees (No Date), in possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>45</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando's War Against the Nazis* (Presido Press: California, 1997), p. 41.

<sup>46</sup> Fox, John P., ‘German and Austrian Jews’, p. 26. See also, Gillman, Peter and Leni, *Collar the Lot: How Britain Interned and Expelled It's Wartime Refugees* (Quartet Books: London, 1980), p. 257 and Rhodes-Wood, E.H, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1960), pp. 17-19 and 83-84.

<sup>47</sup> Testimony of refugee serviceman Paul Streeten in Dear, *10 Commando*, p. 92.

<sup>48</sup> Fox, John P., ‘German and Austrian Jews’, p. 26. Angus Calder described that “even within the army, some forms of life were much lower than others” and “at rock bottom, the Pioneer Corps”. Calder, Angus, *The Peoples War: Britain 1939-45* (Jonathon Cape Ltd: London, 1986), p. 249.

<sup>49</sup> Captain Markham speaking in Parliament. HC Vol 358, col 1073, 12 March 1940.

<sup>50</sup> HC Vol 360, col 1025, 7 May 1940. Captain Markham explained to parliament the problems surrounding the poor fitness levels of the British men in the Pioneer Corps. HC Vol 360, cols 1071-1075, 12 March 1940.



there was a view that many of the commanding officers were old World War One veterans or were no longer fit for front line duty.<sup>51</sup> Refugee serviceman Peter Terry later commented that because of the low health and intelligence of most of the British members of the 77 Alien Pioneer Company they became known by their German colleagues as '*rachiten*,' meaning rickets. Non-alien companies in general were known among refugees as '*rachiten kompagnien*'.<sup>52</sup>

In contrast a substantial number of the refugees were very skilled professionals.<sup>53</sup> Some of them were even ex-servicemen from the Imperial German and Austrian armies in World War One.<sup>54</sup> Their military experience and knowledge of the German army could have proved invaluable to the British army. The refugees were used for tasks that did not require, to any significant degree, any of the expertise they had acquired over years of professional experience. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy remembered from his brief time as Jewish Chaplain of the (alien) pioneer companies at the Kitchener Camp that, "a university professor, or banker or a lawyer became a coal heaver, or a highly qualified doctor or dentist might, by very special concession, be permitted to act as a medical orderly".<sup>55</sup> Henry Van Der Walde recalled that in his unit he knew of many men who were skilled professionals. He said that there were lawyers, medical doctors, one or two rabbis, academics of various descriptions, artisans and students; "an odd mixture of characters if ever there was one".<sup>56</sup> Similarly, Ken Schindler explained that amongst his comrades were several doctors,

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<sup>51</sup> Ken Schindler, letter to the Author, 27 April 2000.

<sup>52</sup> Testimony of refugee serviceman Peter Terry in *Dear, 10 Commando*, p. 94.

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, 17 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Levy, *Now I Can Tell*, p. 1. See also Rhodes-Wood, *War History of The Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 23. A similar description is given in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 215, 14 September 1940, pp. 3-4.

<sup>56</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 23.

two rabbis, clerks, salesmen, cooks, actors, and company directors.<sup>57</sup> For over three years these refugee soldiers were mostly used for manual labour.

With such negative connotations attached to pioneer units it is unsurprising that many refugees presumed that they were not being given full equality in the army. They felt that the reason why they were restricted to the Pioneer Corps was that they were regarded by the government as being untrustworthy to hold any important military responsibilities. Some refugees were particularly angry at such treatment whilst others felt that there was little they could do other than accept their lot. At the time one refugee serviceman argued bitterly,

have you ever asked yourself whom they put in the Pioneer Corps and why? The lowest of the low – the scum of the earth – and because they aren't fit for anything but navvying. Old men or cripples. If you're cross-eyed or half deaf, if you've got a bad police record, or if the psychiatrist puts a 'Q' on your medical-history sheet, you're sent to the Pioneers. And if you're sound of body and mind and you're still a bloody Pioneers, there must be something else wrong with you. In our case it's because we're bloody aliens – the worst thing a man can be [*sic*].<sup>58</sup>

A significant proportion of refugees who passionately wished to be involved in units that would allow them the opportunity to face the enemy in combat or utilise their skills to the maximum were denied the opportunity to do so for many years because they had originated from Germany and Austria.<sup>59</sup> Refugee serviceman Alfred Perles explained that “nearly all [enemy aliens] were impatient to get out of the Pioneer Corps, and they could not understand why, despite their high educational standards and evident qualifications, the War Office should be so reluctant to grant them

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<sup>57</sup> Schindler, Letter to the Author.

<sup>58</sup> Perles, Alfred, *Alien Corn: Reminiscences of the Pioneer Corps* (George Unwin and Allen Ltd: London, 1944), p. 165.

<sup>59</sup> The majority of refugee interviewees expressed how they did not want to serve in the Pioneer Corps.

transfers to other units, where, they felt sure, their special knowledge could be used to far greater advantage in the war effort”.<sup>60</sup> Ironically, British soldiers who conscientiously objected to military combat duties were allowed to transfer from fighting units to the non-combatant Pioneer Corps.<sup>61</sup> It is important to note that this restriction had nothing to do with the refugees’ religion. It stemmed entirely from the War Office’s reservations about the refugees’ national identity.<sup>62</sup> As will be shown later, however, the Polish Jewish refugees faced restrictions as a result of their religion rather than their nationality.

An inevitable consequence of the “company of the talents”<sup>63</sup> having to endure years of arduous manual labour was that life in the Pioneer Corps was at times very uninspiring and unchallenging for the refugees. Louis Rudnic commented in a memoir that a majority of the refugees had never experienced manual labour before. They therefore found the work quite hard at first.<sup>64</sup> Peter Masters recalled how the work was very often frustrating for the refugees. It was tedious and physically tough. The refugees were made to load and unload railroad cars, build roads, and test bailey bridges. Peter felt that, “it was a dreary existence - dull, unchallenging work”.<sup>65</sup> Eric Kenneth pointed out that not only was the manual labour in the Pioneer Corps “pretty rough”, it was also quite dangerous. He recalled that the soldiers had to move cranes and shunt trucks. Occasionally refugees were killed.<sup>66</sup> Air raid duties also proved to

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<sup>60</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 164

<sup>61</sup> HC Vol 355, cols 95-96, 29 November 1939. See also, testimony of Peter Streeten in *Dear, 10 Commando*, p. 92.

<sup>62</sup> All interviewees were Jewish except two who were born as Christians but regarded as Jews by the Nazi racial laws. All expressed in their interview that vast majority of those of (alien) pioneer companies were Jews. Sir Herbert Emerson stated that “at least 90 per cent” were Jews. Memorandum by Herbert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO321/10676.

<sup>63</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>64</sup> Rudnic, Louis, ‘Life Story’, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back*, p. 41.

<sup>66</sup> Eric Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

be very hazardous. The 69 (Alien) Pioneer Company lost five men and 19 were wounded whilst performing their duties during an air raid attack on 19 December 1940.<sup>67</sup> However, it was not just alien units that were involved in such work.

The arduous work conducted by (alien) pioneer companies was similar to that carried out by the British companies of the corps. Major E. H. Rhodes-Wood described it as “strenuous physical toil in which they were engaged month after month without respite”. Rhodes-Wood also expressed that as a result of this tedium many British Pioneers would have preferred to have been in the front line than base.<sup>68</sup> However, this impetus to be engaged in ‘action’ was different to that of the refugees, who wished to fight due to their direct experiences at the hand of the Nazis. The monotony of the work performed by the alien pioneers is well documented through war diaries. Even when the (alien) pioneer companies were attached to the BEF in France they were only used for manual labour. On return from France the refugees had to endure work of a similar fashion until they were permitted to transfer in 1943. They were involved mostly in camp construction, forestry work, and road construction. Occasionally they were used for fire watching and demolition and clearance duties during the Blitz in London.<sup>69</sup>

Ken Schindler believed that they were only given such work because the authorities did not know what to do with them and they “did not yet dare to make best use of the refugee’s varied skills”. Ken suggested that the War Office was worried that allowing

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<sup>67</sup> War Diary 96 (Alien) Pioneer Company, PRO WO 166/555.

<sup>68</sup> Rhodes-Wood, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> See War Diaries of 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, WO 167/1318; 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, WO 166/5560; 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company WO 166/9974; 87 (Alien) Pioneer Company WO 166/5572; 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company WO 167/1309, 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company WO 166/5578, and see HC Vol 365, col 710, 16 October 1940 for debate about using the Pioneer Corps for clearance duties in London.

the enemy alien refugees a greater responsibility within the army could be harmful to British defence. As a result the refugees would often spend time performing almost mindless work such as picking up pebbles from a large airfield”.<sup>70</sup> They were “unskilled handymen to the armed forces of the Crown”.<sup>71</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy believed it was “a tragedy. Here were men with tremendous qualifications and they were a labour corps. It took quite a while for the authorities to realise they had a very valuable asset in these men”.<sup>72</sup> Henry Van Der Walde agreed and said that the men sometimes described these menial tasks as a form of “slave labour”.<sup>73</sup>

Yet, many of the refugees had other options. In the early years of the war some refugees were awaiting visas to go to America. They were accepted into Britain on condition that they were to go later to another country.<sup>74</sup> As the threat of a German invasion loomed, they had the consolation of having the opportunity to emigrate. However, despite the danger of falling into Nazi hands again, most of the refugees felt it was more important for them to stay in Britain and fight back. So they volunteered for the Pioneer Corps. As a result they lost the chance to leave Britain for the United States when their visa finally became available. Having chosen to join the army, with the possibility of leaving the army penniless and having difficulty finding work,<sup>75</sup> it was a somewhat deflating experience for many of the refugees to find that they could not contribute to the war effort in as active a way as they would have liked.

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<sup>70</sup> Schindler, letter to author, p2.

<sup>71</sup> Stent, Ronald, *A Bespattered Page? : The Internment of His Majesty's 'Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'* (Andre Deutsch: London, 1980), p. 249.

<sup>72</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>73</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 23.

<sup>74</sup> Mr Geoffrey Lloyd, Under Secretary of State for Home Office, HC Vol 344, col 1086, 28 February 1939.

<sup>75</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 March 1940, p. 17.

Although many of the refugees would have preferred to be allowed to transfer to a fighting or technical unit, they still made wholehearted efforts to get on with their job with as little fuss as possible. Louis Rudnic recalled, “amazingly 95 per cent went to it with great enthusiasm and extraordinary efficiency, achieving record performances and targets”.<sup>76</sup> In spite of much of the work being laborious, some refugees recognised that some of it, such as the building of defences, was important for the war effort. Ken Schindler, for instance, recognised that such work clearing away rubble after air raids in the southeast of London, was a necessity at the time. He rationalised the refugees’ position in the Pioneers, saying, “the fighting branches of the forces needed a variety of non-combatant support units, in order to be able to function. Therefore I did not feel out of it by serving in the AMPC”.<sup>77</sup>

Fred Pelican recalled that by and large his unit had enormous respect and confidence in their officers. He also commented that, “by the same token they [the officers] were fully aware that we were hardworking, efficient and, most of us, highly intelligent. Not a single one of our men had ever been seen drunk, or picked up by military police or discredited the uniform we proudly wore”.<sup>78</sup> Even during the crisis in France, Major Woodcock, commanding officer of 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company reported, “the general conduct of all ranks throughout this period is excellent. Good work of the company”.<sup>79</sup> Another officer, second in command of an (alien) pioneer company, spoke highly of the qualities of his men in an interview with the *Manchester Guardian*. The officer explained that the British staff were very much aware that many of the refugees were professional men, but their peacetime occupation was not

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<sup>76</sup> Rudnic, ‘Life Story’, p. 5.

<sup>77</sup> Schindler, Letter to the Author, p3.

<sup>78</sup> Pelican, Fred, *From Dachau to Dunkirk* (Valentine Mitchell and Co Ltd: London, 1993), p. 49.

<sup>79</sup> War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, PRO WO 167/1318.

to be considered in the Pioneer Corps. He proudly stressed however that, “whatever work they are accustomed to before, they make no attempts to avoid even the filthiest job and they do it darned well”.<sup>80</sup>

Despite many refugees being content to ‘do their bit’ for the defence of Britain they did not necessarily accept their situation. There were clear signs of disappointment among many of the refugees. Propaganda used to entice greater numbers of refugee volunteers into the Pioneer Corps suggested that the men should have been proud to serve in the forces in any capacity as, “it is a privilege to fight with the British army in its struggle against Nazi and fascist oppression”.<sup>81</sup> To a large extent many of the refugees did feel this way. Henry Van Der Walde believed that when the refugee soldiers were ‘kitted out’ in their British army uniforms they all felt ‘terribly proud.’<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, they still felt that their skills were being wasted and many retained the ambition to fight. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recalled that in the Kitchener Camp the men “were frustrated. They did come to me saying they were promised all kinds of things. They would have loved to go into combatant units but naturally they were disappointed. You can imagine how distressed they were that their other ‘land’ had let them down”.<sup>83</sup>

One opinion expressed at the time was that the refugees should not have been expected by the government to enrol for tasks of mere manual labour.<sup>84</sup> These tasks were not ideal for the refugees who would have been more productive in areas of the

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<sup>80</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 January 1941, p. 7.

<sup>81</sup> *Conditions of Service in the British Army for Refugees and other Aliens* (Issued by The Jewish Refugees’ Committee from Information Supplied by the War Office, National Service Dept: London, 1943), p1. In Wiener Library.

<sup>82</sup> Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, p. 22.

<sup>83</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

army where they could demonstrate their skills or at least become part of a fighting unit as so many desired. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy expressed how it was not just their skills that were wasted but that their knowledge of German was, at least initially, not being used to the allies advantage.<sup>85</sup> It has been suggested that the number of volunteers would have been much larger if the British had not dealt with the Jewish refugees from enemy countries with a degree of suspicion.<sup>86</sup>

There is a need now to reassess the extent to which the refugees were trusted by the War Office between 1939-43. In doing so consideration will be given to the extent to which skilled refugee soldiers were prevented from joining technical and medical units despite the fact that qualified men were desperately needed for the services, and where this occurred, whether this was an example of a policy of questionable discrimination based upon the refugees' former nationality.

There is some validity in the suggestion that the War Office's policy of restricting the refugees from serving in units other than the Pioneer Corps was based on both pragmatism and necessity, especially considering the emergency that Britain was facing. The fact that the refugees were accepted into the army at the very outbreak of war suggests that the government believed they posed no imminent threat to British defence. Otherwise they would not have risked allowing potential enemies into the army ranks. It could be suggested that the refugees were restricted to the Pioneer Corps only as an attempt to integrate them more smoothly into the army. It could be further argued that once the refugees were in the Pioneer Corps, soldiers with

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<sup>84</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 March 1940, p. 17.

<sup>85</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>86</sup> Gutman, Yisrael, *Fighters Amongst the Ruins: The Story of Jewish Heroism During WW2* (B'nai B'rith Books: Washington D.C., 1988), p. 249.



technical qualifications could be sifted out at a later stage.<sup>87</sup> Their time in the Pioneer Corps would allow them to adjust to new surroundings and, for those who had previously served within the Austrian or German army, it would provide them with the opportunity to acclimatise to a different military lifestyle. Norman Bentwich argued that a plan to familiarise the refugees with army life before allowing them into the other units is a valid explanation for the government's actions. Bentwich argued that, "the most significant aspect is the gradual recognition of the aliens as reliable soldiers, and the physical preparation of thousands of skilled and spirited men, who were involuntarily in labour units, for more important service which they were to render when able to leave the companies and enter other branches".<sup>88</sup>

From this perspective it has been argued that the War Office did not mistrust the refugees. The government's restrictions can be viewed as an attempt to integrate the refugees slowly rather than 'dump them in at the deep end'. There are other reasons why slow integration may have been beneficial for both the refugees and their British army comrades. Firstly, it gently introduced the refugees to the regulations and procedures of the British army, commands and routines, such as saluting and parade drills. It also allowed the refugees more time to develop their language and pronunciation skills. There is little doubt that this communication barrier was a problem of varying degree for most refugees. Many had only just arrived in England prior to their entrance into the British army. Fred Pelican is one witness who recalls that knowledge of the English language was a hurdle that many refugees needed to overcome. He claimed that, "an excellent understanding prevailed between the

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<sup>87</sup> Klugescheid, Andreas Bad-Orb, Translated by Bohm, E.I, *His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens: German-Jewish Emigrants to Great Britain Between 1933-47* (MA Thesis, University of Gottingen, No Date), p. 85. In the Jewish Military Museum.

<sup>88</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 35.

sergeant and the men”, but “here and there the language barrier was an obstacle”.<sup>89</sup> Even those refugees with a good command of basic English would have faced some difficulties in the use of technical and military terminology. Colonel Walter Elliot, Director of Public Relations at the War Office, stated, “it has also to be borne in mind that sometimes in the case of aliens there are language difficulties”. He indicated that this was a barrier that prevented refugees joining units other than the Pioneer Corps.<sup>90</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recalled that the refugees in the Kitchener Camp had to attend regular English classes in an attempt to rectify this situation.<sup>91</sup>

Another possible reason for the slow integration of the refugees into units other than the Pioneer Corps may have been concern about possible negative reactions of British soldiers. In the early stages of the war it could have been regarded as a reckless decision to allow refugees, who had recently fled from nations at war with Britain, to be used as front line soldiers. For the average ‘tommy’ engaged in a war against the Nazis it would have been a somewhat bizarre experience to turn to their side and see their comrade next to them speaking with a strong German accent in broken English. Clearly, the immediate entrance of an ‘enemy alien’ into the fighting units could have proved problematic. It could have led to sour relations between refugees and British soldiers, something entirely unhelpful at a time of national emergency. Indeed, General Sir Ronald Adam, Adjutant General, stated that one of the grounds for the restriction of service for a number of years was because “men speaking English with a

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<sup>89</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 43.

<sup>90</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1941, p. 5.

<sup>91</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

foreign accent were suspect to the average British soldier in the ranks, and at the outset the presence of such men in British units would have been unwelcome".<sup>92</sup>

So, there is clearly evidence, that supports the idea that the government's intention was to implement a policy which would use the Pioneer Corps as a stepping stone, a means to pave the way for refugees to eventually join other, more specialist or fighting units. The War Office was aware of the refugees' potential but was also aware that it could have caused unnecessary problems if they were immediately allocated into fighting or skilled units during the early part of war.

However, such a theory also has its shortcomings. There is no solid evidence to suggest that at the time the refugees were made aware that they were restricted to the Pioneer Corps so that they could eventually be gradually integrated into the army. It was not unusual therefore for the refugees to reach the conclusion that their confinement within the Pioneer Corps was because the War Office lacked faith in their loyalty to Britain. Some felt they were treated unequally because of policies motivated by prejudice. Fritz Lustig recalled that he felt cheated when only allowed to join the Pioneer Corps. He said, "I felt very strongly the discrimination against us, it was unfair and unreasonable".<sup>93</sup>

The argument that the refugees were contained within the Pioneer Corps for reasons simply of integration is ultimately unconvincing. In the aftermath of internment there was a military recruiting drive targeting the 'enemy alien' refugees. To argue that the

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<sup>92</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, pp. 73-74. The refugees' relationship with the British soldiers is discussed in Chapter Eight.

<sup>93</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

refugees accepted into the army had to go through a short period of 'integration' by serving in the Pioneer Corps seems plausible. However, by the time that refugees were being released from interment to join the Pioneer Corps in Autumn 1940 some refugees had been serving in the British army for over a year. It must be assumed that within this period they had become competently accustomed to British army traditions, duties and the English language.<sup>94</sup> Five alien companies had served in France with the BEF and had demonstrated great courage in the face of adversity.<sup>95</sup> Yet these soldiers, who could not have done more to prove that they were loyal servants to the British cause, were still forced to remain within the Pioneer Corps for another two and a half years.

Similarly, if the reason for keeping refugees in the Pioneer Corps was to gradually integrate them into the British army so as to reduce any possible conflict with the British troops, then it would have been counterproductive to keep all the refugees together, almost ghettoised, as this would have provided the refugees with little or no contact with the British members of the forces. Henry Van Der Walde described the men in the Pioneer Corps as being a mixed crowd, but only in the sense that they consisted of men of different professions. The vast majority were of German and Austrian origin and, "95 per cent were Jewish".<sup>96</sup> Ken Schindler also confirmed that there were no British members in his company other than the veteran officers.<sup>97</sup> A minority of refugees in the (alien) pioneer companies were from other nations such as Italy, Belgium, Russia, Poland and Czechoslovakia. For example, on the 21 August

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<sup>94</sup> A correspondent in *The Times* reported, "by now everyone in the company speaks English well". *The Times*, 27 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>95</sup> These (alien) pioneer companies were 69, 74, 87, 88 and 93. The experiences of the refugees sent to France in 1940 are discussed in this chapter.

<sup>96</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 22.

<sup>97</sup> Schindler, Letter to Author, p. 3. Similar recollections in Dear, *10 Commando*, p. 79.

1940, 69 aliens had been recruited into the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. The vast majority (64) were from Austria and Germany whilst there was one volunteer from each of Belgium, Russia and Danzig. As with the German and Austrian refugees, most of them were Jews.<sup>98</sup>

So, even though the refugees did gain experience in the army, they clearly did not have a tremendous opportunity to mix with the British soldiers. As a result, when they eventually were allowed to join other units they were just as alien an entity to the British soldiers as they would have been if allowed to join the fighting or specialist corps when they first volunteered. Many of the refugees in Britain shared similar experiences of segregation imposed by British authorities, first the Home Office, and then the War Office. They were kept together in refugee camps on arrival in Britain; they were kept together during internment and then they were kept together within the army.

Segregation into the Pioneer Corps had two other negative consequences which weaken the premise that the refugees were being integrated into the British army as opposed to being discriminated against. Firstly, placing all German and Austrian refugees together meant that the soldiers were more inclined to converse in German.<sup>99</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman recalled that one British officer complained to him about the soldiers conversing in their mother tongue or Yiddish.<sup>100</sup> Refugee serviceman

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<sup>98</sup> The return of foreigners enlisted into the British forces, PRO PREM 3/42/1. Other different nationalities within the (alien) pioneer companies included Scandinavians, Lithuanians and Greeks. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 215, 14 September 1940, p. 3.

<sup>99</sup> Testimony of Peter Terry in Dear, *10 Commando*, p. 94.

<sup>100</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman, Interview, London, 28 January 2003.

Peter Terry remembered that, sometimes, even the sergeant's commands were shouted in German army style.<sup>101</sup>

Secondly, it is hard to argue that the Pioneer Corps was used as a means to integrate the refugees into the art of warfare and combat experience. As the Pioneer Corps was mostly a labour force, the amount of military training was minimal. After several weeks of basic training<sup>102</sup> there was only the occasional musketry training, field engineering exercises and march discipline. Rifle drill and P.T occurred only on very rare occasions. More often than not only small groups of the refugees took part in these training exercises whilst the rest of them continued their labour duties.<sup>103</sup> Although many of the refugees were already highly skilled, the Pioneer Corps was not designed to teach them any new trades or prepare them for any battle skills.

The American military experienced the same concerns as the British when faced with a body of Austrian and German refugees who wished to fight in the allied war effort. It could be argued that one major factor affecting the different refugee policies adopted by the two nations was that Britain faced a greater threat of being invaded, as it was closer to the German front line. Therefore, American policy could allow itself to be more relaxed. It did take the American government a little longer to decide upon accepting refugee soldiers compared to Britain. However, two months after America had entered the war, the Selective Service Act allowed for any refugee to join fighting units regardless of whether or not they were classified as an 'enemy alien'. The only conditions that applied were that they had to have the intention of becoming

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<sup>101</sup> Testimony of Peter Terry, Dear, *10 Commando* p. 94.

<sup>102</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 215, 14 September 1940, p. 3.

<sup>103</sup> War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, PRO WO 166/5560, and War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company PRO WO 166/9974.

naturalised, and that they had to be able to read, write and speak English to such a standard that they could understand commands.<sup>104</sup> In the British army refugees were accepted into the Pioneer Corps even if they had not yet achieved a competent grasp of the English language. However, many were encouraged to attend English classes before their entry into the army and it was compulsory for the refugees in the Kitchener Camp.<sup>105</sup>

The only restrictions imposed on the refugees in America were that they were not allowed to enlist in the navy or the Marine Corps. In Britain they were not permitted to join any units other than those in the Pioneer Corps. At the same time, the American policy was not solely aimed at the German and Austrian refugees as it was in Britain, but to all non-American citizens.<sup>106</sup> So, it is evident that the American stance towards refugees joining the army was liberal compared to that of the British. It took the British years, not months, to reach the conclusion that it made practical sense to employ the refugees in most branches of the army. This suggests, that to a large extent, the British policy was shaped by mistrust of the refugees' allegiance, rather than simply out of concerns regarding assimilation into the army.

The Czechoslovakian and Polish armies based in France, and then, after Dunkirk, in Britain, also included a number of Jewish refugees. These armies did not, however, contain any former German or Austrian Jewish refugees. All soldiers in the Polish and Czechoslovak armies were men regarded by the governments in exile as

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<sup>104</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 January 1942, p. 9.

<sup>105</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 15.

<sup>106</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 January 1942, p. 9.

Czechoslovak or Polish nationals.<sup>107</sup> As noted earlier, although there were calls for a formation of a free Austrian army in Britain, German and Austrian refugees were only permitted to join the British army.<sup>108</sup> Before the evacuation of the British Expeditionary Forces, Polish citizens in Britain were permitted to volunteer for the British army and were not restricted to just the Pioneer Corps as were the German and Austrian refugees. The Poles were later conscripted into their own national armies.<sup>109</sup> The Poles and Czech Jews could also join any unit in their national armies; however, as pointed out earlier, within the Polish army there were certain unofficial restrictions placed on the Jews. This, however, was an issue of religious discrimination, not a question of nationality.<sup>110</sup> This is discussed in Chapter Eight.

The reputation of the AMPC was cosmetically enhanced in November 1940 simply by having its title changed to 'Pioneer Corps.'<sup>111</sup> The intent behind this was to foster a greater degree of respectability for the Corps. It was also an acknowledgment of the hard work and contribution made by the pioneer companies to the British army, especially within the BEF.<sup>112</sup> The granting of the distinction 'Royal Pioneer Corps' was considered. The decision to change the title again was left unresolved until after the war.<sup>113</sup> However, clearly this alteration of the official title did not have any bearing on the menial duties the refugees still engaged in. Between 1941 and 1943 the

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<sup>107</sup> This was sometimes irrespective of the fact that some of the refugees may not have perceived themselves to be Polish or Czechoslovakian. One Polish Jew spoke of his disappointment at being conscripted when he had lived in Poland only for four weeks of his life. *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 October 1940, p. 6.

<sup>108</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 September 1942, p. 13, and 25 September 1942, p. 15.

<sup>109</sup> For debate over the validity of conscription of Poles in Britain see *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 Sept 1940, p. 11.

<sup>110</sup> See interviews with Paul and Laci Bock, Reverend Heszkel Klepfisz and Maurice Hermele.

<sup>111</sup> *The Times*, 28 November 1940, p. 2.

<sup>112</sup> HC Vol 367, col 13, 26 November 1940. Also discussed in Fox, John P, 'German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers, p. 11.

<sup>113</sup> H.C Vol 367, col 131, 16 November 1940; *The Times*, 28 November 1940, p. 2. Also reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No273, 28 November 1940, p. 2.



refugees were still “chiefly employed in camp and hut construction”.<sup>114</sup> The Pioneer Corps still remained non-combatant.

While the refugees were initially restricted to the Pioneer Corps, it seems that there were opportunities for them to transfer to more technical units as early as autumn 1940.<sup>115</sup> It is claimed that by this time, during which the first releases from internment were being organised, a very small number of refugees ‘of enemy origin’ were successful in transferring to units other than the Pioneer Corps, such as the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC) and the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (RAOC). The refugees who were accepted into these units were described as having good trades that would prove useful for these Corps.<sup>116</sup> In November 1940 it was claimed by Captain Balfour that, any friendly aliens of enemy origin were free to present themselves at a combined recruiting centre and, provided that the person was ‘bona fide,’ they could be accepted into the Royal Air Force (RAF).<sup>117</sup> In 1941, Mr Richard Law, Financial Secretary to the War Office, reiterated that they were aware that many of the refugees serving in the Pioneer Corps wished to join the fighting services, especially as air pilots. He claimed that transfers were available to suitable personnel. The conditions for application took into account the refugees’ age, medical category, technical proficiency and nationality.<sup>118</sup> Colonel Walter Elliot stated that the War Office had not neglected the technical and engineering qualifications of the refugees. He confirmed that a number had been transferred to units that suited their trades but that the refugees did not always pass the trade test that both British and alien personnel

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<sup>114</sup> War Diaries of (Alien) Pioneer Companies, 74 Company, WO 166/5560; 74 Company, WO 166/9974; 87 Company, WO 166/5572; 93 Company, WO 166/5578. All located in the PRO.

<sup>115</sup> *Conditions of Service in the British Army for Refugees and other Aliens*, p. 2.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> HC Vol 365, col 1316, 6 November 1940.

<sup>118</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 March 1941, p. 12.

had to take.<sup>119</sup> It seems that Walter Elliot used this argument as an explanation for why so few refugees had successfully transferred out of the Pioneer Corps. He claimed, “they do not always in fact possess the qualifications they profess”.<sup>120</sup>

These facts appear to support the argument that the War Office could not have just generically mistrusted the refugees. However, on closer examination one can see how piecemeal and insignificant these changes actually were. Firstly, Mr Law stated that the opportunities to enlist in the RAF, for example, were available - but that nationality was a factor that would be taken into consideration. This indicates that refugees from Germany and Austria were not likely to be accepted. Those regarded of German ‘nationality’ were not permitted to join the RAF. Even though “any person of neutral origin or a friendly alien of enemy origin could present himself at a combined recruiting office”,<sup>121</sup> there was no chance whatsoever that they would actually be enlisted. Steven Mendelsson was one refugee who was rejected from enlisting in the RAF on grounds of ‘nationality’. He explained that he used to go to the Air Training Corps, as he wanted to be in the RAF when he was old enough, in 1940. He went to the base for about two years when they suddenly found out that his former nationality was German. They told him that they could not “tolerate that sort of thing” and dismissed him. He later applied to be in the RAF and passed all his tests with “flying colours”. However, when he had to state nationality he knew he could not put British and that he would be rejected if he put German, so he stated that he was a Czechoslovakian. When quizzed about this it was discovered that he was not a

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<sup>119</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1941, p. 5.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Captain Harold Balfour, Under-Secretary of State for Air. Reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 257, 9 November 1940, p. 5.

Czechoslovakian and so he eventually admitted he was German and he was told to leave.<sup>122</sup>

Secondly, despite a small percentage of refugees being permitted to transfer to technical units, the fact remained that the opening of most army branches to the refugees did not officially occur until spring 1943.<sup>123</sup> The number of refugees who transferred from 1941 to 1943<sup>124</sup> to more technical units such as the RASC or the RAOC was estimated as being fewer than 1000.<sup>125</sup> Between approximately 5840<sup>126</sup> and 6500<sup>127</sup> former Austrian and German refugees in the Pioneer Corps were based in Britain during this period.<sup>128</sup> Only 15-17 per cent of the refugees were therefore able to transfer out of the Pioneer Corps during the first three and a half years of war. The RASC and RAOC were similar to the Pioneer Corps in the fact that they were not fighting or technical units. All other corps still remained closed to refugees until 1943. In the case of the navy, Mr. A. V. Alexander, first Lord of the Admiralty, explained that the number of applications for entry into the Royal Navy far exceeded the requirements of the service. As a consequence he said, "This means that every alien entered for the general branches excludes a British candidate".<sup>129</sup> This can be viewed as a prejudiced policy, especially if some aliens were being rejected irrespective of whether they were better qualified than some British recruits. Refugees of different nationalities were treated differently. It was possible for other aliens such as the Polish, Norwegians, Dutch or French to apply for entry into the navy. However, in the

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<sup>122</sup> Steven Mendelsson, Interview, Sheffield, 30 April 1999.

<sup>123</sup> *Conditions of Service in the British Army for Refugees and other Aliens*, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> It still took two years for a small amount of transfers to begin since war was declared on Germany.

<sup>125</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 177.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>127</sup> Figure announced by Mr Otto Schiff in *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 April 1943, p. 13.

<sup>128</sup> In May 1941, when records of the numbers of refugees enlisting into the Pioneer Corps were discontinued; the number of refugee servicemen had reached 5068. Return of Foreigners enlisted into the British Service, 29 May 1941. PRO PREM 3/42/2.

case of the enemy aliens, enlistment into the navy was not permitted under any conditions.<sup>130</sup> The refugees were also turned down when they volunteered for the Local Defence Force (LDF), later to become the Home Guard.<sup>131</sup> In comparison, Polish nationals were initially permitted to join the Home Guard if vouched for by a chief constable; but the aliens of enemy nationality were not allowed no matter who vouched for them.<sup>132</sup> Even the British children of aliens faced some restrictions in the army. It was not until December 1940 before such men were permitted to join the RAF.<sup>133</sup>

Finally, Walter Elliot's argument that refugees were rejected from transferring to more technical units because they were not as qualified as they claimed was not an accurate explanation. It was true that some refugees were returned from the RAOC for being unsuitable. However, of the small numbers that were given permission to transfer, only a very few were rejected. The grounds of rejection were not necessarily because the refugees were not qualified enough.<sup>134</sup>

It can be argued that if the War Office had faith in the loyalty of the refugees then they would have permitted a greater number of men possessing specialist skills to transfer to more relevant units much sooner than spring 1943. Even the process of recruiting the refugees from internment took much longer than necessary, fuelling the idea that suspicion remained for these 'enemy aliens'. Winston Churchill became

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<sup>129</sup> HC Vol 365, col 1327, 6 November 1940.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid. Also reported in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No257, 9 November 1940, p. 5.

<sup>131</sup> Calder, *Peoples War*, p. 131.

<sup>132</sup> Stated by Captain Margesson, Secretary for War, in HC Vol 370, col 39, March 1941. Reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 March 1941, p. 12.

<sup>133</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 292, 21 December 1940, p. 2.

aware of the staggered acceptance of willing refugee volunteers and commented that the process was “very slow”. He suggested that, “the numbers should at least be doubled”.<sup>135</sup>

Anthony Eden made it quite clear that the army needed skilled men. He stated, “The army is fully alive to the necessity of utilising the technical and scientific knowledge of its personnel to the fullest extent. With this object in view, a comprehensive and detailed investigation has been in progress for the past 11 months, with the result that some 13,000 skilled technicians have been, or are about to be, transferred within the army to positions in which they can be fully employed in a trade appropriate to their skill”.<sup>136</sup> It is clear that the refugees were not included in this ‘investigation’ for skilled men and that, as explained earlier, very few if any were transferred. There is no doubt that the authorities were totally aware that there were many skilled medics, dentists, engineers and other professional peoples within the refugee contingent in the Pioneer Corps. A survey conducted of the refugees internees based at Onchan Camp, Isle of Man, which did not indicate how many of the internees actually joined the Pioneer Corps, “reveals how much talent and useful knowledge is interned in this camp. Interned and wasted”. The *Onchan Pioneer Journal* recorded that among the internees were 93 graduated engineers, 347 skilled workers and craftsman, and 93 independent professions including scores of physicians, lawyers, scientists, accountants and dental surgeons.<sup>137</sup> One refugee observed that although the Pioneer

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<sup>134</sup> The War Diary of 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company shows that a very small amount of refugees were transferred into the R.A.O.C and Intelligence Corps. Only one refugee was returned. War Diary 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1941, PRO WO 166/5578.

<sup>135</sup> Letter from Winston Churchill to General Ismay, 30 August 1940, PRO PREM 3/42/1.

<sup>136</sup> HC Vol 364, col 976, 15 August 1940.

<sup>137</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* Vol XXI, No 286, 13 December 1940, p. 5.

Corps was better than internment, it had similarities.<sup>138</sup> One of these similarities was that the refugees' skills were not being adequately utilised and that there did not seem to be any justifiable rationale behind such a policy.<sup>139</sup>

As early as October 1939, Leslie Hore-Belisha stated that "the lookout for talent is continuous and all commanding officers are instructed to look out for it. No one however humble or exalted his birth need be afraid that his military virtues will remain unrecognised".<sup>140</sup> It appears, though, that the refugees were deliberately overlooked during this quest for available talent. Even as the conflict intensified and the British Army needed a greater number of skilled recruits, the availability of many refugees who were more than qualified and willing to help, was ignored.<sup>141</sup> It was not just the refugees 'talents' that were being untapped. Lord Croft stated, "the government are fully alive to the potential value of those possessing knowledge of certain areas of Europe".<sup>142</sup> However, the government chose not to use refugees within the Intelligence Corps or special commando units until the latter stages of war,<sup>143</sup> adding weight to the premise that the War Office was too suspicious of the enemy aliens to allow a large number of them into more specialist military units.

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<sup>138</sup> Testimony of Paul Streeten, in Dear, *10 Commando*, p. 92

<sup>139</sup> The spokesmen of internees in Australia asked, "how, the skills and capabilities of the engineers, scientists, doctors and experts in our midst, are rotting behind barbed wire". 'A Letter of Appeal for Freedom, 16 May 1941, in The Jewish Museum.

<sup>140</sup> HC Vol 352, cols 347-348, 11 October 1939.

<sup>141</sup> "Refugee doctors, some of them men of the highest repute, are being deliberately ignored, although they have offered their services without reserve to the government. Those who have British medical qualifications, in addition to their foreign degrees, and who have settled in this country for a number of years, have all volunteered for the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC), and have all been rejected". Not only was the government accused of implementing a 'short-sighted policy', but also they were unintentionally encouraging a strong feeling of resentment against the refugee doctors. *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 June 1940, p. 16.

<sup>142</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 166, 9 July 1940, p. 4.

<sup>143</sup> Before the fall of France some civilian refugees in Britain were used to monitor German radio transmissions. Alfred Fleischhacker, Interview, Berlin, Germany, 2 August 1998.

There was always optimism amongst the refugees that their skills would be used for national service.<sup>144</sup> The government was aware of the refugees' keenness to help, but at the same time recognised that there was pressure from British medics not to permit them to help. Sir John Anderson expressed in parliament, "I have no doubt that the majority, if not all, of the foreign doctors would be willing to undertake some form of national service in their profession, but my information is that the medical profession would not look with favour upon this proposal".<sup>145</sup>

Almost a year later the refugee doctors, approximately 80 in strength, who were by this time veterans in the Pioneer Corps, were still pressing, with no luck, to be used as medical staff rather than manual workers.<sup>146</sup> During the first year of war the need for medical staff was relatively light. After the fall of France and the slow build up to creating a new second front, it would have been expected that the government would welcome any offers of aid from qualified doctors, surgeons and dentists. Subsequently the War Office was pressured to consider the transfer of refugee doctors languishing in the Pioneer Corps.<sup>147</sup>

By 1941 there were increased demands on the War Office to take immediate steps to ensure that the British Forces were no longer hindered by the refusal to utilise available specialist personnel.<sup>148</sup> It was not just doctors being restricted from duty but also dentists, biochemists, scientists, engineers and electricians. Their appeals were

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<sup>144</sup> In January 1940 it was reported that over 100 doctors and dentist refugees, although debarred from activity in their profession, hoped that they would be able to contribute their skills once in the British army. *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 15 and p. 19.

<sup>145</sup> HC Vol 361, col 427, 28 May 1940.

<sup>146</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 1941, p. 60.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> There are considerable numbers of appeals in the reports of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletins* during 1940 in particular.

consistently rejected without reasons being given.<sup>149</sup> In parliament Sir John Anderson was questioned as to why refugee scientists and technicians who could prove useful to the war effort were being wasted.<sup>150</sup> H. M. Carleton Greene, a British civilian, asked in *The Times*, “in view of the present shortage of skilled workers, is it satisfactory that these [refugee engineers and technicians] are employed in unskilled manual labour?”.<sup>151</sup> Angus Calder has argued that this criticism of the army went beyond the issue of not using the talents of the refugees. The army wasted most of the “best material that reached it” in general. He argued that to remedy this problem, from 1942 onwards all recruits were put through six weeks basic training and put through aptitude tests to decide which branch of service would suit them best.<sup>152</sup> However, there is no evidence to suggest that this method of screening was employed with the ‘enemy alien’ refugee servicemen.

The British press gradually began to alter its general ‘anti-refugee stance’ in the light of such obvious wastage of available talent. Newspapers such as *The Times*, *The New Statesman and Nation*, *The Daily Sketch*, *Manchester Guardian*, and *The Jewish Chronicle* all wrote of the absurdity of a situation that the government appeared unable to recognise.<sup>153</sup> After a visit to one of the (alien) pioneer company’s army camps by a team of journalists in October 1941, one man wrote, “I came into contact with the first batch of men. These were employed on stone quarrying for road construction. Practically all of them are professional men who, before Hitler’s advent to power, were engaged as doctors, lawyers, architects, engineers, scientists, and so

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<sup>149</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 April 1941, p. 5.

<sup>150</sup> H.C Vol 362, col 1036, 4 July 1940.

<sup>151</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1941, p. 5.

<sup>152</sup> Calder, *The Peoples War*, p. 249.

<sup>153</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 June 1941, p. 16.



on. Actually it occurred to me that in the interest of the general war effort some of them would be of far greater use in some branch of the services which afforded them more scope for the utilisation of their specialised knowledge".<sup>154</sup> One politician, Mr. A. V. Hill could not comprehend the negative attitude of the War Office toward the refugees. He wrote a letter to *The Spectator* stating that "among the refugees now in England many are anxious to join our fighting services; not in an inferior status but as active fighters. Why on earth do we not accept their services?". He concluded that the government needed to make a total change in their policy towards the refugee.<sup>155</sup> By late 1940 such an opinion was echoed more frequently within the British press.<sup>156</sup>

It is clear that by 1941 some professional societies had had no direct association with the refugees. Some, such as the British Medical Association and Socialist Medical Association, even felt threatened by their presence in Britain.<sup>157</sup> However, the absurdity of the government's stance was magnified when even these groups began to urge the government to increase the number of available doctors by using the highly skilled refugees.<sup>158</sup> Pressure on the government in parliament came from politicians such as Lord Wedgwood who was regarded as a valiant champion of Jewish rights. He made persistent enquiries over the treatment of refugees from Nazism and their increased involvement in military and civilian life.<sup>159</sup> Eleanor Rathbone also worked

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<sup>154</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>155</sup> Reported in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 221, 21 September 1940, p. 3.

<sup>156</sup> *The Manchester Guardian* in particular.

<sup>157</sup> Cesarani, David, *Britain and the Holocaust* (Holocaust Educational Trust: London, 1998), p. 9.

<sup>158</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 May 1941, p. 12.

<sup>159</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 July 1943, p. 9.

tirelessly for the rights of refugees.<sup>160</sup> Herbert Freeden in the *Association of Jewish Refugees Information* said that Eleanor Rathbone had become the mother of the oppressed, “though her first and foremost love was for the Jewish people”. He explained that “Her efforts to integrate the refugees in England into the war effort met, only later, with success, for, in 1940, under the threat of the German invasion, security measure were over-riding all other considerations and Jews and other anti-Nazis went into internment; Eleanor worked day and night to right this wrong. She visited internment camps, drafted memoranda, framed parliamentary questions, wrote letters to the press, haunted government departments, attended committees and followed up individual cases”.<sup>161</sup>

Discontent also increased amongst pressure groups and prominent people of influence. One letter criticising the government’s policy, which appeared in *The Times*, was signed by a number of prominent men and women including the writer H. G. Wells:

(1) Wholesale internment was conceived in panic and is incapable of sober justification. The defence put forward by the government, so far as one has been attempted, is singularly weak and unconvincing.

(2) The concessions announced in the White Paper are intended to appear impressive, but in reality will boil down to relatively few releases, and those affected, as the neutral correspondents indicated, not on grounds of principle but on narrow consideration of utility.

(3) The machinery set up to deal with releases will prove hopelessly inadequate for the speedy consideration of cases. People interned pell-mell are to be released in dribblets through a number of bottle-necks.

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<sup>160</sup> Major Cazalet believed that “all refugees in this country owe her [Rathbone] a dept of gratitude”. HC Vol 362, col 1207, 10 July 1940. For more background on Eleanor Rathbone see, Stocks, Mary D, *Eleanor Rathbone: A Biography* (Victor Gollancz: London, 1950).

<sup>161</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, November 1949, p. 4.

(4) A complete reversal of government policy is the only solution. It involves the release of all interned friendly aliens of whose antecedents the Home Office has information and against whom there is no reasonable suspicion. [*sic*]<sup>162</sup>

Although this letter was aimed specifically at the policy of internment it applied also to similar problems that the refugees were facing within the British army.

Despite these protests from various sources, the War Office did not make any significant concessions to the refugees to enable them to transfer to specialist units until spring 1943. Even then, the refugees could still not transfer or enlist into the Royal Signals. The most logical and strongly supported reason as to why the refugees were not employed in any units other than the Pioneer Corps was because they were still regarded by the War Office with great suspicion. The refugees who had been through tribunals, internment, and security checks were permitted to join the army but were under constant surveillance by MI5.<sup>163</sup> However, was not the threat of a British Nazi agent who wanted to penetrate into the British army just as real as a Nazi spy disguised as a Jewish refugee? The average British soldier did not experience such an intensive vetting system. Despite all the evidence that the refugees were loyal and 'friendly' towards Britain they still faced a number of restrictions from the period 1939-1943.

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<sup>162</sup> Letter signed by Lord Cecil, Lady Violet Bonham-Carter, Professor Gilbert Murray, Mr H.G Wells and Mr Andrew McFadyean. *The Times*, 22 August 1940, p. 5 Also reported in the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Information*, Vol XXI, No 195, 23 August 1940, p. 7.

<sup>163</sup> Letter from Colonel Jacob to Winston Churchill, 13 January 1941, PRO PREM 3/42/2.

## Chapter 5

### Suspicion of the Refugee Soldiers, 1939-43

Most Jewish refugees swore an oath of allegiance to King George VI when they attested.<sup>1</sup> This was the same oath taken by British recruits when attested into the army:

I swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty King George the Sixth, His heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me.<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence, the Jewish refugees expected that the War Office would ensure that conditions of army life would be the same as for those of their British comrades.<sup>3</sup> The army further strengthened this expectation. The question remains, in practice, were the refugees discriminated against within the British army between 1939-1943?

Before the War Office's decision to fully integrate the refugees into all units of the army in 1943, there existed a degree of equality for refugees in the British Forces. They received the same rate of pay as British soldiers<sup>4</sup> and their uniform followed the

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000. The swearing of an oath was made optional for the refugees. "Any alien who does not wish to take the oath of allegiance may be enlisted without doing so, in which case, the oath printed on the attestation paper will be endorsed oath not taken and initialled by the attesting officer". Recruiting Instruction No W/584, 29 April 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>2</sup> Sarle, Bernard, Certified Copy of Attestation, July 1940, in possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>3</sup> After a correspondents visit to an alien pioneer camp it was reported, "each man is attested as a British soldier and is entitled to every right and privilege of a British soldier". *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> In the Recruiting Circular 2a, it was stated that they received 2/- a day, which was the same rate as English soldiers. *A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army*, Recruiting Circular Number 2A, Peter and Leni Gillman claimed it was 2s 6d a day for privates. Peter and Leni Gillman, *Collar the Lot: How Britain Interned and Expelled It's Wartime Refugees* (Quartet Books: London, 1980), p. 256.

same style as the British who served in similar corps.<sup>5</sup> However, they were only allowed to join the Pioneer Corps (as was discussed in the previous chapter), as were there other restrictions unique to the German and Austrian refugees.

One area of potential discrimination was the issue of promotion to senior positions in the British army. The issue of whether the refugees' opportunities were as good as other soldiers was raised publicly in 1941. A letter appeared in the press making allegations that the aliens in the Pioneer Corps were being handicapped from advancement in their military service.<sup>6</sup> Walter Elliot denied this allegation and argued that recommendations for promotion were made purely by the decision of commanding officers and that the refugees went through the same process of interviewing under the auspices of the War Office as the British personnel. He added that promotions were subject to proper security requirements.<sup>7</sup> However, as the relevant security records are not available, it is not possible at present to assess the impact of such requirements on promotion.

In parliament, Duncan Sandys M.P. stated that he could not accept that ability in the Pioneer Corps in general would go unrecognised. "I am informed that a soldier's prospects of promotion are at least as good in the pioneers as they are in other corps, nor is such promotion restricted to the rank of Corporal".<sup>8</sup> It was true, that refugee soldiers could get promoted and progress up the ranks in the same manner as the

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<sup>5</sup> Duncan Sandys declared in parliament that as regards to wearing uniform the 'enemy aliens' in the Pioneer Corps were subject to precisely the same rules as other soldiers. HC Vol 374, col 1929, 23 October 1941. Also discussed in Pelican, Fred, *From Dachau to Dunkirk* (Valentine Mitchell and Co Ltd: London, 1993), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> "It is stated that these men, German and Austrian refugees, are looked upon in every way as British soldiers. In one important point [rank], however, their position is not similar". H. M. Carleton Green in *The Times*, 24 November 1941, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1941, p. 5.

<sup>8</sup> HC Vol 374, col 1929, 23 October 1941.

British. It was not unusual for refugees with “good conduct in accordance of the King’s regulations”<sup>9</sup> to gain promotion to Lance Corporal, with the accompanying wage increase.<sup>10</sup> As early as January 1940, it was reported that, “some of the refugees who have been on the staff of their camps and have proved their worth have been appointed non-commissioned officers (NCOs) themselves and are proud of their stripe”.<sup>11</sup> Peter Masters witnessed these fairly rapid changes of rank among the refugees. He recalled, “As time passed, some of us were promoted to non-commissioned officer rank. Whereas the majority of senior NCOs initially had been British, more and more of us became sergeants and even occasionally a quartermaster - a warrant officer grade no less. Great excitement greeted the arrival of the first refugees’ Second Lieutenant”.<sup>12</sup>

There were however limitations to the refugees’ opportunities to gain higher ranks. The first commission of a refugee as an officer was not until December 1941.<sup>13</sup> According to contemporary accounts, it also seems that the War Office was refusing to allow refugees with medical qualifications to join the Medical Corps because it would mean that they would have to be commissioned.<sup>14</sup> Even when the rank of commissioned officer became open to refugees, there still remained limits on this concession. Walter Elliot contended that, “aliens, whether natives of enemy countries or not, are eligible for commission in arms or branches of the army other than the

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<sup>9</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Van Der Walde, Henry, ‘My Life’ (1993), p. 28.

<sup>11</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 15.

<sup>12</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando’s War Against the Nazis* (Presido Press: California, 1997), p. 32.

<sup>13</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 69.

<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 1941, p. 60.

Pioneer Corps, each application being carefully considered on its merit".<sup>15</sup> However, despite Walter Elliot arguing to the contrary,<sup>16</sup> the fact remained that the refugees could only take up the rank of commissioned officer within the Pioneer Corps, and not more than one alien officer could be posted to a company.<sup>17</sup> In 1941, the vast majority of refugees in the army were restricted solely to the Pioneer Corps. They were not being considered for any other units, let alone being granted commissions in combatant or specialist corps. In no company did an 'enemy alien' function as commanding officer.<sup>18</sup> It was questioned as to whether the British officers would even be prepared to serve under a higher-ranking alien officer.<sup>19</sup>

One of the most controversial issues regarding the rights of refugees was the restriction on bearing arms. Right from the inception of the alien companies, the rules laid down that they should be non-combatant.<sup>20</sup> Louis Rudnic explained that, "as recruits in the Pioneer Corps we received general training for a few weeks, although there was no intention by the authorities to use these 'foreign legion' units in combat situations".<sup>21</sup> Henry Van Der Walde confirmed that, "as 'non-Britishers' we were not a fighting unit and our basic training did not include the use of firearms".<sup>22</sup> Ken Schindler also recollected that much of their training was restricted to parade ground drill. He believed that, "at same stage we did do a small amount of rifle drill, but of

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<sup>15</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 December 1941, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> *The Times*, 11 December 1941, p. 5. Also reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 December 1941, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Captain Margesson stated, "the granting of commissions to aliens in the Pioneer Corps will be limited to the alien companies and it is not intended at present to have more than one alien officer in each company. Alien officers will not normally hold a rank higher than subaltern". HC Vol 373, cols 1776-1777, 5 August 1941.

<sup>18</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 69.

<sup>19</sup> Wing-Commander James speaking in parliament. HC Vol 373, col 1776-1777, 5 August 1941.

<sup>20</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 60.

<sup>21</sup> Rudnic, Louis 'Life Story' (June, 1999), p. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 22.

course without ammunition”.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, records show that the refugees had rifle drill and musketry on only very rare occasions. Weapons training was usually only conducted with small numbers of the companies present. In the case of the 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, between August 1940 to August 1941 the refugees only had weapon training on six occasions. It was not until the end of 1942 that weapon training became more regular, and even then they did not have any experience handling Bren or Sten guns until spring 1943.<sup>24</sup> In comparison, after the evacuation of Dunkirk, the British companies of the Pioneer Corps had regular weapons training. The academic Rhodes-Wood has stated that it became an “an integral part of each week’s programme”.<sup>25</sup>

During the invasion scare, Sir John Anderson announced that the government was to continue its policy of prohibiting all aliens in the United Kingdom from possessing firearms. It was stated that this restriction was to be imposed on all refugees irrespective of their nationality.<sup>26</sup> Only British personnel were permitted to carry firearms, which was “a great disappointment to the aliens who were prepared to fight and die for the country, which had given them refuge”.<sup>27</sup> The Polish and Czechoslovakian soldiers were not affected by this policy as most had been recruited into their own national army based in Britain.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ken Schindler, Letter to Author, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> War Diaries of (Alien) Pioneer Companies, 74 Company, July 1940-December 1941, WO 166/5560; 74 Company, 1942, WO 166/9974; 74 Company, 1943, WO 166/9974. All located in PRO.

<sup>25</sup> Rhodes-Wood, E. H., *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1960), p 12.

<sup>26</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 May 1940, p. 17.

<sup>27</sup> Rhodes-Wood, *Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 22.

<sup>28</sup> Small numbers of Poles and Czechoslovakians were enlisted into the (alien) pioneer companies and were treated under the same conditions. The Return of Foreigners enlisted into the British army, August 1940- May 1941, PRO PREM 3/42/1. There is no evidence to suggest that there were different regulations concerning the bearing of arms for soldiers of different nationalities within the (alien) pioneer companies.



Questions were raised in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords relating to the question of issuing weapons to the refugees.<sup>29</sup> Rhodes-Wood has argued that it would have been difficult for the refugees to protest that they were treated unfairly in comparison to the British soldiers in other branches of the army as Britain was unable to even arm fully her own nationals within the Pioneer Corps.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the pioneer companies that were sent to France in 1940, alien and British were on the whole unarmed units.<sup>31</sup> However, many months after the evacuation from France more weapons became available and these were distributed heavily in favour of the British Pioneers. Not long after the evacuation from Dunkirk Anthony Eden decreed that only the British members of the corps would be permitted to handle arms.<sup>32</sup>

It was later stated that even though the question of arming the entire pioneer troops was to be reviewed, the Home Guard was regarded as a more important priority for receiving arms than the refugees.<sup>33</sup> By the end of November 1940, Anthony Eden announced that the British companies of the Pioneer Corps were fully equipped with rifles.<sup>34</sup> The alien companies, however, were restricted to just a quarter of its men

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<sup>29</sup> Lord Davies asked, in view of good work in France, about the alteration of the war equipment to include arming the alien pioneers. Lord Croft explained that it was under discussion but the Home Guard would first have to be equipped. HL Vol 117, col 432, 18 September, 1940. Mr. Mander asked "is it intended in due course to treat both companies exactly the same whether British or alien". HC Vol 365, col 1560, 12 November 1940.

<sup>30</sup> Rhodes-Wood, *Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 22.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 12. Only about one in five in the British pioneer companies were armed with a rifle before being sent overseas, and most rifles were in extremely poor condition. Ibid, p. 10. The (alien) pioneer companies, though, were issued with no arms whatsoever. War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1940, PRO WO 167/1318, and 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1940, PRO WO 167/1309.

<sup>32</sup> Colonel Arthur Evans asked Anthony Eden whether he intended to arm all ranks of the corps 100 per cent. for defence purposes. Mr Eden replied, "it has now been decided to arm all the British members of the corps". HC Vol 363, col 1149, 30 July 1940.

<sup>33</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 September 1940, p. 14, and *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 262, 14 November 1940, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 November 1940, p. 4.

being armed.<sup>35</sup> Given Eden's assurance that there was no difference in treatment between the British and alien companies,<sup>36</sup> why was this discrepancy in evidence?

This policy was made all the more frustrating for the refugees as many of them were involved in the fighting during the evacuation from France. Fred Pelican believed that, before Dunkirk, the directive that the (alien) pioneer companies were to be kept unarmed was, "accepted by one and all". However he stressed that,

the absurdity became more evident in France at a time of crises when we found ourselves in a situation where our lives were at risk. Being armed may not have been the aim of the elderly elements of our unit, but the younger ones, like myself, had other visions. In an emergency, where our lives could have been in jeopardy, why should anybody prevent me from defending myself and my comrades? It must have become apparent to someone at the War Office that this was an intolerable situation. Here, on one hand you accept a body of friendly aliens into the forces, kit them out like any other soldier, grant them exactly the same privileges, and on the other hand, in an emergency situation you tie their hands behind their backs. They might have just as well formed an Auxiliary Civilian Labour Force.<sup>37</sup>

However, it was claimed that there was an instance when a number of alien pioneer soldiers were armed in France. In the House of Lords, Lord Davies questioned Lord Croft as to whether the refugees were equipped with rifles during the latter stages of evacuation. Lord Croft replied that the refugees were only "lightly armed" when "actually at the seat of war" engaged in operations in France.<sup>38</sup> In contrast, it was claimed by Colonel Arthur Evans that during the battle of France the British-born members of the AMPC were armed 100 per cent.<sup>39</sup> These statements reveal that whilst

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<sup>35</sup> The American army had to help to provide every British soldier in the Pioneer Corps with a rifle. Rhodes-Wood, *Royal Pioneer Corps*, pp. 12 and 135.

<sup>36</sup> HC Vol 365, col 1560, 12 November 1940.

<sup>37</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 60.

<sup>38</sup> Lord Croft also stated that the other British companies were also armed. HL Vol 117, col 238, 14 August 1940. Reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 190, 16<sup>th</sup> August 1940, p. 3 and *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 August 1940, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> HC Vol 363, col 1032, 24 July 1940.

the British soldiers were fully armed, only a small portion of the refugees were provided with weapons even though they were both faced directly by the same enemy. Major Woodcock, Commanding Officer of the 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, confirmed that his men were unarmed throughout their time in France other than for a very short period at the end of May.<sup>40</sup>

Colonel Arthur Evans spoke in the House of Commons describing the part played by his 600 'largely professional' alien Pioneers in the defence of Harve. He stated, "I decided on my own responsibility to arm them and give out fifty rounds per man". He continued, "they conducted themselves in a manner worthy of the best traditions of the British army". Norman Bentwich described how the 87 and 88 companies made a hasty defence line when the Germans broke through in May 1940. He wrote that the pioneers responded to the emergency "manfully".<sup>41</sup> Remarkably, in less than 2 days the refugees had learnt not only to load and handle rifles but were manning machine guns and anti tank rifles. They were fully prepared to fight against any armoured vehicle that came near, putting their lives at risk when they could have opted just to flee.<sup>42</sup>

The refugees, after the display of such courage under fire, had their loyalty challenged once again on arrival into Britain. It has been stated that the Pioneers salvaged from France every weapon that they could carry but had to hand them over at Southampton

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<sup>40</sup> War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 8 June 1940, PRO WO 167/131.

<sup>41</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 36.

<sup>42</sup> HC Vol 362, col 1031, 4 July 1940. This issue is raised in Klugescheid, Andreas Bad-Orb, Translated by Bohm, E.I, *His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens: German-Jewish Emigrants to Great Britain Between 1933-47* (MA Thesis, University of Gottingen, No Date), pp. 89-90, in The Jewish Military Museum.

or at the training centres.<sup>43</sup> It may be the case that they handed over weapons even before leaving France. Major Woodcock recorded at the time that the 97 rifles and ammunition that were issued to his men had to be handed over to the O.C transit camp before their return to England, rather than on their arrival. Most of these rifles had been issued to the men only a week previously.<sup>44</sup> Fritz Lustig felt that it was not fair on the refugees that they were trusted with weapons when it suited the British authorities but when they reached the British Isles they were no longer allowed to bear arms again.<sup>45</sup> Major Woodcock revealed that, “during the time the men carried arms they showed great keenness and general disappointment was felt when rifles and ammunition were ordered to be handed in”.<sup>46</sup> Lord Croft explained that the refugee companies were not first priority in the distribution of weapons: “it was vital to arm the whole of the combatant divisions as soon as possible and the pioneer divisions have been principally working on defence measures ever since [the evacuation]”.<sup>47</sup>

It has been argued that the refugees were kept unarmed within the Pioneer Corps for a large portion of the war for the sake of their own protection rather than as a result of War Office suspicion of the refugees’ allegiances. At a meeting of refugees, Captain Davidson told them that “we know you would like to do the same [go into the firing line] but the British government will not allow you to do so in your own interest. Nevertheless, your services will be appreciated”.<sup>48</sup> Reverend Malcolm Weisman

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<sup>43</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, June 1940, PRO WO 167/1318.

<sup>45</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000. Lord Croft said that the Pioneers Corps in France had done an excellent job. He was not aware that on their return they had no arms but he could not imagine it because it had been vital to arm the whole of combatant divisions as speedily as possible. HL Vol 117, col 238, 14 August 1940. Also reported in *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Vol XXI, No 190, 16 August 1940, p. 3, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 August 1940, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, June 1940, PRO WO 167/1318.

<sup>47</sup> HL Vol 123, col 211, 9 June 1942.

<sup>48</sup> *A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army*, Recruiting Circular Number 2A, The Central Office For Refugees (No Date), in Possession of Bernard Sarle.

believed that this was definitely one of the main reasons for certain restrictions. He did not feel that the army's policies were motivated by distrust but rather consideration for the refugees' safety should they be captured.<sup>49</sup>

The argument that refugees were retained in the Pioneers and restricted from bearing arms for their own protection is not very satisfactory alone to explain their lack of provision with weapons. The evidence suggests it is more likely that the reason for such limitations on the refugees' military responsibilities was because the War Office remained unsure of the loyalties of the 'enemy alien' refugees even up to 1943. Fox believed that there were doubts over the reliability of the refugees and that there also existed an, 'irrational fear' of them being armed.<sup>50</sup> As the (alien) pioneers companies were utilised in the expeditionary forces, it would most certainly have been practical for them to be given adequate weapon training and access to arms in the case of any unexpected conflict with the enemy.

The issue of providing firearms for the refugee servicemen was not discussed again in the House of Lords until the summer of 1942.<sup>51</sup> By that time, some of the refugees had been present in the army for three years and were still not permitted to use or be regularly trained in weaponry, something that suggests a considerable lack of trust. Lord Wedgwood was a vigorous advocate of the need to treat the refugees better. He pointed out the futility of the policy against people who were as or more determined to fight than the British soldiers.

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<sup>49</sup> Malcolm Weisman, London, 30 January 2003.

<sup>50</sup> Fox, John, P, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces and British and German Citizenship Policies'. *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1992), p. 5.

<sup>51</sup> HL Vol 123, col 211, 9 June 1942.

So far as this country is concerned, Jewish Pioneer Corps are not trained to use arms at present. I should like to know whether when they get arms, they will receive military training. If you are going to say that the Pioneer Corps shall be used solely for making roads or demolition and work of that sort, it comes perilously near to Hitler's forced labour, the forced employment of French prisoners and others. It is obvious that these people who are spoiling to risk their lives ought to have just as good a chance to serve and ought to be training to fight. In the same way as any ordinary regiment. They should have a right to change from Pioneer's Corps to a regular regiment so that they can take a more active part. These people have more reason to fight Hitler than any one else. I do not think that we ought to continue the exclusive privilege of the British to die in defence of liberty. I think the more we allow the Jews or the coloured races to take part side by side with us, face the same risks and survive the same dangers, the more we shall create that brotherhood and commonwealth which will provide our only chance of securing a successful and enduring peace.<sup>52</sup>

While some British soldiers might not have enlisted without conscription, most refugees in the army had volunteered and were emotionally determined to fight.<sup>53</sup>

Rhodes-Woods posited that many of the British Pioneers, like the refugees, would have desired to be in the 'front line' rather than 'base.' However, he explained that the motivation was not necessarily because of a strong desire to fight, but more of an escape from the "strenuous physical toil" of the labour corps.<sup>54</sup> The British

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, col 209.

<sup>53</sup> Fox, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Rhodes-Wood, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 5.

government recognised the volunteers' dedication and did not wish to conscript other refugees.<sup>55</sup> In comparison, by 1941, Polish Jewish refugees, similar to the British, were conscripted into their national army based in Britain. However, this decision by the Polish government in exile was shrouded in controversy, especially as Polish citizens were also permitted to volunteer for the British army, and a number of Jews refused to serve within an army that contained a strong atmosphere of anti-Semitism.<sup>56</sup>

Of course there were also a minority of refugees who did not actively wish to engage in combat. Karl Fraser was one of the refugees who only joined the army because he believed he was guaranteed service within the British Isles.<sup>57</sup> Information provided for refugees at the time often stressed the point that the refugees would never be at risk of capture by the enemy. Although the attestation form signed by all enlisted refugees stated that they would be liable for service outside the United Kingdom, the Pioneer Corps was not to be used as an armed fighting force.<sup>58</sup> *The Recruiting Circular* from the Central Office of Refugees stated that, in the early days of war, even if they were

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<sup>55</sup> Herbert Morrison explained that a review was carried out that examined the opinions of the 'enemy alien' refugees who were not serving in the army. From one panel, which interviewed 70 refugees, it was concluded that two factors stood out. Firstly, there was a marked disinclination of almost all to join the Pioneer Corps and secondly, the anxiety of the majority to join the armed forces (many had volunteered for the RAF, and the Merchant Navy without success). Morrison believed it was their sincere desire to do their utmost for the war effort. Memorandum by Herbert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676. There were even suggestions of conscripting them. Sir R. Glyn asked Mr. Bevin, Minister of Labour, whether he intended, under the present regulations, to call up aliens of military age to military services, who had come as refugees from Nazi persecution. Mr Bevin explained that it was not proposed to extend the liability of compulsory military service to 'enemy aliens' under the National Services Acts. HC Vol 374, col 861, 7 October 1941.

<sup>56</sup> For parliamentary debates on this issue see HC Vol 351, col 1048, 12 September 1939, and HC Vol 368, cols 1056-1057, 6 February 1941. The issue of the refugees' experiences of anti-Semitism in the army is discussed in Chapter Eight.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

<sup>58</sup> Bernard Sarle, Certificate of attestation, in Bernard's possession.

sent to France, they would be kept in the back areas.<sup>59</sup> Captain Markham, Commanding Officer of a British pioneer company, revealed that many British citizens also joined the Pioneer Corps because it was understood that they were doing so, not as fighting soldiers, but rather as workers. He explained to parliament that “A good many of them were very surprised when they found in a very short time that they had a rifle and a bayonet placed in their hands and were given the full pack and so on, and were expected to do almost the normal work of an A.I. infantry soldier, for a time at any rate”.<sup>60</sup>

It is necessary to assess the impact that the changing circumstances of war had on the government’s policy towards refugee soldiers. There can be no doubt that the threat of invasion in 1940 resulted in an environment where every civilian refugee was regarded as a potential danger to the defence of Britain. This was a view shared by the government, press and the public alike.

In the late spring of 1940, the majority of the civilian Jewish refugees had their status reclassified without a tribunal. As discussed in Chapter Two, they had already been categorized as ‘enemy aliens’ but they were now deemed additionally as an imminent threat to the British defence. The potential threat posed by these ‘enemy aliens’ worried the Home Office to such an extent that a contingent were sent to internment camps within the British dominions, such as Canada and Australia. In response to this decision by the Home Office, the War Office issued orders that suspended the enlistment of German and Austrian nationals into the British army.<sup>61</sup> General Ismay explained that the “War Office reported that up till recently, they have been

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<sup>59</sup> Recruiting Circular 2a, in Bernard’s possession

<sup>60</sup> HC Vol 358, col 1073, 12 March 1940.

<sup>61</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 June 1940, p. 14.



steadfastly recruiting foreign refugees into the AMPC. When the general demand for the internment of enemy aliens and the importance of ensuring that hostile elements did not creep into the British army caused them to close down recruiting”.<sup>62</sup> Louis Rudnic, who was in the British Army at the time of mass internment recalled that many of the refugee servicemen took the news very badly, especially as people with similar backgrounds were being imprisoned whilst they were serving in the British Forces. Louis stated, “I could not understand it the sense of it. They were here [Britain] because they did not want to be in their former countries. It was ridiculous”.<sup>63</sup>

The panicked nature of this new British policy was illustrated by the fact that refugees such as Rudnic were now serving in the British army, whilst fellow refugees who had suffered similar experiences were suddenly interned as potential enemies of British security. Initially, there were reports that the government had not made up its mind what to do with the refugees already within the forces. One correspondent believed that the alien companies of the AMPC would be disbanded and the refugees would then be interned. It was claimed that some refugee soldiers had been prematurely interned by mistake.<sup>64</sup> However, the War Office decided to allow the refugee soldiers to remain in the army. Despite reports to the contrary, none of the refugee servicemen

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<sup>62</sup> Letter from General Ismay to Winston Churchill, 22 July 1940, PRO PREM 3/42/1.

<sup>63</sup> Rudnic, Interview.

<sup>64</sup> The Bishop of Chichester believed that “the men working at Richborough as proved and trusted servants of the government” were “removed from Richborough and are now interned. They do not understand it. This action is really depriving the country of valuable work. These men were encouraged, rather strongly encouraged, to join the Pioneer Corps. They most willingly accepted their opportunity of serving the country to which they are so grateful. Now they are interned and out of action, unable to help”. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 137, 15 June 1940, p. 2. Also in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 June 1940, p. 14.

were interned.<sup>65</sup> Bernard Sarle was fortunate to be accepted into the British army just before they stopped the recruitment of aliens, thereby escaping the ‘net’ of internment.<sup>66</sup> However, some refugees who attempted to volunteer for the British army after the fall of the Lowlands and France were arrested before they were called up, or whilst their application was being considered.<sup>67</sup> Fritz Lustig, who was one of these, went to the War Office to offer his services after the invasion of Holland. He felt that he had no reason to be better off than his British contemporaries who had signed up and that he had no excuse not to be involved. Although some of his refugee friends had been accepted at an earlier date, he was informed that the recruitment of aliens had now been stopped and he was promptly interned.<sup>68</sup>

There is no evidence available to suggest what the rationale was behind the army’s decision to allow the refugee soldiers to remain in British uniform. It seems peculiar that the refugees in the army were allowed to remain yet the majority of their peers were interned. Both sets of refugees were categorised as enemy aliens and both groups originated from similar backgrounds. However, they were treated very differently despite there being no distinction in the allegiance of both sets of refugees. Even refugees who had done “everything in their power to enlist”,<sup>69</sup> and the many

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<sup>65</sup> It was alleged that some had been interned but it later transpired that the internees were not legitimate members of the AMPC, they were serving with the foreign legion of the French army. The Duke of Devonshire argued that no member of the AMPC had been interned. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Vol XXI, No 195, 23 August 1940, p. 4. The academic Ian Dear was of the same opinion. Dear, Ian, *Ten Commando 1942-45* (Leo Cooper Ltd: London, 1987), p. 85.

<sup>66</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Mr. W. Roberts asked Mr. Anderson whether aliens who had volunteered to join the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and have been deported to dominions while applications were under consideration would have opportunities of returning to enlist. HC Vol 364, col 454, 8 August 1940.

<sup>68</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

civilian refugees who had offered their services to the British cause in other non-military ways, were suddenly interned.<sup>70</sup>

It could be argued that the reason for not imprisoning the refugees already in the army was that if they had all suddenly been spirited out of the services and interned, it could have led to negative knock-on effects. Firstly, it would have been bad for public morale if the government admitted that it was a 'complete mistake' to positively judge the refugee's allegiance to Britain and that they had possibly allowed potential spies into the army. There would also have been considerable press criticism if the (alien) pioneer companies who had fought bravely in the defence of France were then interned immediately on their return to Britain.

Perhaps the greatest motivation for mass internment was a political one that went right to the heart of Britain's invasion fears. Major Cazalet, who sympathised with the plight of the refugees, described the great fears of possible invasion and fifth column activity. He cited the "tremendous public demand for the internment of practically every one whose family has not lived here for 100 years, in complete disregard of the individual merits of the cases concerned."<sup>71</sup> It can be argued that the government's internment of all civilian refugees at this point was a response to these fears and a means of allaying public panic. This concern superseded any conviction from the government that the German and Austrian Jewish refugees generally posed no actual

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<sup>70</sup> Some were invalided out the army because of injuries sustained during their imprisonment in concentration camps. Karl Fraser explained that he spent nine months in hospital, whilst with the Pioneer Corps, due to his concentration camp injuries. He later applied and was accepted for the Officers Cadet Training Unit but the Medical Board in hospital said he was unfit and so Karl was discharged. Fraser, Interview.

<sup>71</sup> HC Vol 362, col 1209, 10 July 1940.

threat, something confirmed by the fact that those already in the army were allowed to remain there.

Despite avoiding internment, the refugees in the army were still treated with a large degree of mistrust. As stated earlier, the premise that aliens would not be issued with firearms was reinforced in parliament during the height of invasion fever.<sup>72</sup> Also, any chances that the refugees might have had of being allowed to transfer to fighting units had completely disappeared. The legacy of internment may have been one of the reasons why restrictions on rank, weapons and transfer to combatant corps remained for another three years.

Further comparisons can be made between the treatment of the civilian refugees and the refugee servicemen. In April 1940, under a new Aliens Order, the Home Office announced that aliens of enemy nationality could not live in a 'protected area' without permission from the Home Secretary or a chief constable. This was to "prevent the risk of the collection or leakage of valuable information through aliens resident in the neighbourhood"<sup>73</sup>

At the same time the labour duties and the location of the refugees in the army were affected by the War Office's fear of fifth columnists within the Pioneers. One refugee, W. Brown, recalled, "we guarded ammunition dumps, though only for a few days; until somebody discovered that we were a company of enemy aliens, then we were

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<sup>72</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 May 1940, p. 17.

<sup>73</sup> The Home Office announced, under the Aliens Order 1920, that some of the civil defence regions certain areas adjoining to important naval ports have been declared protected areas. Article 9 of the order prohibited any alien or class of alien from entering an area declared to be protected, such as the Humber area, Harwich, Medway Thames and Dover, Portsmouth, Plymouth, north Scotland and the Orkney Islands. *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 April 1940, pp. 9 and 30.

quickly moved away”.<sup>74</sup> Henry Van Der Walde recounted another situation where the refugees were moved location because the War Office did not trust them. His camp was situated by the Straits of Dover. In May 1940, the alien pioneer troops had to be “moved away to ‘a safer region,’ not the least worry for the army command being the possibility of the presence of ‘spies’ or German collaborators amongst us”.<sup>75</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy confirmed that the pioneers based at the Richborough Camp were relocated.<sup>76</sup> It must be noted that the alien Pioneers were not bound by the ordinary restrictions imposed upon civilian aliens during their periods of leave.<sup>77</sup>

In July 1940, Lord Croft announced that there would be a lifting of the ban on refugees of proven loyalty who “are afforded an opportunity of volunteering for active service”.<sup>78</sup> However, once again, even when the interned refugees were eventually allowed their freedom by volunteering for the British army,<sup>79</sup> they were still treated as dangerous aliens. Fritz Lustig recounted that while the refugees were on board a ship taking them from their place of internment to England to be enlisted into the army, they were placed under an armed guard made up of the British soldiers who

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<sup>74</sup> Brown, W. W, ‘Life with the Alien Pioneers’, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, August 1988, p. 6

<sup>75</sup> Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, p. 24.

<sup>76</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>77</sup> HC Vol 368, col 665, 30 January 1940.

<sup>78</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 170, 24 July 1940, p. 1. However, the Pioneer Corps could be regarded as anything other than ‘active service’.

<sup>79</sup> Lord Wedgwood pressed the Home Secretary that that in a number of cases, men who have been accepted for the Pioneer Corps were still being retained for a very long period. The reasons for the delay in letting refugees from internment join Pioneer Corps was because of the slow checking process conducted by MI5. HC Vol 368, col 610, 27 February 1941. General Ismay reported, “recruiting has reopened. Rate of progress depends on rate of MI5 checking recruits”. Letter By General Ismay to Winston Churchill, 22 July 1940, PRO PREM 3/42/1. There was also a lack of cooperation between Home Office and War Office. In the House of Lords, Lord Newton spoke of his efforts to secure the release of an interned alien to join the pioneers. Both War Office and Home Office said that the release was the responsibility of the other. Viscount Samuel said that the War Office would not take people into the pioneers until released and the Home Office would not release internees until taken into pioneers. “There appeared to be deadlock on this issue”. *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 274, 29 November 1940, p. 2.

accompanied them.<sup>80</sup> However, the government did make the occasional concession to the refugee soldiers. On their return to Britain these new recruits were offered seven days leave before they had to join their units.<sup>81</sup>

It can be established that there was not full equality of treatment in the army for the refugees from Germany and Austria. However, in explaining such policies it is important to acknowledge the concerns of the War Office that Nazi agents may have been trying to enter the British army under the cover of refugee status. Were such concerns realistic?

Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recently argued, “I don’t think they ever suspected these men as fifth column because they realised these mainly were Jews and they couldn’t be fifth column”. He believed that the reason his military camp full of refugees from Germany was moved overnight was because, “they [the government] feared the German army would drop spies in army uniform who would mix with these Germans and you would not be able to tell the difference”.<sup>82</sup>

Winston Churchill, a man admired by many of the refugees,<sup>83</sup> had initial reservations about refugees from Germany and Austria serving in the British army and was the early driving force behind national internment.<sup>84</sup> However, by 1941, it is evident that Churchill’s concerns were not directed at the Jewish refugees in the army generally

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<sup>80</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>81</sup> HC Vol 368, col 610, 27 February 1941.

<sup>82</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>83</sup> All the refugee ex-servicemen interviewees held Winston Churchill in high esteem.

<sup>84</sup> The academic Bernard Wasserstein explained how Churchill’s attitude towards internment had changed quite significantly by January 1941. By this time Churchill expressed that “a more rapid and general process of release from internment should be adopted”. Churchill Minute, 25 January 1941. PRO PREM 3/42/2/3. Quoted in Wasserstein, Bernard, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939-1945*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Leicester University Press: London, 1999), p. 107.

but rather the possibility of Nazis being amongst them. He stated, "I presume that this [pioneer] corps will be most carefully scrubbed and rescrubbed to make sure that no Nazi cells develop in it. I am very much in favour of recruiting friendly Germans and keeping them under strict discipline, instead of remaining useless in concentration camps, but we must be doubly careful we do not get any of the wrong breed".<sup>85</sup> Such a statement reveals he was pragmatic about allowing refugees into the army and recognised that the majority were loyal to Britain. Winston Churchill was informed that the refugees admitted into the forces were thoroughly 'scrubbed'. In fact, the refugees who had previously been accepted as friendly 'enemy aliens' after the initial set of tribunals at the outbreak of war, were checked by MI5, the Home Office and even a committee of Germans well known to MI5. This committee had means of finding past records before the application for a position in the Pioneer Corps was accepted. They were also continually monitored by their commanding officers. Churchill was reassured that "channels of information are being developed which will give timely warning of the formations of any Nazi cells in the pioneer corps units. The War Office feels satisfied that the precautions are effective".<sup>86</sup>

Churchill's careful attitude was considered very wise by some refugee servicemen.

For instance, Alfred Perles argued that,

the reason for the War Office's reluctance to grant those transfers was, of course, rather obvious. Why should the War Office trust the alien pioneers? After all, most of them were Germans, or of other enemy alien origin. They called themselves 'refugees from Nazi oppression' and that's what they were. But how were the authorities to check up on each individual case? What would deter an enemy agent

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<sup>85</sup> Churchill Minute, January 1941, PRO PREM 3/42/2.

<sup>86</sup> Letter from Winston Churchill, 3 January 1941, PRO PREM 3/42/2. The Minister of Defence responded to the letter, saying that the names and particulars of all 'enemy alien' volunteers were investigated by MI5. <sup>87</sup> Perles, Alfred, *Alien Corn: Reminiscences of the Pioneer Corps* (George Unwin and Allen Ltd: London, 1944), pp. 164-165.

from masquerading as a 'Refugee from Nazi Oppression'. Nothing would have been easier for the German Intelligence Service than to make some of their crack spies pass as oppressed refugees? In the Pioneer Corps they could not do much harm, the most dangerous spy being harmless as long as his activities are reduced to digging holes in the soft soil of Somerset.<sup>87</sup>

In 1940 especially, numerous allegations of enemy alien fifth column activity appeared in the press and parliament, although there were very few allegations of subversive activity against refugees within the army. Newspaper reports and government propaganda told stories of the danger of Nazi spies among the refugees.<sup>88</sup>

The Duke of Devonshire was of the opinion that "there can be no doubt that there are cases of refugees, people probably with admirable references, who have been sent over here by the Nazi government". He believed that the majority of the refugees did deserve sympathy but some of them "remained German at heart".<sup>89</sup>

Despite many sinister reports, it has been argued that the vast majority, if not all, such accusations, were not based on any hard facts.<sup>90</sup> Although there may have been a

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<sup>87</sup> Perles, Alfred, *Alien Corn: Reminiscences of the Pioneer Corps* (George Unwin and Allen Ltd: London, 1944), pp. 164-165.

<sup>88</sup> There are many examples of such reports. Mr. Theo H. Fligelstone said that "there must be in this country quite a number of refugees deliberately posing as Jews who had been sent here as the enemy. Otto Schiff, Anglo-Jewish Association, stated that it was well known by the government and the Home Office that there had been a number of cases where the letter "J" had been deliberately put on a passport in Germany and it had been discovered here that the person in question were not Jewish. *Jewish Chronicle*, 6 October 1939, p. 6.

- There were also reports that Nazi spies were arrested in Egypt with forged visas posing as Jewish refugees. *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 October 1939, p. 11.

- There was some concern over "sinister looking markings" in close proximity to (alien) pioneer company's camp. The government, including Winston Churchill, were worried that these markings may have been created by the soldiers as codes for enemy aircraft. It was discovered the markings were in fact firebreaks of a pattern recommended by the Ministry of Agriculture. Letters between the Home Secretary and Prime Minister, July 1940, PREM 3/42/2.

- In the British movie *Went the Day Well*, Dir. Alberto Cavalcanti (1942), a quiet English coastal village welcomes a unit of British soldiers. It is discovered that the soldiers are in fact German spies who hold the villagers prisoner in an attempt to alert an invasion force.

<sup>89</sup> The Duke of Devonshire said there was immense difficulty making judgements about the loyalties of the refugees as "in most cases it really cannot be proved whether a man's sympathies are genuine or not". *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 191, 17 August 1940, p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> *New Statesman and Nation*, No 491, 20 July 1940, p. 53. The paper claimed that there was no evidence whatsoever of any refugee fifth column and the policies were based upon no sound reasons of national security.



standard Nazi practice of trying to infiltrate the British army no recorded evidence was uncovered that suggests there existed any attempts by enemy agents to pose as Jewish refugee servicemen in the Pioneer Corps. Nevertheless, there can be no doubt that the War Office was suspicious of these refugee servicemen throughout the majority of the war. By the end of 1942, Sir Herbert Morrison acknowledged the unfairness of the War Office's restrictions on refugee servicemen, pointing out that at least 90 per cent were Jews whose race was being exterminated by the Nazis.<sup>91</sup>

It was not surprising that in a time of war and imminent invasion that the British government should want to increase security in every way possible. Regulations sometimes echoed those of World War One. However, the refugees had their background thoroughly screened and investigated on a number of occasions and would not have been permitted to remain in the British army if it was believed that they posed a threat to British security. Winston Churchill wrote, "I see no question why enemy aliens, wishing to fight against Germany, should not be incorporated in a military body where the discipline is strict, where the penalties are severe, and where they can be under constant observation. It is easy to have a vigilance committee of their own people to vet and re-vet these men, who would of course be volunteers".<sup>92</sup> Yet the government's suspicions remained. This resulted in a complete waste of skilled civilians and soldiers for a considerable period of time. Herbert Emerson later admitted that with the problem of manpower becoming acute the government had to make greater use out of "the most willing of people".<sup>93</sup> Compared to the American treatment of refugee soldiers, the War Office pursued contradictory and self-

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<sup>91</sup> Memorandum by Hebert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>92</sup> Letter by Winston Churchill, 21 June 1940, PRO PREM 3/42/2.

<sup>93</sup> Memorandum by Hebert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676.

damaging policies. The refugees were drafted into the American forces with complete equal rights. They were able to gain citizenship and have a choice over which branch of the army they wanted to serve in.<sup>94</sup> The British War Office on the other hand retained the refugees in the labour intensive Pioneer Corps, imposed a number of restrictions on their service, and perceived them to be enemy aliens. Up until 1943, these Jewish refugees who dubbed themselves the 'kings own loyal enemy aliens'<sup>95</sup> were clearly regarded only loyal enough to serve under a veil of inequality.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Copy of Speech given by Harry Blake, *Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women Social*, 23 July 1996; Dear, *10 Commando*, p. 84.

## Chapter 6

### Changing Names and Identity Papers, 1943-45

The majority of refugees witnessed their former lives in Germany and Austria crumble as Nazi persecution escalated. They and their families were stripped of their rights, their dignity and their citizenship. Their German consciousness had been punctured simply because they were Jews. However, by the time of their escape, the Nazis had not been able to destroy everything that they held precious; their Jewish identity and their family name survived intact.<sup>1</sup> It was only in 1943, when the refugee servicemen were permitted to transfer to or join British units other than the Pioneer Corps, that these forms of identities were placed in jeopardy. The British army gave Jewish refugees the option of officially altering their names and their identification papers, with the view of removing evidence of their former German nationality and Jewish faith, a precaution against possible recrimination in the event of capture at the hands of the Nazis. For most refugee soldiers the option of changing identities was completely at their own discretion.<sup>2</sup> This chapter analyses the significance of this dilemma and examines the major issues surrounding the opportunity for refugees to alter their identity. It will assess whether there was any common rationale behind the refugees' decision to either change, or to keep their original names. If a refugee did decide to change his name, what did they change it to and why? Did the decision to alter information on their identification papers have any impact on their Jewishness whilst serving in the British army?

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<sup>1</sup> As was explained in previous chapters, the majority of the refugees had seen their affinity with their Jewish identity grow as a result of their ill treatment by the Nazis.

<sup>2</sup> In circumstances of refugee soldiers being sent abroad in combat units there was a policy of compulsory deletion of any written evidence that revealed details of their former nationality. Refugees accepted into the Special Operations Executive (SOE) were required to completely alter their entire identity and destroy any evidence of their past.

Before 1943, the vast majority of refugees were restricted to the Pioneer Corps. It was claimed that they were not permitted in the front line for their own security.<sup>3</sup> Other than the unanticipated involvement of refugees during the 1940 retreat from France, the War Office did not intend to use the refugee soldiers in any fighting.<sup>4</sup> In 1943, a change in policy permitted the refugees to transfer to fighting units, thus increasing the likelihood of refugees being used in battle. As a consequence there was greater relevance and expediency for the War Office to grant extra 'protection' to the refugee servicemen, something made more possible due to their Jewish and Germanic speaking background. The main concern of the War Office centred on the possibility of refugees being captured by the enemy and receiving ill treatment because of their Jewish and Germanic origin.<sup>5</sup>

In order to fully understand why the War Office encouraged a voluntary policy of removing information from the refugees' documentation, it is important to examine why certain documents which ordinary British soldiers had to keep on their person were a hazard to the refugees' safety. The structure of the refugees' attestation certificates and army pay books, better known as their AB64 (army book) were no different to those of British soldiers. The pay book outlined the military career of the soldier - from his medical records to his education and training. The attestation certificates gave details of the refugees' enlistment and contained an oath of loyalty to the King of England (George VI). The content of these documents openly exposed the refugees' religious identity and provided evidence of their former German or Austrian background. The British Army pay book gave details of the refugee soldiers' religious

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<sup>3</sup> *A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army*, Recruiting Circular Number 2A, The Central Office For Refugees (No Date), in possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>4</sup> As was discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

<sup>5</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 March 1943, p. 5.

denomination, which was 'Jewish', and their army service number.<sup>6</sup> The attestation form gave details of the soldiers' place of birth and nationality of their parents. Question 3 (a) asked 'are you a British subject' to which the reply of the refugees was 'no' to be followed by 'German' or 'Austrian'.<sup>7</sup> This was in spite of the fact that their national citizenship had long been removed by the Nazis. Another system of identification was the use of identity discs. These were worn around the neck and included the soldier's army number, the initial of their first name, their last name, and the initials of their religious denomination. All these identification documents would clearly inform any captor that not only was this soldier a Jew, the Reich's enemy, but that they also were formerly from Germany and Austria and so deemed traitors to the Nazi State. It was presumed that this would leave the refugees in grave danger, possibly inviting a death sentence.<sup>8</sup>

In an attempt by the War Office to minimise the chances of a refugees' real identity being 'found out', they petitioned for much of the information in the documents to be altered or erased. Some of the changes were enforced but the refugees were given a choice on most amendments. One of these options was to change their name by deed poll, with all paperwork arranged by the army.<sup>9</sup> The academic John Fox suggested that the "authorities decreed the compulsory anglicisation of German-Jewish names".<sup>10</sup> However, in most instances it was not compulsory and the refugees retained

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<sup>6</sup> Mr and Mrs M. Myer, Army Pay Book, 97/42/1, in the Imperial War Museum. However, this number was distinctive to 'enemy aliens' as will be explained later.

<sup>7</sup> Mr and Mrs M. Myer, Attestation Certificate, 97/42/1, in the Imperial War Museum.

<sup>8</sup> Mr. Silverman raised this issue in parliament. HC Vol 387, col 1194, 17 March 1943.

<sup>9</sup> The majority of refugees from Germany and Austria who changed their names were those serving in the British army. *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, March 1949, p. 6.

<sup>10</sup> Fox, John P, 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), p. 33.

the right to choose whether to change their name or not, and if so, what to change it to.

The majority of refugees in the army possessed names that were Germanic in origin, such as Sahrlemen or Fleischner.<sup>11</sup> In some cases the names had a distinctly Jewish/Hebrew tone such as Josephy, Friedman or Goldstein.<sup>12</sup> Most refugees, especially those who volunteered to join army units that were likely to accompany the invasion forces into Europe or North Africa, were given the opportunity to change their names. The War Office actively advised and encouraged the refugees to adopt more British sounding names, so as to prevent immediate detection of their identity should they be captured by enemy forces. It was stated in the *Conditions of Service* information pamphlet: “A man may change his name before going overseas”.<sup>13</sup> This conclusively demonstrates that the option to change their names was not compulsory. The fact that not all the refugees changed their original names also demonstrates that they were given the choice rather than it being an obligation.

Other allied armies adopted this policy of optional name change during certain stages of the war. It was encouraged for the same reasons in the French army before the German invasion. It was reported “in view of the barbarism with which the Nazi soldiers treat the Jews in Poland, Jewish soldiers in the French army should change their names to more French sounding names, so as to escape the same fate should they

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<sup>11</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000, and Dr. Otto Fleming, Second Interview, Sheffield, 23 March 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Hans Jackson, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000; Peter Frean, Interview, London, 12 April 2000; and *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, May 1950, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> *Conditions of Service in the British Army for Refugees and other Aliens* (Issued by The Jewish Refugees' Committee from Information Supplied by the War Office, National Service Dept: London, 1943). In the Wiener Library.

fall into the hands of the Nazis as war prisoners”.<sup>14</sup> The American army took the issue one stage further with the granting of naturalisation as American citizens to all refugees that were serving, dependent on the fulfilment of certain conditions.<sup>15</sup>

The British government’s granting of permission for refugees to change their names was unique in British history. During the First World War ‘enemy aliens’ resident in Britain were officially forbidden to alter their names. This policy was later extended to all foreigners up until 1971.<sup>16</sup> So, the Home Office’s granting of special authorization for such a name-changing policy demonstrates the huge significance of this issue at the time, whilst it also highlights the considerable efforts that the War Office made to ensure the safety of its refugee soldiers, despite them still technically being ‘enemy aliens’.

Under everyday circumstances the changing of one’s name may not be regarded as a dilemma. For the refugees, however, after all their terrible experiences under Nazi rule, the changing of their names could have been the traumatic culmination of a systematic erosion of cultural heritage that had shaped their recent past. It could subsequently have been a hard decision to make. However, it can be seen that the reaction of many refugees was quite the contrary. Surprisingly, many of the refugees did not feel that the situation placed them in a particularly difficult predicament. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy for one was not contacted by any refugees who were worried about changing their name.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 22, 3 October 1939, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 June 1942, p. 7. The issue of naturalisation is discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>16</sup> *Foreign subjects changing their names in Britain 1916-71*, 6 August 2003, <http://www.pro.gov.uk/pathways/FamilyHistory/gallery5/name.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

A number of the refugees decided against creating a new name for themselves.<sup>18</sup> A series of common factors existed behind this rationale to preserve their family name. Bernard Sarle, a refugee serviceman from Germany, confirmed that a portion of men in his pioneer unit did not want to change their names. Bernard believed the significance of their surnames meant too much to the refugees for them to alter, despite the risks they might have faced if they fell into enemy hands.<sup>19</sup> The refugees' names were a form of identity that the Nazis did not completely revoke (bar the enforced adding of Israel and Sara on to their passports).<sup>20</sup> Henry Van Der Walde wanted to preserve his surname because he felt that he owed such a gesture in the memory of his family and as an act of resistance against the Nazis. He recalled that the refugees were advised by the British authorities to change their names if they sounded German or Jewish. Nevertheless, Henry decided that, "I did not want my name to get extinguished".<sup>21</sup> Henry Adler explained that he was very worried about what would happen to him if he were taken prisoner. He felt that his original surname was typically Jewish, although not distinctly German, and so could have caused problems if he was captured. Despite this fear, he decided not to make any alterations to his surname. He declared, "I was rather proud of my name and wouldn't change it. It meant a lot to me. I felt very stubborn about it".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> A minority of the refugee interviewees did not change their name during the war.

<sup>19</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>20</sup> P.W Johnson, Passport, 85/2/1, Imperial War Museum. "The 2<sup>nd</sup> Ordinance pertaining to the execution of the "law about Changes to Family Names and First Names" forced Jewish citizens to adopt the mandatory first names of 'Israel' and 'Sara' respectively as of 1 January 1939". Rürup, Reinhard (ed), *Topography of Terror: Gestapo, SS and Reichssicherheitschauptamt on the Prince-Albrecht-Terrain: A Documentation* (Verlag Willmuth Arenhövel: Berlin, 1998), p. 112.

<sup>21</sup> Henry Van Der Walde, Interview, Bury, 7 June 2000.

<sup>22</sup> Henry did decide to anglicise his first name although most of his comrades called him Larry after the popular musician Larry Adler. Henry Adler, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.



Not all the refugees kept their original names because they felt it held such personal significance. For some, there was no easily identifiable reason behind the decision to keep their name. Martin Goldenberg did not regard the issue of changing his name as one of any great importance. He did not feel that it was a decision that he deliberated over to any significant degree. He merely decided that, "I just didn't want to do it".<sup>23</sup> Karl Fraser also felt it was unnecessary formally to change his original name, Friedrich, in the army. He said that the British soldiers tended to call him Charles rather than Karl anyhow. However, he did eventually change his name by deed poll after the war simply because, "I wanted to anglicise my name as no one could pronounce Friedrich. I wasn't hung up about the name; it was just that no one could pronounce it".<sup>24</sup> Henry Adler also changed his first name, Heinrich, so he would be able to "fit in more" with the British troops.<sup>25</sup> These were not individual cases. Fritz Lustig believed that many refugees did not make a big deal about the decision to change their names. He explained that his reason for keeping his original name was because, "if you were taken prisoner, they would eventually find out who you are. I saw no reason to [change name], although many did change. I knew lots of people in my unit who changed names, but I wasn't involved in any discussions about it".<sup>26</sup>

Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recalled, "as far as I know many of them [refugees] did change their names".<sup>27</sup> It can be seen that this was very true.<sup>28</sup> Most refugees had no problems or 'hang-ups' about changing their name. Peter Frean recalled that he did

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<sup>23</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

<sup>25</sup> Adler, Interview.

<sup>26</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000. The belief that the Germans would discover the refugees' identity despite changes to their identification papers raises a weakness of the whole plan. A Germanic accent was one clue to their old identity that it would have been difficult for all refugees to completely disguise.

<sup>27</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>28</sup> It is difficult to establish the number of refugees in the army who took a new name. The majority of refugee servicemen interviewees said that they had changed their name during the war.

not experience a great a dilemma when faced with the opportunity to change his name on joining the Royal Artillery. Bernard Sarle also recalls that he did not feel sad when changing his name. He believed that it was the, “natural thing to do in the circumstances”. He felt that he had to change his name in case he was captured. The matter was as simple as that.<sup>29</sup> He believed that if any of the refugees from Germany or Austria were caught they would have immediately been hung as traitors. Most refugees adopted a new name for this reason.<sup>30</sup> Ken Overman also cited the threat of being taken prisoner as the reason for changing his name after having joined an active unit.<sup>31</sup>

Not all the refugees changed their name through fear of the consequences should they be captured. Many took on a new name in an attempt to protect any family that still remained in Europe. Many felt that being both a former citizen of Germany or Austria and a Jew fighting for the British army, could invite serious repercussions for all of their relatives. Harry Blake explained that it was the British army that actually spread the idea that a refugee’s family was at risk if they did not alter their name. Harry recalled that he joined the Tank Corps in 259 Company, but before he was sent to camp at Aldershot the refugees were interviewed one by one after parade. He explained that it was at this interview that he was informed, “You most probably will be sent abroad, so we advise you to change your name in case you are taken prisoner, so your family will not suffer also”. This convinced Harry that he should take on a new identity starting initially with a new name.<sup>32</sup> Eric Kenneth explained that it was only when he joined the Royal Artillery in 1943 that he was made aware of the

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<sup>29</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ken Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

opportunity to take on a new name. He stated that his decision to change his name was made more out of fear of reprisals for his family in Germany than out of a fear for his own safety. He said, “I did not mind to die, but if they find my corpse and identify me they will kill all my relatives in Austria They have got my finger prints and my photographs”.<sup>33</sup> Hans Jackson was also led to believe that if he were taken prisoner by the Nazis, then his parents, whom he understood to be still alive in Germany, would be placed in great danger. He said that, “if they get us then they would get our parents”. He also revealed that on joining a fighting unit the refugee had to swear to the army that they were aware of these dangers if captured.<sup>34</sup> The British army indeed made the refugees read the following unique declaration when they volunteered for overseas service,

I hereby certify that I understand the risks to which I and my relatives may be exposed by my employment in the British army outside the United Kingdom. Notwithstanding this, I certify that I am willing to be employed in any theatre of war.<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to note that there were concerns among some British authorities as to whether such an opportunity for the refugees to change their names should have been permitted. Reverend Leslie Hardman explained that some non-Jewish officers did not like the idea of refugees taking ‘English names’.<sup>36</sup> Lord Salveson, Privy Councillor, objected to the idea of Jews in general adopting English names. He stated, “I have no prejudice against the Jews, but I do object to their assuming names that lead people to suppose their ancestors came over with the Normans or were of English, Scottish or

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<sup>33</sup> Eric Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>35</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman, Interview, London, 28 January 2003.

Welsh descent". He wrote an article calling for a ban on all aliens being able to change their names. He wrote, "so often had the Welsh name of Lewis been adopted by persons whose real name is Levi that one can never be sure whether a company director of that name is a Jew or a Welshman".<sup>37</sup>

It is difficult to come to any conclusion as to whether there was any correlation between the religious orthodoxy of the refugees and the likelihood of them changing their name. There is little evidence to suggest that the more religious the refugee serviceman the more unlikely it was that he would make the decision to change his name. Many Jews have a 'Hebrew' name and this was also true in the case of the refugees. However a 'Hebrew' name is only used for religious purposes, such as calling men to the *Torah*, in certain prayers, and in Jewish marriages.<sup>38</sup> Not all Jews possess or even know that they possess a Hebrew name. Louis Rudnic told that his Hebrew name was Leiser and Bernard Sarle said his was Emmanuel. Nevertheless, even those refugees who did possess a Hebrew name would not have stated it on any military documentation, as it was not the name used to identify them on most official papers.<sup>39</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman felt that it was not a problem for the Jewish refugees to change their secular names in the army and he advised as such. He believed that it was not necessary for anyone to become a martyr and that to change their name would not be a denial of their Jewish identity. However he explained, that it was unnecessary for the refugees to change their Hebrew name.<sup>40</sup> So, even if the religious refugees decided to give up their Jewish sounding family name, they were still able to preserve, most importantly, their Hebrew name. Keeping their Hebrew

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<sup>37</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 16 May 1941, p. 5.

<sup>38</sup> Such as memorial prayers or the prayers for the sick.

<sup>39</sup> None of the interviewees revealed that they used their Hebrew name in every day life.

<sup>40</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

name would not increase the possibility of discovery that they were Jews, if the German army caught them and it also preserved an aspect of their Jewish identity.

Although most refugees did not regard the question of changing name as a difficult and sensitive issue, there is much to suggest that the decision as to which name to actually take was more problematic and stressful. Bernard Sarle said that; “even though it was a quick decision to make [whether to change their name or not] there was much debate and serious thinking over what names to take”.<sup>41</sup> Harry Blake also commented that whilst he did not find it difficult to make the decision to change his name, he and other refugees became involved in “much hectic arguing and bartering” over what to actually call themselves.<sup>42</sup> Some refugees just could not decide upon an English name and so telephone directories were made available to provide them with some ideas.<sup>43</sup>

There were a number of common motives behind the different choices of name taken. Although each individual had a different combination of motives it is possible to categorise some general trends which influenced the decision making process. Fred Pelican, refugee serviceman, believed that the changing of names had wider implications.<sup>44</sup> There was one group of refugees who wanted to retain some element of their original name for personal reasons. This was a major motivation for Ken Overman, who described how he decided to change his name but wanted to keep his

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<sup>41</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>42</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>43</sup> Dear, Ian, *Ten Commando 1942-45* (Leo Cooper Ltd: London, 1987), pp. 98-99.

<sup>44</sup> Pelican, Fred, *From Dachau to Dunkirk* (Vallentine Mitchell and Co Ltd: London, 1993), p. 43.

original initials.<sup>45</sup> Peter Frean felt a similar compunction and kept the initial from his original surname, which was Friedman.<sup>46</sup>

Another group of refugees preserved elements of their old name by choosing the British equivalent of their Germanic or Jewish name. This was regarded as the simplest method, which had the added bonus of making their new name easy to remember. It was an option that did not affect the refugees' Jewish identity in the same dimension as those who chose a name completely dissimilar to the original. The anglicisation of Germanic names was very common and it was encouraged by the army. The refugees were only given a very short time to consider whether to change their name and what name they should adopt. Altering a name to the most common British equivalent was the easiest and least daunting choice. Hans Jackson's original name was Hans Josephy but he felt the first name was too German and the surname too Jewish sounding, so he anglicised it to Harold Jackson, although after the war he preferred to be called Hans again.<sup>47</sup> Some refugees acquired a name that was not necessarily an anglicised version of their original name, but one they felt to be either the most English sounding or simply an example of a common English surname. Harry Blake explained that there were plenty of men who acquired the surname Smith.<sup>48</sup> Fred Pelican recalled that he knew of a David Cohen who became Henry Smith.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>46</sup> Frean, Interview.

<sup>47</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>48</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>49</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 43.

Some refugees approached the changing of names with a less ideological impetus. Harry Blake chose to keep his initials but he explained that this was more of a practical decision rather than an attempt to preserve a part of his old identity. He stated that, “the reason why I chose my name was because before I left home every handkerchief and pants I wore my mother put a little identity tag sown in with my original name, Heinz Lutts Becker ‘HLB’. I figured if I changed it to something completely different I would have to take all the tags out. So I went for Harry Lou Blake. It was a random middle name and made it the American way of spelling as did not just want Lu [*sic*]”.<sup>50</sup> Peter Masters had similar name tag concerns. “Keeping my initial would be a good idea. It would be easier to get used to. Beside, I had some rather fancy handkerchiefs with P.A embroidered in the corner”. Peter was later to discover that he was unable to take a surname beginning with ‘A’.<sup>51</sup> This is explained later.

Practicality did not just involve the keeping of initials. Whilst it was important that the refugees took a name they would feel comfortable with, it was important that they took a name that they could pronounce. It was not just long complicated names that could cause problems for the refugees to say, even the most basic of names could cause difficulties for refugees with strong German accents. Taking a name they could not say correctly would, of course, only have resulted in suspicion if captured. George Lane,<sup>52</sup> who joined the secret commando unit<sup>53</sup> of the British army, encountered this

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<sup>50</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>51</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando's War Against the Nazis* (Presido Press: California, 1997), p. 53.

<sup>52</sup> His original name was Gyuri Lanyi.

<sup>53</sup> The 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando was a highly secret unit comprising of mostly German and Austrian Jewish refugees. They were used as interrogators, interpreters, military intelligence experts and worked behind enemy lines. Its existence was not known about until after the war. For a detailed account of the role of the 10 Commando see, Dear, Ian, *Ten Commando* and Masters, *Striking Back*.

predicament when he was asked how he wanted to be named. He told his commanding officer that he would have like to have been called George Smith. The general discarded the idea immediately. “Don’t be a bloody fool, you can’t even pronounce the ‘th’ in Smith”. So we fixed Lane [*sic*”].<sup>54</sup>

One group of refugees decided to take a name that was almost identical to the original but for a single change of letter. Fred Pelican explained that “I simply changed a single letter, instead of spelling Pelikan with a K I changed it to a C – Pelican. My first name I simply changed to Fred [from Fritz]. Fred Pelican- simple choice [*sic*”].<sup>55</sup>

Ian Lowitt’s original surname was Löwit so he decided it would be simplest to add a ‘T’ and get rid of the umlaut.<sup>56</sup> Sometimes attempting to change ones name in the most simplistic of ways was not always the most effective means of concealing ones Jewish identity. Reverend Leslie Hardman recalled that “there is this one fellow called Mendleshon with an H and he said to me, “I’ve changed my name sir, just knocked the H off”. So this soldier became known as Mendleson. Reverend Leslie Hardman remembered that he could not stop laughing.<sup>57</sup>

The refugees had to make a quick decision over what name to take. At the same times there were often a number of obstacles, which could make the situation very complicated. Bernard Sarle explained that his first impulse was to alter his name to Sarleman from his original name Sahrleman, but he was told that it sounded a bit like Snarle and his officer did not like it. Bernard was advised to make his surname Salter. Bernard agreed and informed the Major of his decision. Once again his choice was

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<sup>54</sup> Leigh, Wendy, ‘Churchill’s Secret Commandos’, *Daily Mail Weekend*, (Associated Newspapers Ltd, 3 April 1999), p. 21.

<sup>55</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 43.

<sup>56</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, Aberdeen, 28 May 2000.

<sup>57</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.



frowned upon as he was informed that it was the same as that of a West Indian family and that he could not have it. So, Bernard explained that, “I thought of my cousins in America who called themselves Salton and that this may have been a better idea to satisfy everybody. However, in the end I thought of just using the name Sarle”. So after much deliberation the new records officially declared him as Bernard Sarle with ‘Bernard’ being the anglicised version of his original name Bernhardt.<sup>58</sup>

For Peter Masters, choosing a new name was also not as simple a matter as he would have liked. After volunteering for the 10 (Inter-Allied) Commando, Peter explained that all the newcomers were summoned in alphabetical order to inform the commanding officer of their intended new name.<sup>59</sup> In the commando units, policy surrounding the altering of identity was different to that of other units. It was compulsory for refugees to change their entire name and remove evidence of their former existence in the Nazi Reich.<sup>60</sup> Peter described that his friend insisted that it “was no big deal” as to what name the refugees adopted. Peter explained that he disagreed. He felt it was an important decision that needed serious thinking about, as he did not want to be stuck with a poor choice of name for the future. Having been born as Peter Arany he thought that Peter Arlen would be a simple but effective choice.<sup>61</sup> However the soldier in front of him, Abramowitz, heard Peter’s suggestions with his fellow soldiers and decided to steal the idea of having Arlen as a surname. Peter Master recalled, “I hardly had time to think of another name. I consulted my pals. How about Garvey (the name of a young women I admired)?”. His comrades replied that there was a Garvin in the troop and it would be too similar a name. So,

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<sup>58</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, p. 52.

<sup>60</sup> This is discussed later in the section.

<sup>61</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, p. 52.

Peter tried another name but the refugees said a T Troop member already had it with a different spelling and this soldier was having problems.<sup>62</sup> Peter explained that he did not want a name with negative connotations. Peter had another idea. He said that there had been one commanding officer, Major Masters, “who had looked like my real idea of a real soldier and a decent sort. So I took that. No other name with ‘A’ came to mind and ‘M’ would commemorate my grandfather Arnold Metzger”.<sup>63</sup>

It was not unusual for there to be refugees in the military who had undergone multiple changes of name even before they had joined the British Army. Louis Rudnic spoke of his experiences and how they had resulted in him adopting a number of new names. Initially his name was Lazarus but when his family moved to Poland nobody could understand this name. Louis explained that the name Lazarus was changed to the nearest Polish equivalent, which was Lashash. Later, when he lived in Germany, he became known as Ludwig. Finally, after having fled to Britain, he explained that, “the British all pronounced it wrong, saying the ‘u’ as bucket and the ‘w’ as in witch”. So before he joined the British army he changed his name once again, this time to Louis.<sup>64</sup>

There was one final common rationale among the refugees regarding their choice of new name. Rather than seeking a name that echoed their original family name, or was created as a matter of convenience, a number of refugees wanted to make the most of this rare opportunity to acquire the name of someone they admired. Harry Blake remembered that a friend from 251 Company changed his name to Henry Hall, the

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<sup>62</sup> There were different troops within the Commando units. Peter Masters and Harry Brooke were in 3 Troop, sometimes referred to as X Troop.

<sup>63</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, p. 53.

<sup>64</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London, 8 May 2000.

same name as that of a famous bandleader.<sup>65</sup> Otto Fleming was studying a medical degree in Vienna until the Nazis removed him from the course. When he had the opportunity to change his original name, Fleischner, he decided to take on the surname of one of his medical heroes, Dr. Alexander Fleming.<sup>66</sup>

Some refugees wanted to demonstrate their loyalty to Britain by adopting the name of a well-known British political or military personality. Fritz Lustig knew of one refugee who changed his surname from Jellinek to Jellicoe after Sir John Rushworth Jellicoe, the Admiral and Commander of the British fleet in the first part of World War One.<sup>67</sup> Fred Pelican felt that some refugees went a “bit beyond” what was necessary when taking such names, such as Cecil Montgomery whose original name was Otto Weintraub.<sup>68</sup> Bernard Sarle knew of a refugee who tried to get a famous name that was ultimately rejected. He recalled, “there was one silly boy who said he wanted to be called Winston Churchill. The company commander told us that we should use discretion to avoid trouble”.<sup>69</sup> To choose a name like Winston Churchill would only have invited a greater degree of attention and suspicion in the event of capture.

Ian Lowitt believed that some refugees did not take the name changing at all seriously. At times, the situation was quite comical. One instance he found particularly amusing was when a friend changed his name from Brum to Brent and then another changed his name from Troller to Trent. He said that they made a joke of these two men, Brent and Trent.<sup>70</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy agreed that there was an element of humour that

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<sup>65</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>66</sup> Dr. Otto Fleming, Second Interview, Sheffield, 23 March 2000.

<sup>67</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>68</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 43.

<sup>69</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>70</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

surrounded this policy that held essentially serious connotations. He used to have a running joke with one sergeant who changed his name to Arnold Horwel. Whenever they met Levy would say, “how is my former Sergeant Horowitz?”. There was also a joke among the refugees about the almost absurd nature of the mass name alterations. The joke went, “Montgomery come to Bubbe!”.<sup>71</sup> This joke mocks the situation of a yiddisher grandmother calling out affectionately to a son or grandson by the extremely British name Montgomery.

The changing of names was just one of a number of methods employed by the British government to hide the refugees’ former identities as much as possible. The refugees were also offered the opportunity to erase the statement of their Jewish faith on their army pay books. Similar to the changing of names, this was a decision left to the refugees themselves. There were significant consequences if a refugee kept or removed the evidence of his religion, arguably more so than the consequences of changing their names.

John Fox argued that some refugees felt resentment at the military authorities for not supporting a policy of naturalising the refugee servicemen, something that could have given them greater protection in the event of capture.<sup>72</sup> The idea of giving the refugees British nationality was discarded by the government. Instead, alternatives were put into action that (it was believed) would have provided the refugees greater security if captured. Ken Overman disagreed with the idea that some refugees felt antipathy towards the British army over this issue. He believed that the army did make great

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<sup>71</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview. The Yiddish term Bubbe has many meanings with the most common being a Jewish grandmother. Rosten, Leo, *The Joys of Yiddish* (Penguin Books: London, 1971), p. 54.

<sup>72</sup> Fox, ‘German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers’, *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, p. 33.

efforts to help remove information that might reveal their former identities.<sup>73</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy also felt that the army was cooperative to the needs of the refugees concerning the issue.<sup>74</sup>

In early 1943, Sir James Grigg, the Secretary of State of War, was asked whether the men in the (alien) pioneer companies who were to be sent overseas were to be provided with identity papers and pay books that made them indistinguishable from soldiers of British birth. Grigg replied, “my Hon. Friend’s suggestions are now under consideration”.<sup>75</sup> It was later stated, “the position of the men who might unfortunately fall into the hands of the enemy had been carefully considered”. It was claimed that it had always been the aim of the Army Council to give out every measure of protection to the refugees and it was eventually decided that there would be an opportunity for refugees to remove evidence of their nationality in their pay books.<sup>76</sup> This change was compulsory. Erasing details of their former nationality was not a predicament for the refugees as by this stage of the war there is little evidence to suggest that any of the refugees still felt any element of being a German or an Austrian.<sup>77</sup> Ken Overman recalled that the details of nationality on his pay book were just left blank; they were not replaced with ‘British’ He had no problems with this alteration though.<sup>78</sup>

It was not just the refugees’ nationality details that were removed. When the refugees were attested into the army they were issued with an army number. However, the number issued to refugees was noticeably different from that of any British soldier.

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<sup>73</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>74</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>75</sup> HC Vol 387, col 14, 23 February 1943. Reported in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, April 1943, p. 5, and *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 February 1943, p. 1.

<sup>76</sup> *Conditions of Service in the British Army for Refugees and other Aliens*.

<sup>77</sup> This conclusion is based on evidence from interviews with refugee ex-servicemen.

<sup>78</sup> Overman, Interview.

The War Office subsequently had to make a compulsory alteration of these numbers in order to prevent any immediate detection of the soldiers' roots if they became Prisoners of War (POW). Bernard Sarle recalled that not only were his pay books altered but also that new numbers were added. He argued, "previously all 'aliens' had a number staring with '1380', which was a clear clue to their original identity if captured".<sup>79</sup> Indeed, all enemy alien soldiers had a distinctive 'alien' number. On refugee serviceman Martin Meyer's attestation certificate it clearly stated that his army number was 13800426.<sup>80</sup> Private Wolfgang Josephs, (13807308) Bernard Sarle (13802678), and Willy Schmulinson (13804478) also held an army number beginning with 1380.<sup>81</sup> When the refugee servicemen changed their names and identity papers this army number was removed and replaced with a new one. When Wolfgang Josephs changed his name, like all refugees, he was issued with a document that also stated the new army number,

He has in pursuance of an army council instruction changed his army number and name to:

No - 13106765 Rank - Pte Name - Johnson, Peter William and that this change is recognised by the civil authorities.

Gloucester. Date - 10<sup>th</sup> February 1944 Signed: Major Commanding 2220 Company Pioneer Corps.<sup>82</sup>

It has been suggested that even though all the refugees' army numbers were altered, the new numbers they were given all began with '131'. Ian Lowitt argued that the beginning of his changed army number was 13116640 and that the '131' was put at the front of every refugee's number. He did not know that this number was specific to

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<sup>79</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>80</sup> Mr and Mrs M. Myer, Attestation Certificate, 97/42/1, in the Imperial War Museum.

<sup>81</sup> P. W. Johnson, Changing Name Document, 85/2/1, in the Imperial War Museum; Certified Copy of Attestation, July 1940, in Bernard Sarle's possession; Willy Schmulinson Identity Card, 17 August 1942, and Record of Service: Army Form W5258, 12 December 1945, in the Jewish Museum.

<sup>82</sup> P.W Johnson, Changing Name Document, 85/2/1, in the Imperial War Museum.

aliens at the time but on reflection believed that, “if the Nazis knew about this number they would instantly know that you were a refugee from Germany whether you had your name changed or not”.<sup>83</sup> Bernard Sarle's army number was changed to 13116386 whilst Louis Rudnic's was altered to 13116247.<sup>84</sup> This would suggest that the start of the new numbers given to the refugee soldiers (131) were as distinctive to enemy aliens as their previous number (1380). That the refugee soldiers changed one unique number to another one defeated the purpose of the change in the first place.

During the early stages of war the question of the identity discs of Jewish soldiers was a subject of representations to the War Office.<sup>85</sup> It was explained that on these identity discs the Jewish soldiers had ‘Jew’ inscribed. The wisdom of this conspicuous form of identification was questioned. The War Office, however, felt that it was difficult to do anything other than clearly specify the soldiers’ religion.<sup>86</sup> Despite this setback the pressure for change remained, partly due to the fact that many Jewish soldiers felt very passionately about the situation. One worried Jewish mother wrote that her son informed her that he would rather commit suicide than be taken prisoner in Germany and that she was sure this was the attitude of many Jews who did not wish to disclose their Jewish religion whilst in the army.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, John Morris M.P made the House of Commons aware that there was grave apprehension felt by some Jewish soldiers and by Jewish communities over the threat of soldiers’ capture and evidence of their

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<sup>83</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Army Reference for Bernard Sarle from Lt. Col A.B Harnden, 21 September 1945, in Bernard Sarle’s possession; Army Reference for Cpl Louis Rudnic from Major-General L. O. Lyne, 29 August 1945 in Louis Rudnic’s possession.

<sup>85</sup> Mr Vernon Bartlett speaking in parliament. HC Vol 387, col 14, 23 February 1943.

<sup>86</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Vol XX, No 258, 11 November 1939, p. 4.

<sup>87</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 January 1940, p. 20.

Judaism emerging. However, the War Office only reiterated its position on the matter saying that it would not “depart from the present practice”.<sup>88</sup>

There was a small number of refugees who were required to take the alteration of their identities to the extreme. Those who became part of the SOE not only had to change name but destroy all evidence of their former identities and create a new meticulous identity. The army was very specific that in order for the commando units to succeed nothing could remain that would compromise either the safety of the men or the security of the units in general. Peter Masters recalled that they were issued new army pay books that bore their new name, regimental origin and number, birth place and religion. Peter said that he had to burn all evidence of his previous identity. Additionally, he was not permitted to send or receive mail from anyone with foreign sounding names; to make no mention of the Pioneer Corps (a clue to their identity as most refugees initially served in the Pioneer Corps); was not permitted to keep a diary (although this was a regulation for all British soldiers, some did not comply); and they had to create a plausible story to account for their foreign accents.<sup>89</sup> The army devoted much of its energies to creating a new identity for these ‘enemy aliens.’ Refugee commando Brian Groves recalled,

besides new names and pay books the men were issued with army numbers which made them members of one of four regiments, the Royal Sussex, the Buffs, the Royal West Kent and the Hampshires, and later they wore the regimental cap badges of these regiments in their green berets. They were also told by Hilton Jones to make up a complete cover story of their backgrounds which would stand up to interrogation, and were aided in this by being provided with false next-of-kin, false mail facilities and so on, which involved a torturous procedure where all of it was kept secret from the normal pay and records offices without disturbing the normal administrative channels.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>88</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XX, No 239, 24 November 1939, p. 3.

<sup>89</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, pp. 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> Dear, *Ten Commando*, p100.



One member of the SOE, George Lane, described how he was captured by the German army but managed to navigate around the accent problem by putting on his best Welsh accent, which he had developed after being billeted with the commandos in Aberdovey.<sup>91</sup> After much alteration, 'Peter Arany from Germany' became 'Pvt Peter Masters', who was born in London, joined the commandos from the Queens Own Royal West Kent Regiment and was a member of the Church of England.<sup>92</sup>

The declaration of being a member of the Church of England was not unusual. The opportunity to alter details of their religious denomination on their army pay books accompanied the opportunity to change their names. This prospect was optional for most refugees. The decision to either 'keep' Judaism or 'drop it' both had serious implications. Ken Overman was told that he was not allowed to leave the details of religious denomination in his pay book blank. The soldiers were obliged to specify something.<sup>93</sup> Henry Van Der Walde pointed out that the refugees did not have to state that they were Jewish on their documents if they did not want to. He remembered that where there was a question asking about religious denomination on the refugees' pay books and it was advised that Judaism not be mentioned. Instead, some refugees had Church of England put down. He stressed that this was not because of a lack of Jewish identity but more a measure of practical protection in case of service abroad and capture.<sup>94</sup> If they did specify Church of England, however, a host of problems ensued with regard to the provision of Jewish hospitality. In some cases it also

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<sup>91</sup> *Daily Mail Weekend*, 3 April 1999, p. 21, and *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, December 1946, p. 91.

<sup>92</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, p. 55.

<sup>93</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>94</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

prompted an element of condemnation from some quarters of religious Jews and gentiles alike.

For British Jews to state that they were members of the Church of England was not an uncommon practice. It was reported that many Jews registered as Church of England when they were attested.<sup>95</sup> Julius Kern was a British Jew who joined the Royal Navy. He explained that a friend of his had warned him of the dangers faced by a Jew if captured. Julius subsequently decided not to register as a Jew but as Church of England.<sup>96</sup> Eric Freeman believed that most British Jews didn't have their Jewish religion put on their identification papers and dog tags. He said they had Church of England or agnostic instead. Eric said that the only reason he did not do the same, even though he was aware of the possible danger, was "I was stupid, I didn't care".<sup>97</sup> Reverend H. I. Alexander also confirmed that a number of Jews had "become Church of England for the duration".<sup>98</sup> This decision taken by some Jewish troops did not please the Jewish chaplains. Reverend Leslie Hardman fully supported the idea that the refugees should change their names and erase details of their German or Austrian origins but he firmly opposed the actions of putting 'Church of England' rather than 'Jewish' on their identity discs. Hardman's proposed solution was that if the refugee did not want evidence of Judaism to appear on their identity tags, then they could get rid of them once they were overseas. He felt strongly, however, that they should not have claimed to be of a different faith.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 13, 15 January 1940, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> Julius Kern, Interview, London, 20 November 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Eric Freedman, Second Interview, London, 19 November 1999.

<sup>98</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 December 1939, p. 9.

<sup>99</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

When a Jewish soldier registered as Church of England it caused extra difficulties for the Chaplaincy Office and Jewish Welfare Board. As explained earlier, the Jewish chaplains had special lists that contained the whereabouts of all Jewish soldiers in their catchment areas. If a soldier did not state he was a Jew then he was not on the list. As a result these Jewish soldiers had little chance of receiving a visit from a Jewish chaplain, of being included in any religious celebrations, and of being granted permission for special leave during holy days. Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz described how he sometimes encountered Jewish soldiers on his visits despite previously having had no awareness of their existence. He wrote that on one occasion, whilst visiting a military hospital, a soldier approached him and explained that he was Jewish. Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz asked why his name was not on the list. The soldier replied that he had attested as Church of England.<sup>100</sup>

Another dilemma faced by Jewish British and refugee soldiers who were registered as Christians was the issue of burial rights. Ken Overman believed that religion had to be stated on the army pay books and on the identity tags for the purpose of identifying appropriate funeral and burial procedures in the event of the death of Jewish soldiers.<sup>101</sup> Bernard Sarle was one such refugee who felt that it was necessary to have official evidence of his Judaism, as he was afraid of being given the wrong burial.<sup>102</sup> Reverend Leslie Hardman confirmed that this was another obstacle for the Jewish chaplains.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 March 1941, pp. 8-9 and 28.

<sup>101</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>102</sup> Sarle, Interview.

<sup>103</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

In some cases gentile soldiers regarded Jewish soldiers who joined the army as 'Christians', as traitors to their religion or cowards. It was claimed that those soldiers who enlisted under a religion other than Judaism were not held in the same respect by their non-Jewish comrades as those who proclaimed their Jewishness.<sup>104</sup> One Jewish ex-serviceman angrily accused the Jewish soldiers who falsely attested of being guilty of lacking moral courage at a time of emergency, "just the time for testing, not denying one's faith".<sup>105</sup> Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz experienced the contempt felt by some of the non-Jewish personnel over this issue. He reported that he visited one regiment believing that there were two Jews within it. The commanding officer corrected the him saying that there were in fact three Jews present, "one orthodox, one liberal and one who ought to be damned well ashamed of himself. He is so ashamed of his faith that he had attested as Church of England". Reverend Dr. Louis Rabinowitz reflected, "how I wished that officer [the Jewish soldier registered as Church of England] could have heard the grim tone in which the commanding Officer referred to his defection!".<sup>106</sup>

Interestingly, the controversy of Jewish soldiers in the British army choosing to refrain from stating their religion is one that still continues to this day. Reverend Malcolm Weisman explained that he received requests from Jewish soldiers, who were to be sent to the Persian Gulf during the conflict in 1991, to change their religion from Jewish to Church of England.<sup>107</sup> This was because the Jewish soldiers, similar to the those soldiers during the Second World War, were worried that if they were captured, this time by the Iraqis, they would be badly treated because of their religion.

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<sup>104</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 January 1940, p. 23.

<sup>105</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 March 1940, p. 7.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Reverend Malcolm Weisman, Interview, London, 30 January 2003.

It was also reported that British Jewish soldiers serving in Iraq during the 2003 conflict were permitted to erase any mention of their religion on their dog tags. “The British Ministry of Defence made the decision to allow the removals following concerns expressed by the British Jewish community about possible torture”.<sup>108</sup>

To conclude, there can be little doubt about the considerable efforts made by the War Office to help protect their refugee soldiers. They offered numerous methods for the refugees to conceal their previous identities. In most cases much of the decision-making was left to the refugees themselves rather than being made compulsory. Evidence suggests that this policy of providing extra protection to the refugees was not extended to the British born soldiers in the army; it was unique to the refugees. On the advice of the army, a number of refugees did change details on documentation regarding their nationality and faith. The threat of capture was always the main driving force. It is also evident that a number of common factors influenced the decisions made by refugees regarding what names they should adopt. The decision to change their name was often taken quite lightly. However, the decision as to what name the refugees should then take on often presented more of a predicament. There were a number of consequences faced by refugees and British Jews in the army who stated ‘Church of England’ rather than ‘Jewish’ on their identification papers and discs. However, it still did not prevent a considerable number of refugees from doing so. Many refugees regarded the issues over changes of identification as a very memorable and important experience during their service. Refugee servicemen, Brian Groves, formerly Goldschmidt, recalled that at the time he felt amused, excited and fascinated by what was going on; “chaps copying particulars from their original pay

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<sup>108</sup> *British Soldiers Can Mute Religion*, 27 May 2003, [www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=7656](http://www.thejewishweek.com/news/newscontent.php3?artid=7656).

books and the sergeant-major forging ‘officers’ signatures”.<sup>109</sup> Its legacy remains with the majority of former refugees to the present day.

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<sup>109</sup> Dear, *Ten Commando*, p. 100.

## Chapter 7

### Opportunities for Naturalisation, 1939-1945

Despite the limitations imposed on their military service whilst in the Pioneer Corps, the refugees were fully fledged British soldiers, working towards the defeat of Hitler and Nazism. Their service in the British army was yet another chapter in a most remarkable transformation. They had seen their lives change dramatically within a short period of time: From German and Austrian citizens, to victims of the Reich. Then refugees from Nazism, to internment as enemy aliens, and finally members of the British army. The previous chapters have charted the metamorphosis of their national and religious identities/status and the refugees' subsequent treatment by the authorities. They demonstrate how, after fleeing from Germany and Austria, the British government's interpretation of their 'national' identity had a significant impact on the refugees. This chapter will examine the status of the refugees while serving as British soldiers. It will determine the extent to which there continued to be a conflict between the refugees' own perception of their status and those of the government and fellow British soldiers.

The refugee servicemen's allegiance to Britain was unequivocal.<sup>1</sup> One refugee serviceman, Fred Pelican, believed that Britain was the greatest country on earth.<sup>2</sup> To what extent did these former Germans and Austrians begin to identify themselves as

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<sup>1</sup> All refugee interviewees talked of their complete support for Britain. These comments confirm the verdict of the academic E.H. Rhodes-Wood, "their [the refugees] hatred of Hitler and all he stood for was personal and ever-present in their hearts, yet equally as strong was their affection for and loyalty to the land that had given them refuge". Rhodes-Wood, E.H., *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1960), pp. 23-24.

<sup>2</sup> Pelican, Fred, *From Dachau to Dunkirk* (Valentine Mitchell and Co Ltd: London, 1993), p. 59. It is interesting to note that Fred Pelican made no distinction between Britain and England. Many of the refugees made a similar lack of distinction.

actually British? Did their army service inspire them into considering permanent residence in Britain after the war? Was the question of naturalisation one that surfaced during the conflict? In comparison with America, how advanced and favourable to the refugees was the government's policies over the issue of British citizenship? This chapter will examine these questions with a particular focus on the controversial attitude of the government towards British-born women married to 'enemy alien' refugees.

Perhaps, surprisingly, a number of refugees had an ambivalent attitude towards the idea of becoming British even when they were serving as British soldiers. There were three main categories where refugees shared a common approach towards their national identities. The first group were those refugees who did not feel in any way 'British'. One reason for this was that they still retained a bond with their country of origin, despite what they had endured under the Nazi regime. Martin Goldenberg explained that even when he was in the British army he still harboured a feeling of being Austrian. He recalled that he did not identify himself simply as being an Austrian though, but rather as an "Austrian Jew with no religion". He explained that he was not a religious man before he joined the army and he remained uninterested in practicing Judaism whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps.<sup>3</sup>

In Chapter Five it was shown that one concern of the government regarding the loyalty of the refugees was that some of them "remained German at heart".<sup>4</sup> For some refugees, the text of this statement is true, but the meaning and interpretation of the words could not be further from that of the government's interpretation. Chapter One

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<sup>3</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

<sup>4</sup> *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, Vol XXI, No 191, 17 August 1940, p. 4.



discussed the reluctance of a number of the refugees to regard the Nazi regime as truly representing 'Germany'. Nazism and Germany were seen as two distinct entities, and they believed that with the removal of the Reich, their nation would return to its former self.<sup>5</sup> Whilst serving in the British army, this hope still existed among some refugee servicemen. It is evident that the refugees who held this opinion were often those who still had the desire eventually to return to Germany once the war was over. One of these refugees, Harry Brooke, explained, "I still regarded myself as a German right throughout the war". He said that he fought the war to liberate Germany and believed that the refugees did not "fight the Germans, we fought the Nazis".<sup>6</sup> Harry Brooke still recalled happy memories of Germany and, like the majority of refugees, still had family trapped under Nazi domination. His ultimate ambition was to, "destroy the Nazi system so we could all return".<sup>7</sup>

A second group of refugee servicemen, similarly, did not have any feelings of actually being British or even hoping to become British after the war. However, their earlier experiences under the Nazis, coupled with increasing awareness of the radically deteriorating conditions for European Jewry, had eradicated any national identification with their countries of origin. In these cases a feeling of Jewishness often became prominent within their psyche. Fritz Lustig was recently of the opinion that even though the refugees' roots were in Germany and Austria, the majority felt no identity toward their former nations. He stated "As far as nationality went they

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<sup>5</sup> John Fox argues, "it has been suggested that most refugees made the distinction between fighting against Nazism, but for their [idealised] Germany". In Fox, John P., 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), p. 24.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Brooke, Second Interview, Sheffield, 24 November 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Harry Brooke, First Interview, Sheffield, 26 May 1999.

regarded themselves as officially stateless refugees and nothing more”.<sup>8</sup> There is evidence to suggest that this opinion is valid. Peter Frean, for example, recalled that by the time he was a soldier in the British army, he no longer felt any form of national kinship and declared that he was completely “finished with Austria”. He, like Martin Goldenberg, felt a strong bond with Judaism, but not in the religious sense.<sup>9</sup> At first, Henry Adler also did not feel British. He explained that “I loved it here,” but he had joined the army to fight the Germans, not because of a developing British identity. Having no national affinity, he only identified himself as being a Jew.<sup>10</sup> One refugee soldier, Private Algor, described his personal identity in these words: “I am a refugee from Germany and have been in the British army for three years. Sometimes people call me a Jew, sometimes a German Jew, and sometimes simply a German. I am not a German. I refuse to be German. I am a Jew”.<sup>11</sup> So, it appeared that, for some refugees, being British soldiers did not have much impact on developing a British identity.

A third, much larger, group of refugee servicemen included those who, while serving in the British army, became British at heart. Life in the army and a growing sense of familiarity with Britain brought many refugees to developing a strong emotional and ideological bond with Britain. They admired the nation that had provided them with refuge and then wanted to remain there after the conflict, irrespective of whether they had only a temporary transit visa before war was declared.<sup>12</sup> Within the British army they greatly improved their English language skills and adapted to the British way of

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<sup>8</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Frean, Interview, London, 12 April 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Henry Adler, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 June 1943, p. 12.

<sup>12</sup> Mr A. P. Michaelis, Vice President of the Association of Jewish Refugees in Great Britain, said that the hope of the majority of refugees in the country was to stay in Britain rather than return to Germany or Austria. In *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 January 1944, pp. 5 and 6.

life, albeit mostly a military lifestyle.<sup>13</sup> Ken Overman recalled that his English was so good that some British members of the army would ask him to check their letters to see if they were right. Ken explained that he felt “very pro-British, after all, the nation had saved my life”.<sup>14</sup>

Harry Brooke pointed out that, initially, among of the refugee servicemen there was a difference between feeling British and wanting to become British.<sup>15</sup> However, after years of army service a number of refugees recognised that they did, indeed, want to become British citizens. Karl Fraser explained that as he quickly became accustomed to the British army he began to feel a kinship with Britain. He remembered that it did not take long until he felt that he wanted to become a British citizen.<sup>16</sup> After a period of serving in the army Henry Adler also admitted that he had become “slightly anglicised”. He remembered that he eventually accepted that he wanted to stay in England once the war was over.<sup>17</sup>

To what extent was naturalisation during the war a possibility for those refugees who saw themselves as potential British citizens? Did the government perceive the refugees soldiers as prospective British citizens? The Central Office for Refugees suggested that service in the army would greatly help a refugee’s case if he decided to apply to become a British citizen. It claimed that a refugee soldier would have his “future very carefully considered, that is to say as far as his permit to remain in this

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<sup>13</sup> Their relationship with the British populace is examined in the next chapter.

<sup>14</sup> Ken Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Brooke, Second Interview. Also, an important factor in some refugees’ desire to remain in Britain was that they did not want to return to their former countries after what had happened to the Jews. There was nothing there for them anymore. This attitude is discussed in the Conclusion. The fact that all the former German and Austrian interviewees remained in Britain after the war rather than emigrate to America or Israel again demonstrates that they eventually developed a comfortable bond with Britain.

<sup>16</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

<sup>17</sup> Adler, Interview.

country is concerned, and even perhaps his naturalisation”.<sup>18</sup> Did this promise materialise?

There were very different views concerning aliens becoming British citizens. The politician, Aneurin Bevan told parliament that he believed the refugees, specifically those who were serving in the Pioneer Corps, “would be extremely desirable as citizens”.<sup>19</sup> Lord Wedgwood and Eleanor Rathbone both shared a similar viewpoint. Wedgwood was a firm believer of equality for all refugees from Nazism. He urged that they should be treated as ordinary citizens of Britain. He was also aware that some refugees still hoped to return to their country of origin after the conflict. He stated,

I think they ought to be told by the government that they are on their way to becoming British citizens, that they must fit themselves into the community, that they must cease to think of some blessed time when they will be able to return to Vienna and Berlin, that they must become British in sympathy and British in outlook.

In contrast, Earl Winterton discouraged the refugees from hoping that there was any possibility of naturalisation. He argued that the refugees should be regarded as only temporary guests of Britain “until they find a haven elsewhere”.<sup>20</sup> Wing-Commander James took a similar view. In parliament he implored Herbert Morrison to “bear in mind the assurances repeatedly given to the House that admission to this country from

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<sup>18</sup> *A Few Points Why the Refugees Should Join the Army*, Recruiting Circular Number 2A, The Central Office For Refugees (No Date). In possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>19</sup> Mr. Aneurin Bevan speaking in response to Mr. Herbert Morrison in HC Vol 373, col 1526, 31 July 1941. Also reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 August 1941, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 March 1940, p. 6.

Nazi oppression was to be for temporary transit only and was not to be a prelude to the granting of British citizenship".<sup>21</sup>

During the first year of war it was still possible for some refugees to apply and be accepted for British citizenship. Almost two years into the war 1251 certificates of naturalisation were issued.<sup>22</sup> No numbers were given as to how many of these were refugees from Nazi Germany and Austria.<sup>23</sup> In July 1940, the granting of naturalisation was halted in the majority of cases and all considerations of applications were suspended.<sup>24</sup> Mr. Peak, the Undersecretary of State for the Home Department, claimed that it was felt necessary to suspend the naturalisation process because of "the impossibility in present circumstances of devoting time and labour to necessary investigations."<sup>25</sup> This could be justified by the adverse change in fortunes of the British military campaign at this point, and the preparations then under way in light of a possible case of invasion. However, it could be argued that the provision of transport, food and the guarding of tens of thousands of interned aliens used more finances, time and manpower than it would have actually cost the government to facilitate the naturalisation process. While, there certainly was Tory backbench pressure for the government to make no concessions to Jewish refugees,<sup>26</sup> there also was pressure from those in support of allowing the refugees to apply for British citizenship. The restrictions on the refugee soldiers gaining British citizenship was

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<sup>21</sup> HC Vol 373, col 1525, 31 July 1941. Also reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 August 1941, p. 5.

<sup>22</sup> Mr Morrison replying to Sir. R. Glyn in HC Vol 380, col 1302, 16 June 1942.

<sup>23</sup> Mr Morrison stated that he could not specify how many applications for naturalisation was made by aliens serving in the Pioneer Corps without a great deal of research. He suggested that it would be quite a large number though. HC Vol 373, cols 1525-1526, 31 July 1941. Mr. George Broadbridge gave a similar suggestion over the number of applications made. HC Vol 390, col 832, 10 June 1943.

<sup>24</sup> HC Vol 367, col 1060, 12 December 1940. Also see HC Vol 392, col 448-449, 23 September 1943, and HC Vol 390, col 831, 10 June 1943.

<sup>25</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 913-914, 11 December 1940.

<sup>26</sup> For instance, Sir George Broadbridge asked the Home Secretary if he was satisfied that the large number of applications by aliens for naturalisation did not amount in any way to a menace to public security?". HC Vol 390, col 832, 10 June 1943.

raised on a number of occasions in parliament.<sup>27</sup> Questions were raised as to whether the refugees serving within the British army should, likewise, be granted special conditions that allowed naturalisation if they desired.<sup>28</sup>

It was announced in June 1942 that 319 aliens had been granted British nationality within less than a year after the suspension.<sup>29</sup> The number rose to 354 by December 1943.<sup>30</sup> Although small, this figure demonstrates that the government was prepared to make some exceptions to its general policy.

For most refugees their experience was that Home Office refused naturalisation during the rest of the war. Refugee serviceman, Eric Kenneth has recalled that all refugee soldiers were sworn into the army as British subjects only, (but not British citizens), similar situation to the colonial soldiers. He recalled that Major Julian Leighton, who recruited refugees from the internment camps,<sup>31</sup> explained to the prospective soldiers that the government could not promise British citizenship because it “would make you mercenaries”.<sup>32</sup> In parliament, Mr. Peak stated “the granting of British nationality is a very special privilege and that these applications

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<sup>27</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 913-914, 11 December 1940; HC Vol 367, col 1060, 12 December 1940; HC Vol 368, col 311, 23 January 1941; HC Vol 373, col 1525, 31 July 1941; HC Vol 373, cols 2113-2114, 7 August 1941; HC Vol 393, col 364, 28 October 1943; HC Vol 392, col 1042, 14 October 1943; HC Vol 400, col 1494, 8 June 1944; HC Vol 408, cols 378-379, 15 February 1945; HC Vol 409, col 803, 21 March 1945.

<sup>28</sup> Colonel A. Evans asked Mr. Herbert Morrison “whether, when it is found possible to consider application for naturalisation for men serving with His Majesty’s Forces, service in the Pioneer Corps, whilst not being regarded as a special ground for naturalisation, will be taken into sympathetic consideration?”. Mr. Herbert Morrison said could make no statement as regards future policy. In HC Vol 373, cols 2113-2114, 7 August 1941.

<sup>29</sup> Figures given by Mr. Herbert Morrison in HC Vol 380, col 1392, 16 June 1942.

<sup>30</sup> HC Vol 395, cols 555-556, 2 December 1943. The Earl of Munster, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for India and Burma, stated that the numbers of persons described as of German nationality who have been naturalised are as follows: 1939, 390; 1940, 208; 1941, 18; 1942, 20. HL Vol 128, col 479, 14 July 1943.

<sup>31</sup> Major Julian Layton, (later lieutenant-colonel) was put in charge of the refugee Pioneers at the Richborough Camp and was engaged in their screening. *The Daily Telegraph*, 11 August 1989.

<sup>32</sup> Eric Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

must be very carefully scrutinised; and, therefore, we cannot in present circumstances proceed generally with ordinary applications".<sup>33</sup> Mr. Morrison explained that although he could not prevent people sending in applications he would not encourage it.<sup>34</sup> Although the refugees' participation in the war effort was commended, any refugee who enquired about the possibility of naturalisation was informed that it was not possible. Mr. Morrison also made it clear that no special arrangements for men serving in the army were to be made. Serving in the Pioneers Corps was not interpreted as a "special ground for naturalisation".<sup>35</sup> There was to be no distinction between the military and civilian refugees as regards the naturalisation policy because many civilians were also helping the allied cause.<sup>36</sup> Only 20 males described as of German nationality were naturalised between 31 December 1941 and 30 June 1943.<sup>37</sup>

Aneurin Bevan M.P. argued that one consequence of stopping the process of naturalisation in Britain was that, "some of the aliens in the army were suffering great hardship, as many of them had their naturalisation papers almost completely through at the beginning of war".<sup>38</sup> A further point made was that, no indication was made during wartime suggesting that the naturalisation of aliens was to be resumed after the conflict. Mr. Morrison stated "it would be wrong of me to commit myself now to what is to happen after the war to refugees who came to his country".<sup>39</sup>

The refugee servicemen were encouraged to take the oath of allegiance to the King when attesting for the army but were not allowed to take a similar oath to become a

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<sup>33</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 913-914, 11 December 1940.

<sup>34</sup> HC Vol 392, col 1042, 14 October 1943.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert Morrison responding to Wing-Commander James. In HC Vol 373, col 1525, 31 July 1941.

<sup>36</sup> Herbert Morrison speaking in HC Vol 395, col 555, 2 December 1943.

<sup>37</sup> HC Vol 391, Col 715, 20 July 1943.

<sup>38</sup> HC Vol 373, Col 1526, 31 July 1941.

<sup>39</sup> HC Vol 385, Col 492, 19 November 1942.

British citizen.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that the refugee servicemen were not treated entirely fairly. They were encouraged to enlist into the army but were offered little long-term benefit in return. Mr. Lipson stated, “if a man is good enough and loyal enough to fight for his country, ought not he to be given naturalisation?”.<sup>41</sup> Miss Eleanor Rathbone felt that the refugees in the British army should have at least been given some assurance that they would be naturalised at the end of the war. She explained that the refugees were uncertain as to whether “after the war is over, they will not be bundled out of this country?”.<sup>42</sup> Such fears would not help the morale of the refugee troops.

As we have seen, the government spent time, money and manpower to investigate and monitor these Jewish refugees from Nazism in the tribunals at the outset of war and when they volunteered for the British army. Yet the government now claimed it could not afford to do the same investigation regarding possible naturalisation. The fact that the refugees had already been checked should have sufficed. The investigations into the background of the refugees had already been completed; no more substantial resources would have been needed to re-investigate them. To claim that the refugees still needed to be checked would suggest that the original investigations, which actually allowed refugees into the army, were not sufficiently thorough.

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<sup>40</sup> The wording of the oath of allegiance for attestation and naturalisation both stated ‘I Swear by Almighty God that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to His Majesty, King George the Sixth, His Heirs and his Successors’. The only difference between the two was in the final wording. For the army it asks that they “observe and obey all orders” including the “Generals and Officers set over me”. Whilst in becoming a British citizen it asks that they remain faithful “according to law”. See Certified Copy of Attestation, July 1940, and Oath of Allegiance, July 1946. Copies in possession of Bernard Sarle.

<sup>41</sup> HC Vol 385, col 492, 19 November 1942.

<sup>42</sup> Eleanor Rathbone also asked, in very similar wording to Mr Lipson’s earlier argument, “if they are good enough to serve in the British or Allied Forces, are they not good enough for naturalisation?”. HC Vol 392, col 1042, 14 October 1943.



Alternative suggestions as to how to process naturalisation were put to the Home Secretary. In one case in Mr. R. Morgan proposed that since investigating officials of Mr. Morrison's department were often occupied, he could accept in suitable cases the testimony of three or four friends as to the authenticity of the applicants.<sup>43</sup> However, the Home Office rejected this and other possible solutions for dealing with the demands for naturalisation.<sup>44</sup> Towards the very end of the war Mr. Sidney Silverman M.P. commented that the Home Office kept stating the laws surrounding naturalisation but failed to administer them in any way.<sup>45</sup> He argued, "the Home Secretary has declared more than once that the question of naturalisation will have to be postponed to the end of war? Does he think it is necessary to postpone a question of this urgency?". Similarly, Mr. Lipson requested, "could the government be a little more generous in this matter".<sup>46</sup> It can only now be speculated as to the difference naturalisation would have made to the life of the refugee serviceman but there is no doubt from all testimonies that the status of 'enemy alien' weighed heavily upon them. Sir Herbert Emerson wrote that, in the case of the refugee servicemen, "the use of the term [enemy alien] is one of the grievances of refugees generally". He continued, "the difficulty, although psychological, is very real". Sir Herbert Emerson believed that the gaining of British citizenship was the most effective solution to this problem. It was his belief that "[naturalisation] would be a gracious and proper offer for the British government to make during this war; failing this, first priority should

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<sup>43</sup> HC Vol 392, cols 448-449, 23 September 1943.

<sup>44</sup> Mr. Herbert Morrison explained that the number of aliens who could get four acquaintances to testify on their behalf was too large and to confine the procedure to 'suitable cases' would mean differentiating in favour of those applicants who could secure influential support. This is a reasonable response, but an amount 'differentiation' did occur, albeit extremely small, during wartime. As was shown in the statistics earlier, some aliens, including enemy aliens were given British citizenship. It can only be assumed that these were important people with 'influential acquaintances' otherwise they would not have been naturalised. Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> HC Vol 409, cols 803-804, 21 March 1945.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

be given to such men after the war. If naturalisation could be offered, it would be of the utmost value from many points of view”.<sup>47</sup>

One of the most important reasons why some refugee servicemen wanted to be naturalised as British citizens was because of concerns over their safety. As discussed in Chapter Six, the government approved of certain changes to official identification when the refugees were permitted to join active units in 1943. Naturalisation was also suggested as a means of extra protection if a refugee were captured by the Nazis. This debate was raised in parliament at the outset of the allied invasion. However, the granting of British citizenship was not regarded as a practical solution. It was also questioned whether such a measure was even necessary. Herbert Morrison asserted that there was a “belief that the acquirement of British nationality would afford some protection to such a person should he fall into the hands of the enemy, this is a mistake. Such protection as is afforded by the Prisoners of War Convention which applies to any member of the Armed Forces whatever may be his nationality”.<sup>48</sup> Considering that the Nazis had committed the mass murder of millions of innocent civilians just because they were born Jewish, such a statement suggesting that Germany might keep to the ‘legal rules of war’ was naïve. As the refugees were former German and Austrian citizens, their lives were at even greater risk if they were to be taken prisoner. Again there is a contradiction in the stance of the government. If the government did not feel that there was any danger of maltreatment because of the refugees’ Judaism and their former German and Austrian origin, then why did it permit refugees to change their names and identity papers?

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<sup>47</sup> Herbert Emerson Memorandum, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>48</sup> HC Vol 400, col 1494, 8 June 1944.

This constraint on gaining British nationality constituted an unjust situation but it is difficult to suggest that this was a particular form of prejudice against the refugees from Germany and Austria alone. Friendly aliens were also dealt with in the same manner. Mr. Lipson presented the case of a Czechoslovakian subject to parliament. Mr. Lipson asked whether this man, who “has been in this country since 1935, including five terms at Cambridge University, who is a sergeant in the Royal Air Force and obtained his wings in Rhodesia, can have his application for naturalisation granted?” Herbert Morrison said it would not be possible and said again that, although a number of refugees were aiding the war effort in the army, too much work was needed in the process of granting citizenship to make it economical. He added, “the case in question cannot be distinguished from any others”.<sup>49</sup> This also included Polish refugees. Captain McEwan made parliament aware that a number of Polish soldiers, especially those who had married in the country, were anxious to obtain British nationality after the war.<sup>50</sup> McEwan even suggested, “this country is under a special obligation to these men, many of whom will not want to return to a Stalinized Poland”.<sup>51</sup> A similar argument could have been made for the many German and Austrian refugees who did not want to return to their place of origin.

From 1942 until the end of the war, comparisons of the British naturalisation policy were often made with that of the United States of America.<sup>52</sup> Not long after America's

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<sup>49</sup> HC Vol 385, cols 491-492, 19 November 1942.

<sup>50</sup> HC Vol 408, col 378, 15 February 1945. Mr. Lipson also asked about the granting of naturalisation for those Poles, other nationalities and the stateless who were fighting in the British army. HC Vol, 409, cols 803-804, 21 March 1945.

<sup>51</sup> HC Vol 385, col 379, 15 February 1945.

<sup>52</sup> Mr. Rhys Davies asked “will the Home Secretary be good enough to inquire into the practice in America, where, I understand, they are daily joining the American Forces or are being conscripted and are in the end automatic citizens”. Mr Morrison replied, “I am willing to do so but our policy must be settled in the light of British considerations”. HC Vol 385, col 492, 19 November 1942. Viscount Hinchinbrooke also asked whether the government's naturalisation policy was in accord with that of the United States as regards aliens serving in the armed forces of their respective countries. Morrison

entry into the war the United States government declared that aliens serving in the American army would be granted citizenship, providing that their commanding officers supported their applications. At first, the refugee soldiers had to serve at least three months in the army but this was later waived to “facilitate by every means the speedy naturalisation of non-citizen soldiers”.<sup>53</sup> Also, later in the war, the United States government sent special representatives to various areas of war to bestow citizenship on refugee soldiers, irrespective of their former nationality. Earl. G. Harrison, Commander of Immigrations and Naturalisation, announced, “a substantial share in the inevitable defeat of Nazism and Fascism will be born by Americans born in the countries where once those freedom crushing forces seemed to flourish”.<sup>54</sup>

So whilst German and Austrian refugees were actually required to become naturalised Americans if they were to serve in the American army, the refugees from similar backgrounds in the British army were discouraged from applying to become British citizens. Even as late in the war as March 1945, M.Ps were still demanding to know if the government was to grant naturalisations after the conflict for all nationalities serving in the army, including the enemy aliens, the Poles and the stateless refugees. Mr. Clement Attlee, Deputy Prime Minister, repeated that, “as far as concerns of aliens who are serving in the British forces, it seems unlikely that any sufficient reasons will arise for an amendment of the law”.<sup>55</sup> Britain was one of only a few

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said “persons admitted to USA were so admitted after proper selection with a view to their becoming permanent citizens in due course whereas in this country many have been admitted for temporary refuge with a view to going elsewhere”. HC Vol 395, cols 555-556, 2 December 1943.

<sup>53</sup> Herbert Emerson used this issue to support an argument for the relaxation of the regulation on refugees in the British army. Memorandum by Herbert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676. Details of the American naturalisation procedure was reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 June 1942, p. 7.

<sup>54</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 15 January 1943, p. 7.

<sup>55</sup> HC Vol, 409, cols 803-804, 21 March 1945.

countries that adopted such strict laws on naturalisation for army members. Miss Eleanor Rathbone argued,

we have behaved far more meanly than the United States or any of our dominions. In view of the smallness of our numbers compared with many of the larger states, both allied and enemy, may I ask whether we can afford to reject gallant men who have been thought good enough to fight for us, but apparently are not thought good enough to bear the responsibility of becoming citizens.<sup>56</sup>

The irony was that in September 1940, whilst there existed the opportunity for all refugees of suitable age to volunteer for the Pioneer Corps, there was still the “very considerable possibility of emigration to America”.<sup>57</sup> Many refugees chose not to use their visas for America and instead joined the British army, albeit only in the labour units. If they had have gone to America they could have joined a fighting unit and would quickly have become American citizens. Notwithstanding evidence to the contrary, Mr. Herbert Morrison still believed that in regarding the naturalisation issue, “Britain has not treated the refugees badly”.<sup>58</sup>

Without naturalisation, the official status of the refugee servicemen was complicated. The refugees, however, were not the only people affected by their ‘enemy alien’ status. A number of refugee servicemen married women of British nationality. One refugee, Hans Jackson explained the unexpected consequences of his actions. He described how he married a Jewish girl whilst stationed in Glasgow. He recalled that to their great surprise, as soon as they were married, rather than Hans gaining British

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid. Eleanor Rathbone had earlier stated, “is the Home Secretary aware that we are about the only people who treat in this way men serving in our armed forces? Whereas men in the forces of the U.S and in the Dominions are almost automatically naturalised we treat these people as of no importance”. HC Vol408, col 379, 15 February 1945.

<sup>57</sup> The Duke of Devonshire speaking in the House of Lords. HL Vol 117, col 392, 5 September 1940.

<sup>58</sup> Mr. Herbert Morrison spoke in response to Eleanor Rathbone’s accusation of treating the refugees unfairly. HC Vol 408, col 379, 15 February 1945.

nationality, his wife lost her British citizenship.<sup>59</sup> Unbeknown to many of the refugees who married British born women, any British woman who married an alien would automatically assume her husband's nationality.<sup>60</sup> The fact that the refugees were serving for King and country did not have any bearing on the situation. This law, the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act, 1914, was not a prejudiced act that was specifically aimed at the refugees. It concerned all aliens, whether enemy, friendly or neutral. However, its consequences affected the wives of the refugees more so than other aliens. This was because the wives of German and Austrian refugees would automatically become 'enemy aliens'. The government claim that the intention of refusing to investigate claims for British citizenship was so as not to waste valuable manpower is again brought into question here. With an estimated 10,000 women losing their nationality because of this law,<sup>61</sup> it actually created a new problem that required considerable manpower and time to sort out. Viscountess Astor remarked that this was a "terrible situation".<sup>62</sup>

The dilemma for the British wives of 'enemy aliens' did not end with them being stripped of their nationality. This sudden change of identity had serious repercussions that affected the daily lives of themselves and their children. The instant that they

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<sup>59</sup> Hans Jackson, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Mr. Wedgwood explained this problem to the House of Commons. HC Vol 367, col 1060 (12 December 1940).

<sup>61</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 March 1941, p. 8, and 18 April 1941, p. 6. Approximately 1500 of them became Germans or Austrians through marriage. Also reported in the *Daily Telegraph and Morning Post*. Mrs Cazalet Keir MP asked the Home Secretary how many British women had lost their nationality through marriage to allied nationals since the war. Mr. Herbert Morrison replied, "the information desired by my Hon. Friend as regards the whole period since the outbreak of war could not be supplied without long and detailed examination of the alien registration records". Figures extracted for the 12 months before 31 March 1944 show the number of British women who registered with the police under the Aliens Order on marriage to aliens of allied nationality to be 3,564. *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 May 1944, p. 5.

<sup>62</sup> HC Vol 350, col 716, 20 July 1939.

married an alien they become subject to government restrictions.<sup>63</sup> In 1933, British born women married to aliens were exempted from registration with police.<sup>64</sup> However, only days after the declaration of war it was announced that British born women who became Germans and Austrians through marriage were no longer exempt from registration with the police. Consequently, they had to report to a police station immediately. It was also stated that if they wanted to leave the country there would be no difficulties in doing so.<sup>65</sup> This was tactless. Worse still, those that married before and during the British retreat from France, and the ensuing invasion fever technically were liable to be interned as a threat to British defence, even though they were loyal Britons. A number of British born wives did actually find themselves imprisoned as 'enemy aliens' on the Isle of Man while their husbands were serving in the British army.<sup>66</sup>

Fred Pelican and his wife became all too familiar with these problems. He explained that he married Gladys, who was born and bred in a Welsh valley. However, on her marriage day she was legally regarded as an alien and had to get a permit from the

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<sup>63</sup> It was suggested just before the war, by Sir A. Wilson, that there was an increasing frequency of marriages between aliens admitted to Britain on compassionate ground. He believed that British born women had an objective of "providing the aliens who contract them with arguments in favour of naturalisation and against their compulsory re-emigration upon which the government have reportedly stated it will insist". Sir A. Wilson even proposed that a ban should be made on registrars marrying alien men to British women and to impose a condition that entry into Britain was only with the consent that they would not enter into a contract of matrimony with British subjects. Mr. Peake stressed that there was no grounds whatsoever for the suggestions made, especially considering that marrying a British woman would in no way increase their chances of naturalisation. HC Vol 250, cols 715-716, 20 July 1939.

<sup>64</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 December 1941, p. 5.

<sup>65</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 September 1939, p. 15. Sir John Anderson explained that there was distinction made between women married to a foreigner and those who were married to 'enemy aliens'. Those married to foreigners were exempted from registering with police but the British wives of Germans and Austrians had to register. Mr Greenwood asked "am I to take it that the policy of His Majesty's government is to draw a sharp distinction between those who are the victims of the system we are now fighting, and those who may be properly under suspicion?". Anderson said that it was. HC Vol 351, col 368, 4 September 1939.

<sup>66</sup> This problem is described in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 20 December 1940, p. 5.

police to be able to travel and visit Fred whilst he was based in Weymouth. Fred described how he was shocked by such a law that penalised British women for marrying. "What an absurdity. I am an alien in the forces, was allowed to travel anywhere and she was under restrictions. How silly can one get".<sup>67</sup> The experience of another refugee soldier was discussed in the House of Commons. Mr. Wedgwood spoke of Private L. E Kramer, who served in France with the AMPC who would not marry an English girl as he did not want her to lose her British nationality.<sup>68</sup>

Initially, there were exemptions from the restrictions that most enemy aliens faced during wartime. However, in the winter of 1940, the government introduced a controversial new order, Statutory Rules and Order, 1940, No. 1900, called the Aliens (No. 4) Order, 1940.<sup>69</sup> Interestingly, under the order the refugees serving in the British army were not deemed to be aliens. However, at the same time, it placed further restrictions upon their wives.<sup>70</sup> The refugees serving in the army were exempted from any regulations on aliens but their wives were subject to regulations such as curfew, a ban on the use of motorcars, and limits on their movements.<sup>71</sup> The grievances arising from this law did not go unnoticed. Mr. Brown questioned the Home Secretary, Mr. Morrison, as to the wisdom of such an act, especially in relation to the wives and children of aliens serving in the army.<sup>72</sup> Mr. Morrison defended the decision of imposing the new restrictions by claiming, "in view of the large number of aliens now serving or about to serve in His Majesty's Forces, as well as in the forces of allied

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<sup>67</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>68</sup> HC Vol 367, col 1060, 12 December 1940.

<sup>69</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 330-331, 28 November 1940.

<sup>70</sup> Mr. Herbert Morrison speaking in parliament. HC Vol 388, col 1412, 15 April 1943. Mr Wedgwood argued that since they were not regarded as aliens under this act their wives should not lose their British nationality, HC Vol 367, col 1060, 12 December 1940.

<sup>71</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 November 1940, p. 15.

<sup>72</sup> HC Vol 367, col 331, 28 November 1940.



governments in this country, it was felt that it would not be right to leave this substantial body of persons outside the systems of aliens control in present circumstances".<sup>73</sup>

Mr. Herbert Morrison did express concern over the well-being of the wives of enemy aliens. He claimed, "I am anxious, however, that these regulations shall be administered in such a way as to avoid unnecessary hardship or interference with law abiding persons, and special instructions have been sent to the police for that purpose".<sup>74</sup> However, there is evidence to suggest that 'special instructions' could not always be relied upon. One such example can be seen during the interment of the majority of aliens, six months before the new alien order. It was reported that, "so completely wholesale have the internments been, and so panicky the xenophobia," that in many localities the police ignored the Home Office orders. The British born wives of the aliens, as well as the elderly and the sick, were rounded up and interned.<sup>75</sup>

The *Jewish Chronicle* argued that the restrictions placed on the wives of aliens serving in the army constituted a grave injustice.

The effect of this will be serious. First it is a bitter blow to many women who have proved by the tribunals to be friendly to this country and who are proud that their husbands are in the army. Yet the wives are suddenly treated as dangerous people. Second, a large number of them will lose work as this stigma put upon them will create suspicion in the minds of employers and many will be prevented from going to work by physical restrictions on them. Thirdly, they will find it exceedingly difficult to obtain new employment. The effect on male refugees is also serious. At present many hundreds of applicants are still awaiting examination before being enrolled into

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<sup>73</sup> HC Vol 367, col 331, 28 November 1940.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid. For another report on the police not respecting orders of the Home Office see *Jewish Chronicle* 21 June 1941, p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 26th July 1940, pp. 1 and 6. Also reported in the *Evening Standard* and the *Manchester Guardian*.

the forces. When these men join they will do so knowing that they may leave their wives in idleness under the suspicion of being dangerous enemies.<sup>76</sup>

Appeals were made on behalf of the wives of refugees serving in the army. To urge this restoration of their rights a deputation of 25 women visited Osbert Peake led by Mrs Patrick Ness, President of the National Council of Women and representing 11 societies.<sup>77</sup> Major Hopkins and Major Cazalet requested the Home Secretary to consider the difficulties in which the wives and families of the refugees found themselves as a result of their enemy alien status and resultant restrictions. They requested that the matter should be treated with urgency, to which Mr. Herbert Morrison agreed.<sup>78</sup>

The government did make attempts during the early stages of war to rectify the problem created when British women lost their nationality though marrying aliens. Sir John Anderson said, "I fully recognise the importance of this matter to many women whose loyalty to their country of birth is strong".<sup>79</sup> Fortunately for the wives of aliens, during wartime they were permitted to make applications to restore their British nationality.<sup>80</sup> Sir John Anderson stated, "I have accordingly decided that any such woman may, as soon as her husband has been exempted from special restrictions,

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<sup>76</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 29 November 1940, p. 15.

<sup>77</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 18 April 1941, p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> HC Vol 367, col 1025, 12 December 1940. Further appeals were made by Mr. White and Major Cazalet regarding alterations to the restrictions of wives of men in the AMPC. Mr. Herbert Morrison stated that he recognised the importance and it was under consideration. HC Vol 367, Col 1350, 19 December 1940.

<sup>79</sup> Sir John Anderson compared the similar problem during World War One that when British nationality was only restored to women who separated from their husbands. HC Vol 353, col 1397, 23 November 1939.

<sup>80</sup> Under Section 10 (6) of the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act 1914. HC Vol 408, col 1841, 6 March 1945.

apply for naturalisation".<sup>81</sup> During the first year of war an estimated 800 applications were sent from British born women married to German nationals for re-naturalisation and more than half had been granted, "irrespective of the question whether the husband has or has not applied for naturalisation".<sup>82</sup> Moreover, between 1943 and 1944, 3564 British women had to register with the police under the alien order, despite their marriages being to aliens of Allied nationality.<sup>83</sup>

Assurances were given that, in spite of the alleged difficulty in finding time for the investigations required in most naturalisation cases, the applications of British wives of Germans were dealt with as "expeditiously as possible".<sup>84</sup> However, all this time and effort could have been saved had the government simply altered the laws and restrictions placed upon wives who married aliens.<sup>85</sup>

In conclusion, the British policy compared unfavourably to the American policy on refugees and their American wives. Mr. Hannah M.P. pointed out that "America has set us an excellent example".<sup>86</sup> It is important to note that the refugees did not act upon the possibility of naturalisation preceding and during the early stages of war to any large degree. However, such hesitance can easily be justified when considering the belief by many refugees and government officials alike that their stay in Britain

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<sup>81</sup> HC Vol 353, col 1397, 23 November 1939. Mr. Herbert Morrison explained to Sir George Broadbridge that the suspension of naturalisation did not include British wives. HC Vol 390, col 832, 10 June 1943. Also HC Vol 392, col 449, 23 September 1943.

<sup>82</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 1042-1043, 12 December 1940. The greatest number of women who restored their citizenship occurred during the first three years of war. Figures given by Mr. Herbert Morrison: Between September 1939 to 31 May 1942, 2864 readmissions of women to British nationality. By May 1944 the figure was 3270. HC Vol 400, cols 348-349, 18 May 1944.

<sup>83</sup> HC Vol 399, col 945, 27 April 1944.

<sup>84</sup> HC Vol 367, cols 1042-1043, 12 December 1940.

<sup>85</sup> Requests to change the laws on British wives losing nationality were made before the war. HC Vol 349, cols 624-625, 29 June 1939.

<sup>86</sup> HC Vol 350, col 716, 20 July 1939. Colonel Sandeman Allen compared British policy to other nations. "Can we not bring this country in line with Australia and New Zealand? Why should there be any difference in the empire on this matter?". HC Vol 349, cols 624-625, 29 June 1939.

was to be a temporary one. So, it is unfair to criticise the Home Office at this time. However, by mid 1944, in the light of imminent military action in Europe and the Middle East the issue of naturalisation became one of necessity for many of the refugees who desired extra protection if captured. Complicating matters further, there were growing numbers of British wives of refugees losing their nationality. The Home Office failed to take any decisive action and remained ambiguous as to whether it intended to allow naturalisation after the war. It was recognised at the time that this uncertain attitude of the Home Office was cause for distress for many refugees in the British army. It was not until after the war that the Labour government restored the possibility of refugees gaining British citizenship and the refugee servicemen were granted priority for this new wave of naturalisation.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> This is discussed in the Conclusion.

## Chapter 8

### Relationships with the British Troops

#### (1) Anti-Alienism in the British Army, 1939-45

In 1943 the British government reversed its restrictive policies imposed upon the refugee servicemen. There was now almost full equality for the refugees within the ranks of the British army. Britain's military successes, coupled with the fact that many refugees had served splendidly for almost four years, contributed to the government's decision to utilise fully the skills and talents of these soldiers. Sir Herbert Emerson explained that, although legally the refugees remained 'enemy aliens', this made "no reference to the attitude or feelings of the individual". He stressed that "these 'enemy aliens' are, in fact, bitterly anti-Nazi and very friendly".<sup>1</sup> As the Government and military authorities had perceived the refugees as a potential threat to Britain for such a long period of time, it can be assumed that this would have had an impact on British citizens serving in the army and how they reacted when coming into contact with the refugee soldiers. Did mistrust of the 'enemy alien' permeate through to the ranks of the army itself? Did the average British soldier identify the refugees serving alongside them as a threat? Was anti-alienism fostered by the policies of the War Office or did cordial relationships exist between the refugee soldiers, their officers and the local communities situated near to military camps? As well as answering these questions this chapter also considers the refugee servicemen's feelings towards any German POW they encountered on their return to Europe. The

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum by Sir Herbert Emerson, 21 December 1942, PRO WO 321/10676.

second section will explore the extent to which the refugees witnessed anti-Semitism in the army. Comparisons are made with the Jewish refugees serving in the Polish Free Army. Did the transfer of refugees into combatant or technical units, from 1943 onwards, have any impact on these issues?

Some British soldiers had a lack of understanding of who the refugee servicemen actually were. Most of the refugees had been contained within the insular world of the Pioneer Corps for a number of years and so not many British soldiers had experiences of actually serving alongside them. When coming into contact, was it the case that British soldiers' and civilians' confusion over the 'true' identity of the refugee servicemen resulted in a lack of distinction being made between them and the German enemy? If so, this chapter will analyse whether this was the result of innocent naivety or an expression of anti-alienism imbibed from above. Was there any ill treatment of the refugee soldiers?

There were a number of different responses made by British soldiers when they encountered the refugee servicemen especially for the first time. Martin Goldenburg claimed that none of his fellow British soldiers conspicuously labelled him out as a 'German'. However, other British soldiers sometimes made it clear that they regarded him as an 'enemy alien'. Being a higher rank than some of the British soldiers made little impact on the general attitude. Martin explained that, "even with three pips on my shoulder I was still looked at as an alien".<sup>2</sup> Peter Frean similarly recalled, "To other people I was a foreigner, and was always to remain a foreigner". He recalled that his (alien) pioneer company had a very good football team and they used to play

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<sup>2</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

against the Royal Engineers. He said they always beat the British at football and the British couldn't understand it. They would ask Peter, "how do you play footie so well and you don't even speak the language [*sic*]".<sup>3</sup> Peter Frean also commented that in the opinion of some fellow soldiers "just by wearing a British uniform didn't make you British".<sup>4</sup> This attitude, as was explained in the last section, was actually shared amongst some refugees who did not want to become British. Nevertheless, within the Pioneer Corps, Karl Fraser described that, "we became His Majesty's own army".<sup>5</sup> They dubbed themselves as the 'King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens'.<sup>6</sup>

Karl Fraser believed that the conflicting attitudes among the British authorities regarding the identity of the refugees only encouraged confusion among some British troops concerning the refugee soldiers. He said, "the army considered us British, but the Home Office still considered us aliens".<sup>7</sup> The lack of clarity over the refugees' official status led to the refugees being physically distinguished from the British soldiers. Fritz Lustig recalled that, "they always had notices that were divided in sections for British and non-British personnel".<sup>8</sup> English bureaucratic tactlessness did not help matters with recruitment posters in camps embellished with the message 'England expects every man to do his duty' and 'you are not Englishmen, but you should do your duty'.<sup>9</sup> Ian Lowitt admitted that even he was confused over his status whilst in the army; "I didn't know what my position was".<sup>10</sup> If some refugees were

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<sup>3</sup> Peter Frean, Interview, London, 12 April 2000. The 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company also played local British football teams and remained unbeaten. The games were quite a big social event for the refugees. War Diary 93 Company, 1941, PRO WO 166/5578.

<sup>4</sup> Frean, Interview

<sup>5</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

<sup>7</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview.

<sup>8</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Fox, John P., 'German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces During the Second World War', *American Historical Association Conference*, San Francisco (1994), p. 4

<sup>10</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, Aberdeen, 28 May 2000.

even puzzled over their official status, then it could not be expected that the average British soldier would be any more clear in their minds as to whether the refugees were the same as the British soldiers or not.

Martin Goldenburg explained that some British soldiers believed all the refugee servicemen were still German nationals. This was in contrast to the attitude of the majority of refugees as regards their national identities. Martin proclaimed, from the refugees' point of view, how incorrect such a judgement was, "officially we were stateless, we did not belong anywhere really".<sup>11</sup> However, since a number of British soldiers regarded the refugees as enemy nationals, it was inevitable that they would treat them with distrust. A number of the British soldiers and officers were indeed apprehensive about serving alongside enemy alien soldiers in the British Expeditionary Force, especially when they were issued with arms.<sup>12</sup> Ken Overman explained that the problem was inflamed because, in the early years of war, the British soldiers were not informed who the refugee soldiers were.<sup>13</sup> As a consequence, he recalled "they could not understand why I was delighted when something went wrong for the Germans in the war. They felt that blood was thicker than water".<sup>14</sup>

A number of the refugee interviewees judged that the level of education within the army was quite poor. Karl Fraser explained that there were some British soldiers who could not even read or write. He believed that during much of the war, "there was "a

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<sup>11</sup> Goldenburg, Interview.

<sup>12</sup> Commanding Officer Major Woodcock wrote, "the fact that this coy is composed of aliens caused a certain amount of apprehension of certain British units when stationed side by side in France". War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, June 1940, PRO WO 167/1318. Some naval officers at Le Harve were more than fearful when they heard about some aliens being armed. Fox, 'German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers', p. 5.

<sup>13</sup> The refugees being restricted to the Pioneers Corps would not have helped this problem.

<sup>14</sup> Ken Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.



lot of ignorance. Other than football they knew nothing and needed educational training".<sup>15</sup> As Jeremy Crang has written, "it was decided [by the War Office] that education had no place in an army under active service condition. During the early months of the war official education in the army ceased".<sup>16</sup> It was not surprising therefore, in their minds, that the British soldiers could not understand the difference between an Austrian and German. Martin Goldenberg, a former Austrian citizen, recalled that such a lack of distinction frustrated him.<sup>17</sup> In Parliament, Geoffrey Mander commented that the Austrians "feel deeply humiliated at being wrongly described as German".<sup>18</sup> This lack of differentiation between Austrian and German was not helped by the government's constant rejection of categorising them as two legally separate entities. This was in spite of many requests for the government to make a distinction between the Austrian and German refugees. At the outbreak of war, Eleanor Rathbone argued that the Austrians should be categorised differently to the Germans because, like the Czechoslovakians, their country was taken without their consent.<sup>19</sup> In the USA during 1942, the Austrian refugees were removed from

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<sup>15</sup> Fraser, Interview. A number of the interviewees expressed a similar view, especially in relation to the British soldiers lack of awareness, or even interest in the events of the war.

<sup>16</sup> Crang, Jeremy. A, *The British Army and the People's War* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000), p. 117. One letter in the *Jewish Chronicle* pointed out that Jewish servicemen were guilty in not taking a greater interest in the plight of European Jews. "I have been shocked by the ignorance on Jewish issues of serving men. outside the purely selfish problem of anti-Semitism. I have found widespread apathy, although this is certainly not true of the alien pioneers, whom I have found to be the most articulate and knowledgeable". By A.B.S. Glasgow. *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 July 1943, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>18</sup> HC Vol 393, cols 1427-8, 23 November 1943.

<sup>19</sup> Sir John Anderson responded to such calls stating, "sweeping distinctions of the kind she [Rathbone] suggested, automatically applied, would not be compatible with the public interest". HC Vol 351, col 369, 4 September 1939. Also reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 September 1939, p. 16. In 1942 Mr Mander asked Mr Morrison the advisability of differentiating between Austrians and Germans in Britain. Mr Morrison replied "I regret that I should not be prepared to grant these exemptions wholesale to all persons of former Austrian nationality". HC Vol 378, col 782, 5 March 1942. Mr. Mander raised the issue again when the Moscow Conference declared the German annexation of Austria null and void. Mr Osbert Peake, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, replied, "it makes no difference whether they are described as Germans or Austrians". HC Vol 393, cols 1427-8, 23 November 1943.

the status of 'enemy aliens'.<sup>20</sup> No such change was made in Britain during the war. The reason given was that a change of status would have made no difference to the Austrian refugees' lives.<sup>21</sup> Yet, as we have seen, there were substantiated disadvantages in Britain of being classified an 'enemy alien; the removal of this classification from the Austrian refugees would have made an important difference to the lives of the soldiers and their wives.<sup>22</sup>

The War Office did make some attempts to instruct British soldiers and civilians that the refugees were not Nazis, and that they were fighting for the common cause. This included the use of lectures and films. Karl Fraser, for instance was asked later in the war to give lectures twice a week to try to explain what was happening in Europe.<sup>23</sup> An educational film entitled *Lift Your Head Comrade* was made.<sup>24</sup> Martin Goldenberg recalled that, whilst stationed in Weymouth with the 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, the Ministry of Information came to make a film about Germans who were fighting Hitler in the ranks of the British army.<sup>25</sup> The writer of the movie, Arthur Koestler, was sent from M.I.11 to help to create the propaganda film.<sup>26</sup> The intention of the film, *Lift Your Head Comrade*, was to acquaint the British public with the existence of the 'enemy aliens' in the British army. It tried to make clear that the refugees were loyal

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<sup>20</sup> This issue was raised in HC Vol 378, col 782, 5 March 1942, and HC Vol 385, col 384, 18 November 1942. Reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 February 1942, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Mr. Mander defended the decision to uphold the classification of Austrians as enemy aliens by explaining that they were aliens of enemy nationality and so there would be no useful purpose to differentiate. HC Vol 378, col 782, 5 March 1942.

<sup>22</sup> It also would have improved the conditions of life for the civilian refugees of Austrian origin, as they would not have been placed under the regulations over movement, ownership of property and their place of residence.

<sup>23</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>24</sup> *Lift your Head Comrade* (Spectator), Dir. Michael Hankinson, January 1943.

<sup>25</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, W. W, 'Life with the Alien Pioneers', *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, August 1988, p. 6. The filming lasted over 5 days at the end of July 1942. Major Durber wrote "film taking by Ministry of Information Film Unit (War Office authority) B.M/M.I.11/1120 (P.R.3)". War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, July 1942, PRO WO 166/9974.

fighters for the British cause and in no way fifth columnists. Major Durber, Commanding Officer, explained in the picture that the alien Pioneers were “anti fascists who were saved from the Nazi persecution and served in this company as volunteers”, adding that, “for them the war began in 1933 when Hitler came to power”.<sup>27</sup> However, despite the good intentions, the major flaw of the film was that it failed to point out that the vast majority of the aliens in the Pioneer Corps were Jews. Martin Goldenberg recalled that he and other refugees had a serious discussion with the film crew trying to explain that firstly, they were not all German, (Martin himself coming from Austria), and secondly, that they were not fighting Hitler simply because they disagreed with his political viewpoints. He argued that the refugees were fighting for their lives because they were Jews and Hitler wanted to annihilate them all. He was disappointed when he saw the movie and saw that none of these points were included. The film merely mentioned that they were Germans fighting for Britain.<sup>28</sup> The irony of the film was that it showed the men as highly trained with weaponry, whilst at the time of filming they were in many cases unarmed.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, some of the refugees were glad that such a film was made and enjoyed watching themselves on the big screen.<sup>30</sup> It is difficult to assess the success of the film in raising awareness of ‘foreigners from enemy territories’ in the army or in reducing the British people’s confusion as to why men from Germany and Austria were in British uniforms.

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<sup>27</sup> Klugescheid, Andreas Bad-Orb, Translated by Bohm, E.I, *His Majesty’s Most Loyal Enemy Aliens: German-Jewish Emigrants to Great Britain Between 1933-47* (MA Thesis, University of Gottingen, No Date), p. 100, in The Jewish Military Museum.

<sup>28</sup> The movie also did not make the distinction between the Austrians and Germans. Goldenberg, Interview.

<sup>29</sup> Klugescheid, *His Majesty’s Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*, p. 101.

<sup>30</sup> W. W. Brown explained that the film began with a shot of himself and his friends marching in the front row. As a result “going to the pictures was our main occupation in the evenings; for a few weeks every time we went we saw ourselves marching straight at ourselves”. Brown, ‘Life with the Alien Pioneers’, *Association of Jewish Refugees Information* (August 1988), p. 6.

The divisions between Austrian and German refugees leads to the larger question of diversity. So far the refugees have been described more or less as if they were one entity going through almost identical experiences. Was there always a sprit of camaraderie between the refugee soldiers? In most cases the Germans and Austrians forged a cordial relationship. Ian Lowitt, a refugee from Austria, witnessed no problems between the refugees from different nations, although there were jocular names for the soldiers of different nations. The Austrians, for example, “would sometimes refer to the Germans as *pifkes*”,<sup>31</sup> Fritz Lustig, also from Austria, recently agreed that “no real animosity existed between the two groups”.<sup>32</sup> However, Harry Blake, refugee serviceman from Germany, felt differently. He believed that the Austrians and Germans did not always get on.<sup>33</sup>

One major conflict during the early days of the Pioneer Corps concerned not differences in nationality but the speaking of German. There was some animosity towards those who continued to talk in German despite it being forbidden in the army. Alfred Perles believed resentment grew against the persistent German speakers. He claimed that as a result there was a common opinion that it was the German speakers who caused the problems for every one else in the unit. Despite not agreeing with this view, Alfred explained that some refugees’ gloom concerning the behaviour of some of the others was very marked. His friend, nicknamed Bressie once exclaimed, “It’s been the orders every day for weeks on end that they mustn’t speak German, and the bloody fools keep blabbering their bloody lingo all day long. Bloody sons of bitches,

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<sup>31</sup> Ian Lowitt explained that the word ‘pifke’ was an abusive name for Germans for which there is no English translation. Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>32</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>33</sup> Harry Blake, Interview, Manchester, 21 May 2000.

that wot they are. Blimey, I'd be ashamed to be recognised by them in the street [sic]".<sup>34</sup>

The (alien) pioneer units were fairly cohesive in composition according to Karl Fraser as most members of his Pioneer Unit were Jewish refugees.<sup>35</sup> Henry Van Der Walde agreed that there were very few non-Jewish refugees in his company, "maybe 2 or 3", he said. Although the alien companies were mostly made up of former Austrians and Germans, a very small number of Jews from Czechoslovakia, Poland and Russia were also present. To some extent this common ground created a friendly environment. However, just as in other units of the British army, there were divisions. Cliques formed, with the intellectuals, traders, Germans and Austrians sometimes forming into separate groups.<sup>36</sup> Henry Van Der Walde recalled that in a number of instances the clashes of personalities were very marked.<sup>37</sup> In some cases being the vast majority within the unit; Jewish refugees even goaded the non-Jews, much as British soldiers may have joked about the refugees were the demographics reversed. Harry Blake recollected one occurrence of taunting by Jewish refugees where the victim was a non-Jew called, 'Branburger,' whom he described as having a "Jewish nose, Jewish lips, a real caricature, but he wasn't Jewish and went to Catholic Church Parade every Sunday".<sup>38</sup> Harry recalled, "we were teasing him asking him sarcastically "you are not Jewish?". This gentile Pioneer tried to prove his non-Jewishness by dropping his trousers and showing that he wasn't circumcised. However, he later went into hospital. Harry remembered, "this man came out of hospital crying his eyes out

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<sup>34</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn: Reminiscences of the Pioneer Corps* (George Unwin and Allen Ltd: London, 1944), p. 69.

<sup>35</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 27.

<sup>38</sup> Church Parade was compulsory for non-Jews, although, later in the war, (1943), there was debate over having it abolished being as it was impractical in view of the war situation. PRO WO 32/14687.

because he had to be circumcised as something was wrong". Harry explained that there were none too sympathetic with the man's unfortunate operation and that, "we took the mickey out of him [*sic*)".<sup>39</sup>

In many cases the British officers in charge of the Pioneer Companies were well respected by the refugee servicemen. Before 1943, the War Office provided the companies with officers who were sensitive to the needs of the units they were to command. It has been argued that their attitude was generally quite fair. A number of commanding officers were notably responsive to the refugees' needs and showed them respect in order to obtain the refugees' best work.<sup>40</sup> It was reported in 1940 that the "English officers and NCO in charge of 3<sup>rd</sup> Auxiliary Military Pioneers were glad to be able to help the servicemen on their feet again and enable them to feel that refugees had a chance to show that they were men".<sup>41</sup> Some refugees were not oblivious to the attempts, initially made by the War Office, to install sympathetic officers in the (Alien) Pioneer Companies. Alfred Perles observed "Lord Reading was assisted by a number of officers who, for some reason or another were considered particularly suitable for dealing with the alien personnel".<sup>42</sup>

The commanding officers were often full of praise for their men and spoke highly of their efforts and behaviour. One officer commented, "they are a great crowd of chaps, and I am fond of them indeed. If I had my choice of unit I would prefer to stay with them".<sup>43</sup> In 1942, Major Layton proudly wrote, "their behaviour at all times had been exemplary. Respect for other people's rights, reliability, and above all sobriety and

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<sup>39</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>40</sup> Bentwich, Norman, *I Understand the Risks: The Story of the Refugees from Nazi Oppression who Fought in the British Forces in the World War* (Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1950), pp. 71-72.

<sup>41</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 March 1940, p. 8.

<sup>42</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 32.

<sup>43</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 January 1941, p. 7.

moral wholesomeness are the characteristics of the men of this unit. I have found them to be diligent, actuated by a common motive; the destruction of their enemy, Hitler". He also remarked that serious crime was unknown in the unit.<sup>44</sup> Alfred Perles recalled that Major Stork of the 249 Pioneer Company was very upset when his unit of aliens was dissolved and turned into a British company. He wrote, "A one hundred percent Britisher without a single drop of Jews blood in his veins, had become so fond of his aliens that he actually wept on the parade ground when he had to part with them".<sup>45</sup>

There were even cases of commanding officers being so proud of their alien units that they hindered the refugees' opportunities for advancement. In 1943, refugees were allowed to join other corps but it was not always certain that they would be accepted for a transfer. Fritz Lustig recalled that with regard to the particular unit of Intelligence Corps he wanted to join, you were only transferred if someone who was already in it put your name forward. He also understood that the officers of the Pioneer Corps were sometimes anxious not to lose their best people and would not facilitate the transfers.<sup>46</sup> Major Woodcock was one of those officers taking such a stance over the transfer of aliens from his pioneer company. It was claimed "Major Woodcock was proud of having the smartest pioneer company in the kingdom and was reluctant to let any man leave for other units".<sup>47</sup> Although done without malicious

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<sup>44</sup> Letter from Major Layton, 8 August 1942, WO 321/10676. Major Woodcock expressed a similar view. "The general conduct of all ranks throughout this period was excellent. There was not one case of drunkenness and only one occasion necessary to implement field punishment. Good work of company". War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1940-41, PRO WO 167/1318. In another camp consisting of aliens the commandant stated that "the men were very enthusiastic. I was impressed by their fitness and by the way they spoke in high praise of the treatment which they received from all those in charge of them". He spoke highly of the discipline and work of the men. *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 239.

<sup>46</sup> Lustig, Interview.

<sup>47</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 40.

intent,<sup>48</sup> such action was an injustice to the refugees who had worked hard in their laborious duties and yearned for the chance to fight with the gun, not the shovel.

Some British officers made efforts to create a more comfortable environment for the refugee pioneers. In Chapter Three it was shown that some commanding officers went out of their way to make sure that the refugees had their religious needs catered for.<sup>49</sup> There are examples of simple gestures made by British officers that were much appreciated by the refugees and boosted morale. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy wrote of one incident. He explained that he hired a hall to celebrate the Jewish New Year with the alien pioneers. He said the first day of service “passed without local inhabitants taking undue notice of a company of men marching through the streets”. But on the second day the streets resounded with the music of a complete military band, which marched at the head of a column of men on what was obviously a service parade. The commanding officer of the infantry had learned of the special New Year service held for the Jewish refugee troops and had offered the services of his band as a goodwill gesture. As the refugees went in the hall the sergeant-major of the band even asked, “what time shall we return to march you back”.<sup>50</sup> After a decade of being treated as outsiders, many refugees sincerely appreciated such gestures. The Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recalled, “it was an indescribable thrill to march with men all keyed up and deeply moved by this pleasant surprise”.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Records from the war diaries of Major Woodcock and the 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company show that he treated the refugees very fairly without any xenophobic traits. War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1940-41, PRO WO 167/ 1318.

<sup>49</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 January 1941, p. 7.

<sup>50</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 November 1940, p. 11 and Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>51</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.



As a consequence of adopting a just and fair attitude towards the refugees, some officers became very popular among the troops. Refugee serviceman, Alfred Perles even wrote that, "The British officers, from Captain upwards, are perfect".<sup>52</sup> It was believed that Major Jacobs, of the 137 Pioneer Company, in particular was loved by all, without a single exception. Alfred stated, "he was not only a sir but a man as well, and a gentlemen to boot. No unit in the British army, in any army, could wish for a better OC than Byron Jacobs".<sup>53</sup> Henry Van Der Walde agreed. He commented that in March 1943 the company was put in a state of mobilisation and "we lost our very popular Major Jacobs, a real gentlemen, on his promotion to Lieutenant Colonel".<sup>54</sup> Alfred Perles also expressed the view that his other Commanding Officer, Major Stork of the 249 Pioneer Company, was "indubitably one of the finest OCS in the Pioneer Corps".<sup>55</sup>

However, not all relationships between refugee soldiers and their officers were so harmonious. The interactions between the refugees and British officers were not always without incident. Martin Goldenburg recalled one instance when his British drill instructor almost put him on charge because Martin said something about the English.<sup>56</sup> Even Lord Reading, who was a Jewish commanding officer in the Richborough Camp, was not a particular favourite of many of the refugees. This was a surprising revelation considering that he had established a tradition of personal consideration, which had gone a long way to securing the happiness of the refugee

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<sup>52</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 239.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid pp. 32, 84, and 239.

<sup>54</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 30.

<sup>55</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 239.

<sup>56</sup> Goldenburg, Interview.

soldiers.<sup>57</sup> However, such actions did not guarantee Lord Reading popularity. The Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy recalled saying to Lord Reading, whose interest in Judaism was minimal, “the men would be very honoured if he were present at service”. Lord Reading refused to attend even though the non-Jewish second in command made the effort. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy commented, “the men felt very bitter about it”. Even some British officers expressed their disappointment in the mess.<sup>58</sup>

Some refugees were commanded by men with unsympathetic attitudes. Some British officers harboured a dislike of the aliens because of their former national identity. Their treatment of the refugees was fuelled by mistrust and hostility. Later in the war the frequency of commander changes increased. Bentwich has suggested that, as a consequence, there were a greater number of officers leading the refugees who upheld xenophobic ideals and were ignorant of the refugees’ cultural background. “They made no secret of their suspicion of all aliens, or their contempt for intellect and culture”.<sup>59</sup> There is much support for this statement. Henry Van Der Walde recalled that the replacement for the popular Major Jacobs was a non-Jewish officer who treated the men with disrespect. Henry commented that he “was not our cup of tea”. However, Henry suggested that the poor attitude of the officer towards the alien soldiers was because of their former nationality, not because he was anti-Semitic.<sup>60</sup> Fred Pelican similarly recalled that in 1943, after a considerable number of refugees had left the Pioneer Corps, they were issued with a new sergeant major. Fred wrote, “unfortunately from then first day he got off to a bad start. Looking around and

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<sup>57</sup> He arranged that friends and relatives could work together in the (alien) pioneer companies. *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 April 1940, p. 1.

<sup>58</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>59</sup> Bentwich, *Understand the Risks*, p. 71.

<sup>60</sup> Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, p. 30. The issue of anti-Semitism is analysed in the second section of this chapter.

noticing he was in charge of some bloody foreigners, he made a great mistake by underrating us in every possible way. His standard of education was below average. He was uncouth. He made himself unpopular by excessive use of authority".<sup>61</sup>

It was rare for the British press, even among the Jewish papers, to report on the conditions in military camps for the alien pioneers. Stories that were published often expressed the mutual respect between the British officers and alien soldiers. However, there was the occasional exception. In January 1941, both *Reynolds News* and the *Jewish Chronicle* gave a very adverse report on the treatment of members of the Pioneer Corps. It was reported, "Many refugees who have volunteered for the Pioneer Corps are unhappy at the attitude often adopted by their officers. 'They make us feel that we are just bastard aliens' was a comment of one anti-Nazi who had joined the Corps".<sup>62</sup>

From 1943, many of the refugee soldiers left the Pioneer Corps and became integrated into the fighting and technical units. The majority of refugees served alongside the British soldiers in combatant units for the first time. One non-Jewish refugee Pioneer wrote that "it was the chance for which they have been waiting years, namely to show their mettle in combat".<sup>63</sup> Having achieved their wish to be 'real soldiers', the question arises whether there was greater friction now they were serving in combatant corps?

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<sup>61</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 89.

<sup>62</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 January 1941, p. 7.

<sup>63</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 242.

Sir James Grigg officially announced in March 1943 that the facilities had been granted for refugees to transfer to other arms of the service.<sup>64</sup> Enemy aliens were permitted to serve in any unit of the British army, bar the Royal Signals and the Chemical Warfare Battalions.<sup>65</sup> The academic Ronald Stent argued that, “at last the authorities yielded to their pleas that they [the refugees] were being wasted and allowed them to transfer to combatant units”.<sup>66</sup> Similarly, Bernard Sarle believed that, after a long wait, the War Office wanted to take out those who were useful to the army having realised the obvious futility of squandering available talent.<sup>67</sup>

This process of change was not without its complications. As from 1 May 1943 it was made possible for refugees to enlist directly into any unit rather than go through the process of entering the pioneers first and then transferring.<sup>68</sup> However refugee volunteers were still being directed to enlist in the Pioneer Corps first and then to try and transfer to other units. Peter Von Albert stated, “this state of affairs, you [Major-General A.J.K. Figott, Director of Recruiting and Demobilisation, War Office] will agree, tended to create some confusion among the volunteers”.<sup>69</sup>

There were a number of conditions for service, including the ability to speak, write and understand English. There was also another vetting process waiting for the refugee volunteers,<sup>70</sup> even though some had served for over three years, and proven their loyalty many times over. The biggest problem concerned those refugees who had

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<sup>64</sup> HC Vol 388, col 1837, 22 April 1943.

<sup>65</sup> Minute Sheet, Register No. 27/GEN/288, 13 April 1943, PRO WO 32/10676.

<sup>66</sup> Stent, Ronald, *A Bespattered Page? : The Internment of His Majesty's 'Most Loyal Enemy Aliens'* (Andre Deutsch: London, 1980), p. 249.

<sup>67</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000.

<sup>68</sup> HC Vol 388, col 1837, 22 April 1943.

<sup>69</sup> Letter from Peter Von Albert, 8 June 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>70</sup> Minute Sheet, Register No. 27/GEN/288, 13 April 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

not served in the Pioneer Corps. There was a requirement that a refugee had to show just cause of why he had not enlisted before.<sup>71</sup> Firstly, this provision was to ensure that aliens who applied for service direct from civilian life did not gain advantage over those who had been serving for a number of years. Secondly, it was regarded as unjust if the civilian refugees got first priority over the British subjects in the Pioneer Corps, some of whom also wanted to serve in active units.<sup>72</sup> However, War Office statistics were to demonstrate that the refugees were not receiving special treatment in transfers compared to the British subjects. By the end of May 1943, only 112 refugee pioneers had been transferred to combatant arms compared to 2000 Britons.<sup>73</sup> Herbert Emerson believed that before 1943 some refugees were so keen to join fighting units of the British army that they refused to enlist in the Pioneer Corps. Despite such reasons for not enlisting, the War Office suggested that a refugee who did not volunteer for the Pioneer Corps was “kicking his heels in a stockbrokers office” and therefore should not be given his choice of unit.<sup>74</sup>

Louis Rudnic noticed the very slow process of refugees transferring to other units. He recalled that even though most sections of the army had become open to ‘enemy aliens’ a number of refugees still remained in the Pioneer Corps. Not knowing the reason behind the lack of transfers, Louis was under the impression that this was because many refugees were not interested in joining combatant units. However, he

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid. Reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 April 1943, p. 5.

<sup>72</sup> Letter from R. F Adam, War Office, 15 June 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>73</sup> Minute 17, 25 May 1943, PRO WO 321/10676. Herbert Emerson was informed that the reason for transfers being so slow and few in numbers was because they had to be in proportion to those transfers from British pioneer companies. Letter to Sir James Grigg from Herbert Emerson 6 May 1943, PRO WO 321/10676. Other reasons why the numbers of transfers were, at first, quite low was because of commanding officers refusing to allow transfers as “there are many British subjects in the Pioneer Corps who would like to serve elsewhere, but we cannot always let them because the Pioneer Corps must be kept up. The alien cannot expect better treatment than the British subject”. Letter from R. F Adam, 15 June 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

<sup>74</sup> Minute 15, 17 May 1943, PRO WO 321/10676.

recalled, that eventually a considerable number made successful applications to move units.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, over time the situation improved and all the refugees who wished to transfer to or join active units were able to do so. After 1943, it has been stated that 4950 of the original 6840 that enlisted into the Pioneer Corps had dispersed, with the majority transferring to combatant or specialist units.<sup>76</sup> Fred Pelican recalled,

we were now entering an era where the emphasis shifted from the shovel to the gun, from square-bashing to something more sophisticated. The inevitable came about, not surprisingly, when the younger, virile elements in my unit applied for transfers to other regiments such as the parachute regiments or the commandos. Technicians wanted to serve in the Royal Engineers and doctors in the Royal Medical Corps. As for myself, I was a sergeant and stood aside for the time being. The same applied to the other sergeants. It was understandable that the young fit men got a bit fed up potato peeling and cleaning.<sup>77</sup>

Like many refugees, Eric Kenneth recalled that it was a moment that he had been waiting anxiously for. He exclaimed that he wanted to fight the Nazis with a gun, not a shovel and immediately applied for transfer.<sup>78</sup> Hans Jackson recalled that, by the end of 1943, most of the refugees had moved on to other units and many of the alien pioneer companies were eventually disbanded as a result.<sup>79</sup> Louis Rudnic was one of the refugees who immediately applied for transfer from the pioneers and was admitted to the Royal Armoured Corp.<sup>80</sup> Ken Overman said that he never wanted to be in the Pioneer Corps in the first instance and volunteered right away when it became known that they could transfer to other regiments. Ken said that, at first he was put in general service before he was posted to the Tank Corps.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Louis Rudnic, Interview, London, 8 May 2000.

<sup>76</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, p. 177.

<sup>77</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 89.

<sup>78</sup> Kenneth, Interview, Grimsby, 30 April 2000.

<sup>79</sup> Hans Jackson, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000.

<sup>80</sup> Rudnic, Interview.

<sup>81</sup> Overman, Interview.

Many refugees took this opportunity to join other units as it was their belief that their talents and skills would greatly aid the British units. Also, by joining fighting units the refugees were almost guaranteed the opportunity to be sent abroad to face the enemy. Ian Lowitt also wanted to transfer to any other unit other than the Pioneer Corps because he, “always wanted to do his bit”, and felt he had much more to offer than the labour duties of the pioneers. After aptitude tests he was informed that he was best suited for the Anti-Tank Corps. By then his English was pretty good and being familiar with technical terms he ended up in the Royal Artillery. Ian was very pleased about the transfer.<sup>82</sup> Harry Blake recalled that Lord Reading interviewed people who wanted to transfer to fighting units. At first Harry was moved to the engineering units, but explained that he was “cleaning telescopes when he wanted to be in a fighting unit. I wanted to do more”.<sup>83</sup> He later succeeded in joining the Tank Corps.

Some refugees wished to join units that would utilise their knowledge of German language and culture. It had been suggested for some time that the refugees would make ideal agents and should be sent into their respective countries and “go in and out on ‘Scarlet Pimpernel’ adventures”.<sup>84</sup> Fritz Lustig managed to get accepted into the Intelligence Corps soon after the alien pioneer camp in Richborough was dissolved. He explained that he was, “fed up being in Pioneer Corps anyway and was fortunate to know as an acquaintance an officer in the Intelligence Corps who helped get me in”. After an interview with War Office he was immediately transferred.<sup>85</sup> Hans Jackson had a more disappointing attempt at joining the Intelligence Corps, but only because he broke his arm playing football after applying. He ended up serving in the

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<sup>82</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>83</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>84</sup> Letter to Winston Churchill, Prime Minister, 1 July 1940, PRO PREM 3/42/2.

<sup>85</sup> Lustig, Interview.

Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS).<sup>86</sup> Harry Brooke and Peter Masters were able to join the alien commando unit.<sup>87</sup> The commando was an “invaluable Crack Force” specialized in the art of sabotage, infiltration and interrogation.<sup>88</sup> Peter Frean recalled that he also had the option to join commandos but chose not to as he had no idea what they did. He initially taught radio engineering in the Educational Corps before joining the artillery.<sup>89</sup>

After 1943, the major difference in the experiences of most refugee servicemen was that, after many years of being in a unit where they were part of the religious and national majority, they now found themselves in fighting and technical units where they were in a small minority. This was the time when many refugees now served side by side with British born soldiers. Harry Blake believed that in two whole regiments of the Tank Corps, the Irish Fusiliers, there were only two refugees, both from Berlin. Similarly, in the 1st Royal Tank Regiment there were five or six refugees and all were posted to different squadrons so that most had only one refugee in them.<sup>90</sup> Hans Jackson felt that he was the only refugee in the ATS. He explained, “all my pals went elsewhere”.<sup>91</sup> Ian Lowitt similarly recalled that he was the only Jewish refugee in the unit in the 62nd Anti-Tank Regiment.<sup>92</sup> The only exceptions to this situation were those refugees who joined the secret commando unit. Similar to the Pioneer Corps,

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<sup>86</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>87</sup> Masters, Peter, *Striking Back: A Jewish Commando's War Against the Nazis* (Presido Press: California, 1997). Harry Brooke, Second Interview, Sheffield, 24 November 1999.

<sup>88</sup> Leigh, Wendy, ‘Churchill's Secret Commandos’, *Daily Mail Weekend*, (Associated Newspapers Ltd, 3<sup>rd</sup> April 1999), pp. 18-21.

<sup>89</sup> Frean, Interview.

<sup>90</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>91</sup> Jackson, Interview.

<sup>92</sup> Lowitt, Interview.



the main contingent of X Troop 10 Commando<sup>93</sup> came from Germany and Austrian, and nearly all were Jewish.<sup>94</sup>

In many cases it was also the first time British soldiers had met a German or Austrian. It was clear in Peter Frean's mind that once they were in the army "we were British soldiers, we weren't enemy aliens any more". However, on reflection he believed that the majority of British soldiers did in fact regard the refugees as British soldiers, but not at all British.<sup>95</sup> Close examination of the individual experiences of refugee soldiers, mostly from interviews, reveals that there were two general experiences that define the relationship between the British and refugee soldiers.

The first consisted of those refugees who often encountered no problems with their fellow British comrades. Other than ordinary personality clashes, there was little exhibition of xenophobia. The refugees felt that they were treated with as much respect as any other ordinary British soldier. These refugees felt that they were easily accepted and that some British soldiers took a genuine sympathetic interest in their background. Martin Goldenberg recollected that his British comrades never complained or showed unease at the fact that his country of origin was an enemy nation. He explained that he was the only non-British officer in his unit and "I was going around with my officers pay book as an enemy alien and no one even battered an eyelid".<sup>96</sup> Ian Lowitt also experienced no trouble with the British soldiers. He believed he had good relations with them. His regiment mostly came from the East End of London and he felt the majority were "uneducated". However, "they all knew I

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<sup>93</sup> Known as both X Troop and 3 Troop.

<sup>94</sup> Brooke, Second Interview. Dear, Ian, *Ten Commando 1942-45* (Leo Cooper Ltd: London, 1987), p. 78.

<sup>95</sup> Frean, Interview.

<sup>96</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

was Jewish, and knew I was from Austria but never said anything".<sup>97</sup> Eric Kenneth also forged good friendships with the British soldiers. He recalled that they would "ask all the time what the German name for this or that and weapons". He pointed out that no soldier ever gave him any reason for concern especially because his own anti-Nazi views were well known all over the unit.<sup>98</sup> Ken Overman explained that his good camaraderie with the British soldiers did not just end within the military camp. He stated that that he always used to go out with them socially "for drinks" when on leave.<sup>99</sup> Henry Adler, who enlisted in the army in 1943, wanted to join the Royal Air Force but was not permitted, so he joined the infantry. He stressed, "never during in my whole army career. I never had the slightest problem with my fellow soldiers or officers. Not one single time. I can't repeat that often enough. They all knew I was Jewish and German. Nobody ever made the slightest remark about it. We spoke about it sometimes. There was an interest. People I joined up with were latecomers and quite well educated and we had a very good relationship".<sup>100</sup>

Other refugee soldiers experienced a more difficult relationship with their British comrades. A combination of ignorance and misunderstanding resulted in the refugees occasionally being singled out. Ken Overman described that in 1943 he was first posted to general service but eventually he succeeded in transferring to the Tank Corps. Ken argued that, although he pledged his allegiance to the King in the same manner as any other British soldier, he was still regarded by his fellow soldiers as a foreigner.<sup>101</sup> Karl Fraser explained, "people took fun of your accent or called you Peruvian, but nothing too malicious". He said that it was often made clear to him that

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<sup>97</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>98</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>99</sup> Overman, Interview.

<sup>100</sup> Henry Adler, Interview, London, 29 January 2003.

<sup>101</sup> Overman, Interview.

he was the only foreigner in his unit.<sup>102</sup> For Peter Frean it was not so much an unfriendly attitude towards him but rather a lack of interest in making him feel part of the unit. He admitted, though, that he shared a similar feeling towards them. “The other soldiers were not my type”. After a while, however, he “got to know them well enough”.<sup>103</sup>

In rare cases there were British soldiers who were ardently anti-German and the idea of a German in British uniform, despite their background, would have resulted in much hostility. Refugee serviceman Harry Blake knew of the passionate hatred for the enemy. He remembered “the anti-German fervour was so strong with all the propaganda dished out”. He recalled that when he was posted to a new unit he had an interview with the commanding officer and sergeant major. He was asked where he was from and so Harry replied that he originated from Germany. Harry was informed of the attitude of some of the unit and that there was a worry among some officers that the British soldiers would not be able to distinguish between a friendly German and the enemy, especially given the pressures of war and the emotional ferocity of the men. Harry was told by the commanding officer, “there’s one thing that you have to remember. When you meet the tank crew never tell any of the men where you come from other than that you’ve been to Germany. If you say you are a German they will tear you apart before the Germans get a chance”. Harry decided “I wouldn’t have dared tell them during the war. So many accidents could happen. Wouldn’t take that chance. Some men within Tank Corps wouldn’t have had a problem taking out a bayonet and slitting your throat. Most of them were ignorant”. He explained that many times whilst in the Tank Corps “some of the ‘educated’ [said sarcastically]

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<sup>102</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>103</sup> Frean, Interview.

Englishmen would come up to me and say you've got an accent where do you come from, and I'd say I came from South Africa, and they believed me. Nobody knew I was from Germany, they all thought I was South African". Being simply a foreigner did not make any difference to his relationship with the British soldiers. Harry believed "I got on well with the British lot."<sup>104</sup> Interestingly, Eric Kenneth, who as explained earlier was an ardent anti-Nazi, was also anti-German even though he did distinguish between the two. He held the opinion that "the only good German is a dead German".<sup>105</sup>

This attitude raises the question of whether many of the refugee servicemen shared a similar viewpoint about the Germans and Nazis? If so, how did they treat German civilians or POW encountered during the Allied advance through Western Europe? Many refugee servicemen had first hand dealings with many German POWs, being fluent in German they were used as interpreters or interrogators during the final months of war.<sup>106</sup> More often than not, the refugees did make a distinction between the 'Nazis' and the 'Germans', Fritz Lustig, who served with the Military Intelligence, commented, "you couldn't lump all the Germans together".<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>105</sup> Kenneth, Interview. The English Jewish soldiers Eric Freedman and Julius Kern also revealed that they had anti-German attitudes. Julius stated, "you didn't care for the Germans. All you wanted to do was get your hands on them". Eric held a dislike for Germans throughout the conflict but after witnessing terrible scenes at Bergen-Belsen his dislike turned to complete disgust. He said, "all I knew was that I hated Germans. If a German was standing right in front of me I'd tell them to their face. If I could kill them I would have killed them". Julius Kern, Interview, London, 20 November 1999, and Eric Freedman, First Interview, London, 11 January 1999.

<sup>106</sup> Many of those interviewed by the author revealed that they were occasionally given the task of questioning Nazi suspects. Fritz Lustig explained that one whole unit in the Military Intelligence consisted almost entirely of refugees, most German born. Lustig, Interview. The academic Norman Bentwich estimated that 220 refugees from Germany and Austria were transferred to the Intelligence Corps. About 110 refugees were transferred to the Commandos and 50 to the General Service Corps for War Crimes. The refugees in these Corps would have had dealings with German POWs. Bentwich, *I Understand the Risks*, pp. 176-177.

<sup>107</sup> Lustig, Interview.

The refugees on the whole were very professional in their dealings with POWs. Hans Jackson was called upon to help with interrogations. He admitted, "I knew all the stories [of Concentration Camps], of course you hated them but you were purely professional".<sup>108</sup> Harry Blake was also transferred to the Intelligence Corps. He similarly recalled, "I had to interview German POWs. Even though I was Jewish and theoretically a German, feelings did not come into it. I just did my job as a British soldier. Obviously I had a dislike of them but did not take the thing personally. He is told what to do as you are told what to do. You could inwardly say 'the bastard' but even at that age you would be immature to let out your temper on some poor so and so".<sup>109</sup> Martin Goldenburg recently agreed with this opinion. He had to guard German POWs in Egypt. He explained, "I met them as individuals even though there may have been murderers amongst them".<sup>110</sup>

Even though the refugee servicemen often treated the German POWs fairly, there were exceptions. Ken Overman was given the duty of issuing instructions to German POWs in Egypt. Ken recalled, "they weren't my favourite people. They probably guessed I was Jewish. I was disgusted with them". Ken stated, "I didn't abuse them physically. However, I did not make life easy for them, I treated them as badly as I dared".<sup>111</sup> Ian Lowitt took three Germans prisoner during the military advance through France. He remembered "I spoke to them in German and asked if they were Nazis. They said no. Still, I saw a watch one of them was wearing and I took it. I could have hit them but I didn't. I said nothing about being Jewish. Brought them

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<sup>108</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>109</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>110</sup> Goldenburg, Interview.

<sup>111</sup> Overman, Interview.

back to camp and handed them over. It was satisfying in a way”.<sup>112</sup> Fred Pelican recalled that on D-Day plus 5 he had to interrogate captured German officers for military combat information. He recalled that the attitude of the Germans was very disrespectful and on one occasion it prompted him to punish them. “They must have looked upon me as some stinking traitor of the fatherland. At one time I heard a queue of SS officers outside the tent waiting for interrogation. I heard them whistling a Nazi tune ‘Today Germany belongs to us, tomorrow the entire world’. I jumped out of the chair and demanded to know who whistled. Half a dozen raised their arms. ‘Lie on your belly’ I screamed”. Fred then made the officers crawl.<sup>113</sup>

There were some incidents of Germans being killed by refugee soldiers. The refugee serviceman Eric Kenneth shot dead a Nazi from close range. He explained that a girl who had been beaten badly by her stepfather informed the British that he was a former guard of a concentration camp and was armed with a rifle. Eric was sent round to the house to arrest the German. He recalled, “I had Sten gun. We were told to go downstairs to the cellar. We heard him. I shouted out in German to surrender. ‘Come out with your hands up’. Instead of that a rifle appeared behind the doorframe. I said ‘he could see us, I think I should shoot the light out’. The sergeant major right behind me said, ‘carry on bombardier’. I shot the light but his rifle was still staring at me behind the doorframe. He fired so I took careful aim at the rifle and let six or seven rounds off. Heard a big clump. No cry. Tried to get ambulance but by the time it came he was dead. I think his rifle exploded and tore his hand off. We didn’t care much what happened to him. I felt bad but proud when I killed him, still proud now

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<sup>112</sup> Lowitt, Interview.

<sup>113</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 100.

[sic]”.<sup>114</sup> This incident was justified in that Eric responded to being shot at, however, there were rare occurrences when the killing of Germans by the refugee soldiers seemed unnecessary. Peter Masters explained, “once in a while atrocities did occur, even among our own elite troops. Usually these were caused by an exceptionally strong motivation, real or perceived, or by someone losing their cool”. He recalled that one such event during a massive counter attack after the Normandy landings involved a 3 Troop sergeant who was forced by his colonel to execute three SS prisoners. The reason being that there were no men available to guard them and they could not risk them escaping as it would have compromised their position. The sergeant expressed to Peter Masters that he was deeply regretful of the incident.<sup>115</sup>

Having examined the refugees’ relationship with the British and German soldiers, there will now be a comparison of the refugee servicemen's experiences with the British civilian population. Henry Van Der Walde recalled that, as the refugees were mostly from Germany or Austria, they did arouse an element of interest, not just among their fellow soldiers but also among the local populations they came into contact with. He described that, other than their stint of clearance duties in London, the pioneer camps full of refugees, were often billeted near small towns or villages in England and Scotland.<sup>116</sup> Henry said that the local populations were often very good to the foreign soldiers and that they were well received. Like some of the British soldiers, the local civilians were sometimes confused over the status of the refugees.

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<sup>114</sup> Kenneth, Interview.

<sup>115</sup> Masters, *Striking Back*, p. 188.

<sup>116</sup> Small villages or towns such as Marlborough, Richborough, Tisbury, Whitsun, Weymouth, Shirehampton, Bicester, Redruth, Watchet, Yeovil and Westward Ho!. War Diary 93 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1941, PRO WO 166/5578; War Diary 87 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1941, WO 166/5572; War Diary 74 (Alien) Pioneer Company, 1941, WO 166/5560. Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, pp. 23-30.

Henry recalled that they would ask the pioneers, “how come they were German, yet were serving in the British army. It was incomprehensible to some people”.<sup>117</sup>

Both Jewish and gentile communities accepted the refugee soldiers as if they were British citizens. In some cases the refugees received special attention from the curious civilian populations. Hans Jackson explained that the refugees stationed in Glasgow were well looked after by the Jewish community. He remembered, “they mixed with us and took us in”.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, whilst based in Edinburgh in June 1942, Henry Van Der Walde recalled that “we were well received by the Edinburgh citizens and we in turn became very fond of the Scots”.<sup>119</sup> Generally, the refugees received great kindness from local residents.<sup>120</sup>

As discussed earlier, some friendships blossomed between refugee servicemen and British women, which in some cases led to marriage.<sup>121</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy and Reverend Leslie Hardman pointed out that some of these marriages were with British gentiles, a development of which they did not approve.<sup>122</sup> Louis Rudnic, for example, married a gentile Geordie girl from Tyne and Wear on 18 June 1943.<sup>123</sup> Andreas Klugescheid believed that these marriages contributed to the creation of good relations with the civilian population by integrating the refugee into British society.<sup>124</sup> However, in some cases the marriages to the refugees may have caused resentment

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<sup>117</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview

<sup>118</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>119</sup> Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, p. 30.

<sup>120</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 April 1940, p. 1.

<sup>121</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 55

<sup>122</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview. Reverend Leslie Hardman, Interview, London, 28 January 2003. The marriage of Jewish refugees to non-Jewish girls is further evidence that a number of refugees were very much, non-practising Jews.

<sup>123</sup> Rudnic, Louis, ‘Life Story’, p. 4.

<sup>124</sup> Klugescheid, *His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*, p. 99



among the wives' families, not least over the loss of nationality, rather than bringing the refugees and civilians closer together.

John Fox argued that civilian communities generally responded well to the alien companies when they were employed locally in the United Kingdom.<sup>125</sup> The pioneers were often allocated tasks as 'navvies' building roads. Henry Van Der Walde recalled that a good working relationship was often established where they worked under civilian contractors, though sometimes the refugees were urged to slow down their work rate as they were making the civilians workforce look bad.<sup>126</sup>

The exemplary behaviour and full commitment of the refugees in their tasks helped win over any members of the public who did not know what to make of the soldiers. It was reported that the Pioneer units created the finest impression among the local populations. In one instance, as a reward for the diligence of their duties, one of the companies was invited to a special cinema performance. They were marched to the cinema headed by an army band, while the local population turned out and greeted them enthusiastically.<sup>127</sup> Norman Bentwich reported that when Taunton and Yeovil were raided by the German air force, the men showed courage and energy, and soon dissipated any suspicion which the country people might have felt for the strangers in British uniform.<sup>128</sup> Refugee members of the 69 (Alien) Pioneer Company even offered their services to local farmers in their free time.<sup>129</sup> Also, when the refugees were involved in the dangerous and upsetting task of rescue and clearance of ruins in London, they distinguished themselves and won the appreciation of the military and

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<sup>125</sup> Fox, 'German and Austrian Jews as Volunteers', p. 7.

<sup>126</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 25.

<sup>127</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 April 1940, p. 1.

<sup>128</sup> Bentwich, *I Understand The Risks*, p.38.

<sup>129</sup> War Diary 69 (Alien) Pioneer Company, July 1940-December 1941, PRO WO 166/5555.

civil authorities as well as of the people.<sup>130</sup> Henry Van Der Walde recalled that, “our relations with the populace were marvellous, and with all their heartbreak they had time to provide us with tea and cakes in our breaks from our labours. The Mayor of Bermondsey was the speaker at our Christmas dinner and full of praise for what we did”.<sup>131</sup>

It was not just the local civilian populations that were keen to help the refugee servicemen. Communities and organisations all over Britain, both Jewish and non-Jewish, worked hard at providing services, although on a smaller scale compared to the provisions sent to the regular British military units. Appeals for the British public to provide for the refugee soldiers were commonplace in the Jewish newspapers.<sup>132</sup> Hospitality came in many forms. The refugees were very well supplied for the most important religious festivals by a number of Jewish agencies. In some cases entertainment was provided for the refugees.<sup>133</sup> Gifts and accessories were supplied by welfare agencies, whilst refugee committees also sent the refugees aid, whether it be funds, newspapers or woollen garments.<sup>134</sup>

The refugees made their own cultural contributions to the local communities. Their talents and efforts in providing musical or theatrical entertainment was well recognised. Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy remembered that there was a “wonderful

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<sup>130</sup> Bentwich, *Understand The Risks*, p. 38.

<sup>131</sup> Van Der Walde, ‘My Life’, p. 27.

<sup>132</sup> An appeal was made by Lady Reading for British ladies to help support a Comforts Fund for supplying the needs of refugees in army. She said, “most of these men have no near relatives to knit or provide gloves socks etc which they will need”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 26th January 1940, p. 25.

<sup>133</sup> “Glasgow’s ex-serviceman’s branch of the British Legion has been entertaining large number of Jewish [refugee] soldiers within the allied army. They are continually accorded hospitality”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 July 1940, p. 12.

<sup>134</sup> Lady Reading thanked the Services Welfare Committee for the many gifts, which they had sent to the camp at Richborough. *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 March 1940, p. 8. The Manchester Jewish Refugees Committee sponsored an effort to provide 500 woollen garments for the refugees serving in the Pioneer Corps”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 27 June 1941, p. 16.

collection of artists, musicians and actors and they held many concerts. The concerts were fantastic. The famous Koko the Clown also provided much entertainment".<sup>135</sup> Money was raised for charities through such concerts and other events organised by the alien companies.<sup>136</sup> One (alien) pioneer company decided to make a monthly contribution to the Oxford Refugee Committee and raise money for the old and sick. The company's band became so popular that they played on the wireless. Further concerts were tirelessly arranged to increase funds.<sup>137</sup> The contributions the refugees made to aid the national war effort received warm appreciation from the civilian population.<sup>138</sup> The cultural activities of the alien pioneer companies helped mould good relationships with the British.<sup>139</sup>

This often cordial relationship with fellow British soldiers and local people were severely tested during the period of invasion fever. In the aftermath of the retreat from France the entire coastline of Britain was gripped by invasion fever and the majority of civilian enemy alien refugees were interned. Fred Pelican has described how this affected the relationship of the refugees already serving in the army with the British civilians.

However unforeseen, complications of one kind or another arose. The invasion danger reached a peak, the media warning the public at large to look out for possible spies, dressed in British uniforms. Here were our men in a sensitive area, walking about in times of black out speaking amongst themselves in German or poor English and, to crown it all, wearing British uniforms. It was hardly surprising when our men got picked up by the military or civil police feeling certain they had captured German

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<sup>135</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>136</sup> Rhodes-Wood, E.H., *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps, 1939-1945* (Aldershot: Gale & Polden, 1960), p. 138; War Diary 69 (Alien) Pioneer Company, July 1940-December 1941, PRO WO 166/ 5555; *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 5 December 1941, p. 7.

<sup>138</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 7 March 1941, p. 15. Rhodes-Wood, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 138.

<sup>139</sup> Klugescheid, *His Majesty's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*, p. 99.

spies. Our army pay books to them were excellent forgeries. Our commander's time was daily taken up by calling at various stations affecting his men's release, offering a lot of explanations.<sup>140</sup>

Examples of such misconceptions over the loyalty of German and Austrian refugees were commonplace. Fred Pelican and Eric Freedman, a Jewish British born signaller, both heard of similar occurrences involving false accusations of alien soldiers being Nazi spies. Fred Pelican's account of the story involved a non-commissioned officer in his attachment. Sergeant Stoessel, from Vienna, had previously been a member of imperial Austrian army. Fred described him as a religious man from an orthodox background. He kept kosher and was one of the minority of refugees who was content to live on simple foods such as bread, butter and potatoes rather than compromise his religious beliefs. Most importantly, Fred explained that Sergeant Stosesel did not fail to make his daily prayers. One morning after marching refugee servicemen to a construction site he went into an empty hut, took out his prayer shawl, *tefillin* and began prayers moving his body forwards and backwards.<sup>141</sup> Halfway through his prayers, quite innocently a civilian worker opened the door, noticed the sergeant in the far corner and immediately rushed to the nearest telephone. He called the emergency services and disclosed that he saw a foreign agent in British uniform with a wireless transmitter tied to his head. He claimed that the man was reading out coded messages in a foreign language. Two army vehicles arrived and military police rushed into the hut and arrested Stoessel. All explanations were ignored and he was told to shut up. Fred Pelican concluded that it took time for his commanding officer to give a feasible explanation that led to the release of the sergeant. "It was the joke of the year throughout the company. Officers calling his story cock and bull when they quizzed

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<sup>140</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>141</sup> In Judaism this is called 'Davening'.

him. At this time the predominant concern was security and guarding against enemy agents and infiltrators".<sup>142</sup>

A less dramatic recollection was of the (alien) pioneer company at Westward Ho!, who were confined to their camp for a few days during the summer of 1940. Lord Reading informed his men that the local population were not aware of the presence of foreigners in British uniform, let alone enemy aliens in the army. Alfred Perles recalled that the refugee were warned that civilians "might get panicky" believing they were spies or enemy paratroopers. The civilians were later informed that the refugees "might look like strange animals" but they were "bona fide British soldiers".<sup>143</sup>

Signs of unease among British people were common. Henry Van Der Walde recalled that it was not uncommon for the refugees to hitch lifts all over the country. His longest lift was for 150 miles. He recalled that the British were generally quite willing to pick the refugees up since they were in uniform. However, it often became awkward, even comical sometimes, once they were involved in conversation. "One could feel our host's suspicion that we might be German spies in disguise, with out thick accents and we had to do a lot of explaining".<sup>144</sup>

During the early years of war, the panicked reaction of the government regarding internment, combined with the xenophobic propaganda of the press only helped make

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<sup>142</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>143</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 68.

<sup>144</sup> Van Der Walde, 'My Life', p. 28.

a civilian population nervous.<sup>145</sup> Anti-German attitudes did exist among the public and army alike throughout the war. After news of the liberation of concentration camps such as Bergen-Belsen spread around Britain, a number of Jewish refugees were to bear the brunt of the British hatred of Germans. Jewish refugees were perceived as Nazis and were subsequently attacked.<sup>146</sup> Refugee agencies were well aware of the problem of xenophobia and tried their utmost to prevent its spread. The Association of Jewish Refugees warned its members “we have to be most careful to watch every symptom which may lead to ill feeling against any part of the population”.<sup>147</sup>

Requests were made for refugees to “ask their British friends to judge each case on its own merits and not to apply the instrument of generalisation. They knew from past experience the dangerous influence this can have on the uncritical mind”.<sup>148</sup> To, a large extent the military and civilian reaction to the refugees in British uniforms responded well to such advice. The appearance of anti-German attitudes was rare in comparison to the levels of acceptance and understanding. These men from the enemy nations often intrigued the soldiers and civilians. However, as with most relationships, a greater understanding between the refugees and the British developed over time.

Fred Pelican explained that in the majority of cases, once it became common knowledge that the refugees were loyal to Britain, the public responded most

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<sup>145</sup> “Following a campaign directed against Jewish refugees and internees by certain papers the Committee for Jewish Evacuation and Settlement has taken energetic steps to counteract this insidious propaganda”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 April 1941, p. 19.

<sup>146</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1945, p. 4.

<sup>147</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, April 1943, p. 6.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

favourably.<sup>149</sup> In 1943, for example, the British Legion revised their policy towards refugees and agreed to consider applications for membership by refugees.<sup>150</sup> So, to a large extent, the reactions of the British to the refugee servicemen did not always mirror the government's policies towards them. It can be concluded that:

The non-British companies in the Home Forces were, wherever stationed, winning the high regard of other military formations with which they came into contact and of the civilian population. Their conscientious devotion to duty and high standard of personal conduct made a strong impression on all they met and did much to overcome the unreasoning bias of British insularity and prejudices magnified by wartime propaganda.<sup>151</sup>

## (2) Anti-Semitism in the British Army, 1939-45

In 1943 it was suggested that a new anti-alien campaign in Britain was linked to a rise in anti-Jewish prejudice.<sup>152</sup> Harry Cemach claimed that some Britain citizens were using the guise of antipathy towards Germans to give their anti-Semitic opinions a more acceptable face. The Association of Jewish Refugees acknowledged that during times of such tension, the refugees had a harder time in overcoming any form of prejudice.<sup>153</sup> Jewish refugees from enemy nations were easy scapegoats. However, as has been shown the refugees within the army were rarely exposed to any manifestations of anti-German or Austrian prejudice. Yet were the refugee

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<sup>149</sup> Pelican, *From Dachau to Dunkirk*, p. 55. One British officer explained that sometimes there was a fear of the refugee servicemen, but it soon subsided when British and aliens got to know each other in the boot hall and in the canteen. War Diary 88 (Alien) Pioneer Company, June 1940, PRO WO 167/1318.

<sup>150</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1943, p. 2.

<sup>151</sup> Rhodes-Wood, *A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps*, p. 138.

<sup>152</sup> Letter by Harry Cemach, *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 December 1943, p. 14.

<sup>153</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1943, p. 2.

servicemen subjected to anti-Jewish behaviour within the ranks of the army? Were their experiences worse, similar or better than those of Jewish faith serving within the Polish army based in Britain?

As we have seen, until 1943 the majority of refugees were serving together within the ranks of the Pioneer Corps, many units of which were almost completely composed of those of the Jewish faith. Refugee serviceman Harry Blake recalled only ever meeting one non-Jew, a German political escapee, in his unit.<sup>154</sup> Similarly, the camp commandant of an (alien) pioneer company informed the *Jewish Chronicle*, “all except one are Jews, and even he has some Jewish blood in him”.<sup>155</sup> It would be easy to assume, therefore, that experiences of anti-Semitism among the refugee soldiers during this period were non-existent. Surprisingly, however, there were incidents when the non-Jewish ‘enemy alien’ soldiers, and even Jewish soldiers in the (alien) pioneer companies, displayed prejudice towards other serving Jews. Gentile refugee serviceman, Alfred Perles, recalled one soldier in particular whom he described as an ‘anti-Semitic Jew’. This man had a passionate hatred for Jews and resented the fact that he was of the same religion.<sup>156</sup>

A minority of British officers were felt by the refugees to be hostile to them (as discussed earlier). The majority of refugees believed that such attitudes were symptomatic more of anti-alienism rather than anti-Semitism. Henry Van Der Walde, for example, expressed the view that in the Pioneer Corps there was never any anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by the British officers.<sup>157</sup> While, Reverend Dr. Isaac

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<sup>154</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>155</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 October 1941, p. 5.

<sup>156</sup> Perles, *Alien Corn*, p. 18.

<sup>157</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.



Levy believed that the officers who mistreated the refugees were neither anti-alien nor anti-Jewish; they were just “impolite people”. He explained, “they [refugees] had to understand orders quickly. The officers were not from Harrow or Eton. They were a pretty rough lot. The majors, their language was pretty foul and they had to be reprimanded quite often. Should not talk to these men with such language. It was not because they [refugees] were Jewish though. They [the officers] wouldn’t dare say ‘Jew’ otherwise very serious and they would be severely reprimanded. In the army you don’t insult a man over his religion [*sic*]”.<sup>158</sup> So, experiences of anti-Semitism were uncommon among the refugees whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps. However, did the situation change for the refugees in 1943 and for the rest of the war? In this period, as Jews, they were often isolated.<sup>159</sup>

With such a massive intake of British soldiers from all walks of life it was probably only inevitable that a small percentage of men would bring anti-Semitic prejudices into the army.<sup>160</sup> The number of incidents of anti-Semitism reported increased as the war continued. The High Officer of the Chaplain General Department urged Jewish soldiers in the British army to register complaints of anti-Semitism to a Jewish or Christian chaplain. They were assured that they would be “thoroughly and impartially investigated no matter how high up the person”. The Chaplain Department claimed, “complaints of the kind referred to are heard with increasing frequency, the acts which occasion them are dead against the finest British army tradition. They tarnish the reputation for tolerance and fair play, which is a precious feature in the tradition of the regular British army”.<sup>161</sup> However, despite there being some manifestations of

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<sup>158</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>159</sup> Frean, Interview, and Adler, Interview.

<sup>160</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 30 April 1943, p. 8.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*

anti-Semitic behaviour in the British army, it was not as prevalent as the Chaplain Department suggested.

A number of the British Jewish soldiers did experience anti-Semitism at some point during their army career. It seems that in most cases anti-Semitism occurred only as isolated incidents. A number of British soldiers never experienced it at all. Some of the Jewish chaplains made light of the fact that anti-Semitism was increasing within the British army. Reverend Leslie Hardman recently stated, “anti-Semitism – I fortunately never met it”. He explained that there were incidents that occurred against British Jews but they were not necessarily connected with anti-Semitism.<sup>162</sup> Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy said, “there were only very rare cases of anti-Semitism that were manifested in the army”.<sup>163</sup> Eddie Cohn, a British Jewish soldier, recalled differently. He remembered that, initially, he had quite a few fights with other soldiers who made insults about the Jews.

“It was Jew this and Jew that. It was not always overt but you felt it. Occasionally some roughneck would say Jew bastard or things like that. Didn’t take too much notice of it. Weren’t many clever boys among it. I remember sitting round a fire in our billet about 20 of us and I was the only Jew. By this time I got friendly with a few of them and they saw I wasn’t frightened to fight to defend myself. The talk got round to religion and they were talking about the Jews. I said ‘look fellows I’m a Jew and we are talking together quite friendly’, but they said, ‘oh, we don’t mean you’. You see ignorance. I told them, ‘it did not make any difference if you know me and accept me as part of the group, but why can’t you accept fact that if you’d get to know them your ignorance evaporates and you get to see the Jew as a man like me’. They then spoke about all the Jews making the money and I replied, ‘Am I doing that? I’m here with you’. That quietened them down a bit. After that I had no trouble at all [*sic*].<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Reverend Hardman, Interview.

<sup>163</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>164</sup> Eddie Cohn, Interview, London, 4 March 2000.

Most incidents of anti-Semitism were in the form of an occasional jibe that, after intervention by a Jewish soldier, soon stopped, at least overtly. Anti-Semitism was not a rampant problem in the British Army, especially not relative to the experiences of the refugees in the Polish army. Anti-Semitism in the Polish army, based in Britain has been well documented. It was endemic and virulent. Tom Driberg M.P. stated, “too many [Polish soldiers] suffer from this psychological infection [anti-Semitism]. The Polish government itself has recognised this concern”.<sup>165</sup>

Maurice Hermele, Jewish Polish soldier, labelled the gentile Polish soldiers as ‘masters of hate’. He described the terrible treatment of the Jews, many of whom were conscripted into the army.

Even though the Poles were formed into an army in Britain they did everything they could to make us unhappy. They had the audacity to be anti-Semitic straight on arrival. They shouted at us, called us all sorts of names. In England all doctors, dentists became officers quickly. The Jews did not. I stayed an ordinary private for almost two years and they wouldn’t employ me as a dentist even though they needed dentists terribly badly. There were special dental surgeries laid out for each unit. All the qualified Jewish dentists were made to do jobs that included wiping the floors, serving the officers, doing all sorts of manual jobs and even learning how to shoot was forbidden. For two years I had to suffer insults after insults. Made our lives a misery. Had to report to the commanding officer. He said right away ‘no way I’m going to let a Jew work in the dental surgery. As long as I’m in power you won’t work here’. I couldn’t answer back or they would have put me in prison. Anti-Semitic all the time. Very loud to each other they would say ‘about time we get rid of the Jews glad the war is still going on that they [Nazis] get rid of them for us’[sic].<sup>166</sup>

Abusive and sometimes violent discrimination and prejudice continued without respite in the Polish army throughout the whole war, despite appeals for an end to

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<sup>165</sup> Driberg claimed that, “again and again these Jews have been told by Poles who should be their comrades, ‘you just wait. We can’t do what we would like to do to you here in Britain, because these British swine are in the pay of the Jews; but the moment we land in Europe, out of sight of the British - then, every Pole has two bullets, the first for the Jews, the second for the Germans’”. Driberg, Tom, *Absentees For Freedom: The Case of the Jews in the Polish Forces* (National Council for Civil Liberties: London, May 1944).

<sup>166</sup> Maurice Hermele, Interview, London, 6 May 2000.

such behaviour by General Sikorski and later General Sosnkowsky, Commanders-In-Chief of the Polish army.<sup>167</sup> There was even an anti-Semitic magazine published and circulated among many Polish soldiers.<sup>168</sup> Politicians such as Rathbone, Wedgwood and Driberg protested in the House of Commons about the anti-Semitism in the Polish army.<sup>169</sup> In 1944 the government felt the need to intervene as the situation had worsened dramatically, with Polish Jewish soldiers refusing to obey orders and running away from the army.<sup>170</sup> Maurice Hermele believed that the only reason why these men left the army was because they could no longer stand the anti-Semitism, they hated “being treated as animals”.<sup>171</sup> Although the men were arrested and accused of desertion, it was soon apparent that they wanted to continue to fight in the war, but within the British army, not the Polish. “We are still ready and willing to fight and we will go wherever we may be sent. But would rather serve 20 years in prison than one more day in the Polish army”. They left in the belief that there would be no difficulty in joining the British army and had no intention of evading service.<sup>172</sup> Debates surrounding the trial of the men accused of desertion were heavily covered in the *Jewish Chronicle* and *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*.<sup>173</sup> Shocking revelations of anti-Semitism were also brought to the attention of the British public by the British

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<sup>167</sup> During the discussion of the Allied Forces Bill in parliament attention was drawn to anti-Semitism in the Polish Forces. Sir Edward Grigg read the order of General Sikorski. “Honest brotherhood of all arms must rule and squabbles be eliminated. My principle is that a soldier now fighting for the common cause has thereby given sufficient evidence that he is a Pole irrespective of his origin and religion. Anyone who is found to be guilty of anti-Semitism in the Polish army will in future be severely punished”. *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 August 1940, p. 1; *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 November 1940, p. 1; *Jewish Chronicle*, 9 July 1943, p. 5; *Jewish Chronicle*, 23 July 1943, p. 5.

<sup>168</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 19 September 1942, p. 8; *Jewish Chronicle*, 26 March 1943, p. 7.

<sup>169</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 22 December 1939, p. 10. *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 July 1942, p. 4; *Jewish Chronicle*, 14 April 1944, p. 1.

<sup>170</sup> Debates in parliament over the desertion incident in HC Vol 398, cols 2010-2014, 5 April 1944; HC Vol 399, cols 747-750, 26 April 1944; HC Vol 400, col 162, 17 May 1944.

<sup>171</sup> Hermele, Interview.

<sup>172</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 April 1944, p. 1.

<sup>173</sup> Selected examples in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 10 January 1941, p. 9; 17 July 1942 p. 4; 26 March 1943, p. 7; 19 September 1942, p. 8; 21 January 1944, p. 1; 4 February 1944, p. 7; 7 April 1944, p. 1; 14 April 1944, p. 1; 21 April 1944, p. 1; 28 April 1944, p. 1; 5 May 1944, p. 1; 12 May 1944, p. 1.

press.<sup>174</sup> The men accused of desertion were tried and sentenced by courts-martial but after proving the terrible provocation behind their actions the sentences were rescinded.<sup>175</sup> So, undoubtedly, anti-Semitism in the British army was clearly very minor in comparison with the persecution that existed in the Polish army in Britain.

In the British army, unlike the Polish army, most cases of anti-Jewish attitudes were the result of ignorance rather than stemming from an inherent hatred of all those of Jewish faith. As a result it was easier for such prejudices to be quickly dispersed. Many gentiles had never met a Jew in civilian life. Reverend Louis Rabinowitz believed that a consequence of this was that their impressions of Jews had been solely gathered from what they read or had heard from others.<sup>176</sup>

There were minor incidents of anti-Semitism in the British Armed Forces. Julius Kern, for example, served in the Royal Navy. He stated that he was the only Jew both at his training camp and on his ship. He later commented, "I didn't care 'cause no-one started on me. All down for same job [*sic*]". Julius only had one experience of prejudice during his whole navy career. He explained, "I worked in the boiler house on a coal ship and got in shower before this cook. He said, 'you Jews get in everywhere first'. I lost my temper and nearly threw him over the ship. After that he was my 'best pal' and gave me food whenever. You had to stand up for yourself. I hit him, he was a coward. Always a shame though".<sup>177</sup> Eric Freedman, a Jewish soldier, recalled that he generally had good and comradely relations with his fellow soldiers.

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<sup>174</sup> Newspapers such as *The Sunday Express*, *Reynolds News*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Worker* and the *New Statesman and Nation*. Reported in *Jewish Chronicle*, 28 April 1944, p. 1.

<sup>175</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 12 May 1944, p. 1.

<sup>176</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 January 1941, p. 15.

<sup>177</sup> Kern, Interview.

He said that he only experienced anti-Semitism once or twice. One time he was making a joke about some sausages and the cook called him a 'Jew boy' and said he would not make sausages for him. Eric said, "I kicked him flying. Gave him one whack even though he was a corporal. He reported me, but as soon as they heard he was anti-Semitic they didn't like it. The cook got demoted because of that. Got me great satisfaction [sic]".<sup>178</sup> Even the British chaplain, Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy, had one experience of anti-Semitism in the army. Levy recalled, "I had a very nasty experience in Germany although it was very exceptional. I left the Middle East and came to Europe. The lieutenant colonel asked me to do a favour". The colonel needed some new clothes and Levy was asked if he could make enquiries with some tailors. Levy reported back to the colonel that he needed certain cloth coupons and "instead of saying thank you very much he said, "Of course I should of known better. Your people cornered all the cloth". I said, "I beg your pardon. You are an ungrateful bastard. I went to all the trouble of making enquiries and that's all you can say" and I walked out. I know he was superior to me but I couldn't care less. Stupid man had no business to be an officer. Only case".<sup>179</sup>

On the whole, then there were very few problems with anti-Semitism in the British army. *The Jewish Chronicle* reported that the "vast majority of officers and men in the services were not anti-Semitic; and indeed are very tolerant towards those who are sincere Jews". It was claimed that in the rare cases of anti-Semitism in the British army it was because the "non-Jews were ignorant about Jewish matters".<sup>180</sup> One Jewish soldier wrote in *Fratres*, a magazine of the Oxford and St Georges Club, "the

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<sup>178</sup> Eric Freedman, Second Interview, London, 19 November 1999.

<sup>179</sup> Reverend Dr. Levy, Interview.

<sup>180</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 June 1943, p. 12.

ignorance of Jews and Judaism [in the army] is astonishing. I get asked the most absurd questions e.g. do Jews believe in God?”. However, he came to the conclusion, “despite most extraordinary preconceived notions they are prepared to accept a man at his face value even if it means revising previous opinions considerably”.<sup>181</sup> Eleanor Rathbone had a similar opinion. Speaking of anti-Semitism in Britain she said that a great deal of it was based on misconception and prejudice.<sup>182</sup> There was no pattern that dictated the emergence of anti-Jewish behaviour. Non-Jews often slowly learned to accept that the Jews were fellow soldiers fighting for the same cause. Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz claimed that in the army they took a man for what he was “for as long as he shouldered his share of the burden they did not care what his religion was”.<sup>183</sup> British Jewish soldier Private M. Doberman commented in 1943, “I have had a hard fight during that time defending Judaism and all it stands for. But at last I have brought home to fellow non-Jews the meaning of Jewry. They are now different towards Jews”.<sup>184</sup>

Despite some anti-Semitism in the army, the refugee servicemen very rarely, if at all, witnessed any anti-Jewish behaviour while serving in the army from 1943 until the end of the war. Henry Van Der Walde explained that, “the issue of religion and being Jewish never came up within the camp or outside”.<sup>185</sup> Martin Goldenberg also recalled that being Jewish never had any “negative impact on my army career”.<sup>186</sup> Similarly, Harry Blake believed that being Jewish did not have any bearing on their

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<sup>181</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 1 November 1940, p. 19

<sup>182</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 21 January 1944, p. 5.

<sup>183</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 24 January 1941, p. 15.

<sup>184</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 April 1943, p. 17.

<sup>185</sup> Van Der Walde, Interview.

<sup>186</sup> Goldenberg, Interview.

[the refugees'] relationship with non-Jews. He never experienced, or heard of any stories of anti-Semitism directed at refugees.<sup>187</sup> Hans Jackson was of the opinion that the non-Jewish soldier did sometimes show some interest in the fact that the refugees were Jewish, "not because they were anti-Semitic but because they were curious".<sup>188</sup> Both Reverend Dr. Isaac Levy and Reverend Leslie Hardman explained that they never received a formal complaint from any refugee about anti-Semitism in the army. Not one report of anti-Semitism against the refugees was written in the *Jewish Chronicle*, *Jewish Telegraphic Agency Bulletin*, or *The Times* during the whole war

A possible reason why there was so little overt anti-Semitism may have been that the British gentile soldiers were not always aware of the refugees' Judaism. As the majority of refugees were non-practising Jews their religion was not necessarily apparent. A number of Jews took no advantage of the many privileges allowed them by the authorities because they did not want to appear conspicuous or a nuisance.<sup>189</sup> Harry Blake, for example, believed that "we [refugees] didn't really reveal our Jewishness. I never applied to have leave for *Pesach*. Once you are in the Tank Corps you are part of it so if told to do something you do it. Being Jewish was not something we advertised".<sup>190</sup> There were more incidents of anti-alienism than anti-Semitism directed at the refugees because the refugees' foreign origins were more easily recognizable than their Jewishness. Refugee serviceman Ken Overman explained, "if anything I was heckled for being German, but not because of anti-Semitism".<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>188</sup> Jackson, Interview.

<sup>189</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*, 25 June 1943, p. 12.

<sup>190</sup> Blake, Interview.

<sup>191</sup> Overman, Interview.



## Conclusion

Soon after the war in Europe had ended the Association of Jewish Refugees declared, “their [the refugees] former country is the graveyard of their relatives. There are no bonds left between them and Germany.”<sup>1</sup> Although the majority of refugees’ military service did not end immediately after VE day, they were confronted with the imminence of a return to civilian life, a time to reflect on the dramatic and turbulent events of the past twelve years and the opportunity to resolve issues over their nationality. Ian Lowitt recalled that on his first leave after the war, despite all the jubilation back in England, he was saddened with a “what do I do now feeling”.<sup>2</sup> A demobbed officer stressed the significance of the period at the end of the war saying, “here we stand now - at another turning point in our lives”.<sup>3</sup>

The refugees were aware that their country of origin had indeed become a ‘burial ground’ of many, if not all, of their relatives who had been murdered in concentration camps. Unsurprisingly, most refugees decided that there was to be no permanent return to Germany or Austria.<sup>4</sup> Refugee serviceman Martin Goldenberg recently explained that when the Home Office asked him why he did not want to go back to Austria. He replied, “I don’t want to live amongst the murderers of my family”.<sup>5</sup> The Marquis of Reading stressed that the refugees from Germany and Austria would have

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<sup>1</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1945, p. 4.

<sup>2</sup> Ian Lowitt, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

<sup>3</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, July 1946, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Many national newspapers stated that the overwhelming majority of refugees did not want to return to their place of origin. *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*. June 1945, p. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Goldenberg, Interview, London, 3 March 2000.

ended up in Dachau, Belsen or Buchenwald if they had not been fortunate in escaping to Britain before the war.<sup>6</sup>

By the time the refugees were demobbed they no longer felt any identity with Germany or Austria. Hans Jackson, for one, bluntly stated that he did not regard himself in the slightest bit German.<sup>7</sup> Bernard Sarle recalled that even when he returned to Germany with the Allied Forces as a sergeant in the British army, he thought, “this is an interesting country. I’ve never been through here before, even though it used to be my homeland. Didn’t identify myself as a German [*sic*]”.<sup>8</sup> Most refugee servicemen felt this way about their ‘Germaness.’<sup>9</sup>

The issue of the nationality of refugees was not determined as soon as the war ended. Despite the refugees having served within British units for over two years there still existed ignorance from some British soldiers about the refugees’ allegiances. Ken Overman, for instance, recalled that, when on VE day the soldiers were celebrating in their barracks, somebody in the unit coming up to him and saying, “fancy you being a German and you are celebrating”. Ken explained, “they still couldn’t take it in, in their eyes I was still a German”.<sup>10</sup> Concerns over the refugees ‘nationality’ were not helped by the fact that when they were demobbed the British government still recognised the refugees as ‘enemy aliens’. As a consequence as soon as the refugees

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<sup>6</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1945, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Hans Jackson, Second Interview, London, 2 March 2000.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Sarle, Interview, Falkirk, 27 May 2000.

<sup>9</sup> The Marquis of Reading stated “all roots which may once have bound them to Germany have been once and for all effectively cut. These people may have been Germans of the Germany of years ago; they are not Germans of the Germany of today or tomorrow. They cannot go back”. *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1945, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ken Overman, Interview, Clacton, 21 April 2000.

came out of army they had to report back to the police as aliens and were given 'alien' identity books.<sup>11</sup>

This was made all the more frustrating for the refugees who by now largely felt a strong bond with Britain and wanted to remain in the country permanently. More than ever before the refugees wanted to become British citizens. Karl Fraser explained that after the war he felt "so anglicised that the idea of going back to Austria was nonsense".<sup>12</sup> Han Jackson recalled that he identified strongly with Scotland, the country he lived in before he joined the army. He explained that "Glasgow was my home town, more so than Berlin, and I wanted to live there".<sup>13</sup> A number of refugees were married to British wives and some even had begun to raise a young family in Britain. Peter Frean said that after so much turmoil and shifting from place to place he wanted to finally settle down and raise his family in England. He did not want to return to his former homeland and regarded himself as British.<sup>14</sup> The Home Secretary, Mr. Chuter Ede, recognised that there were many refugees who desired to become British citizens; especially those that have served in H.M. Forces, who he claimed to "have earned their share of the gratitude which we all feel to the fighting forces".<sup>15</sup>

Despite earlier fears, the British government did not adopt a policy of repatriation. Mr. Silverman M.P who opposed repatriation, stated, "it would be difficult to conceive of a more cruel procedure than to take people who have lost everything they

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<sup>11</sup> Karl Fraser, Interview, London, 7 May 2000; Fox, John, P., 'German and Austrian Jewish Volunteers in Britain's Armed Forces 1939-1945', *Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, (Secker and Warburg: London, 1995), p. 49.

<sup>12</sup> Fraser, Interview.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, Second Interview.

<sup>14</sup> Peter Frean, Interview, London, 12 April 2000.

<sup>15</sup> HC Vol 415, cols 2305-2310, 5 November 1945. Many refugees were later pleased that in recognition of the alien and British companies service in the Pioneer Corps the title 'Royal' had been approved by the King. *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 1947, p. 1.

have - their homes, their relatives, their children, all the things that made life decent and possible - and compel them against their will, to go back to the scene of those crimes".<sup>16</sup> The Association of Jewish Refugees argued, "they have gone through the hell of Dunkirk and have fought on the beaches of Italy; they were dropped over Arnhem and marched with the victorious armies through France, Belgium and Holland. The refugee soldiers on their demobilisation have to find new jobs. Being non-British have these men a marked disadvantage seeking employment"[sic].<sup>17</sup> There was a desire amongst all Jewish refugees to acquire once again a proper legal status, "and to be recognised as citizens of a country in which they want their children to love".<sup>18</sup> Mr. Chuter Ede decided that non-British members of H.M. Forces would be included in the categories that would be given priority with regard to naturalisation. In January 1946 the process of naturalisation was restarted.<sup>19</sup>

Although some refugees emigrated to other nations, the majority of refugee servicemen became bona fide British citizens.<sup>20</sup> Martin Goldenberg recalled that he "signed the oath of allegiance for a second time [the first when he joined the British army], except now I was not an 'enemy alien' anymore. I felt very happy about it".<sup>21</sup> Despite the procedure in dealing with applications being very slow the number of naturalisations

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<sup>16</sup> HC Vol 410, cols 2266-2267, 15<sup>th</sup> May 1945. Reported in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1945, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 1946, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, December 1946, p. 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, January 1946, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, June 1946, p. 45.

<sup>21</sup> Goldenberg, Interview. The Certificate of Naturalization stated that the conditions laid down by the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act had been satisfied and that the subject would be "entitled to all political and other rights and privileges, and be subject to all obligations duties and liabilities, to which a natural-born subject is entitled or subject, and have all intents and purposes the status of a natural-born British subject". Certificate of Naturalization, 18 July 1946, in possession of Bernard Sarle.

granted from its resumption to June 1947 stood at 12,976. Of this number 3653 were of refugees who had served in the forces.<sup>22</sup>

There can be little doubt that the refugees had successfully involved themselves in resisting the Nazi regime. One refugee officer wrote that in 1945 the refugee members of the British army became the “true masters” in Germany.<sup>23</sup> This was a dramatic change of circumstance from six to twelve years earlier when the refugees were the persecuted minority of the Nazi Reich. They no longer had any special bond with Germany or the German people. This change of national identity would never have happened if the Nazis had not come to power.

Their development of a British identity during the war was slow. Inequality in the army and ambiguities over the issue of naturalisation did not help in encouraging an affinity with Britain. However, by 1947-48 most refugee servicemen had become loyal British citizens with English names and were fluent in the English language.

Between the years 1935 to 1945 the refugees’ national identities were always uncertain. During this period there were a series of discrepancies between the refugees’ own sense of identity and that of the government in power. To a considerable extent there was a dynamic interplay between these different perceptions.

In most cases, governmental categorisation of the refugees had a negative impact on the refugee’s quality of life. Conflicts between different interpretations of the

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<sup>22</sup> Chuter Ede speaking in parliament, HC Vol 438, col 230, 19 June 1947. Reported in *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, July 1947, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> *Association of Jewish Refugees Information*, July 1946, p. 49.

refugees' identities always resulted in making the refugees' situation more difficult. Whatever the motivations of the Nazi and British governments the refugees always ended up suffering a number of hardships, although emphatically to very different extremes. Despite escaping Nazi persecution the British government's categorisation of the refugees resulted in restrictions being played on their civilian life, their eventual internment and conditions of inequality for much of their army career. At the same time the British government's suspicion of the refugees, even when serving in the British army, had an impact on the attitudes of the civilian population and British born soldiers towards these refugees. It has been argued that, "if nothing else, the internment of aliens encouraged the public to believe that the country was infested with German agents".<sup>24</sup> Yet, in some circumstances, the response of the press, and pressure from politicians and pro-alien groups, helped influence the government into reversing its stance on certain policies such as releasing internees and allowing refugees to enlist into units other than the Pioneer Corps.

In general the refugee relationship with British civilians and soldiers was cordial. Experiences of anti-alienism were not that common and its impact on the refugees was minimal. Occurrences of anti-Semitism within the refugees' army experiences were almost non-existent in comparison to that experienced by Jewish British born soldiers and especially the Polish Jewish soldiers. Ignorance of the refugees' background was often the prime cause for any conflicts with fellow soldiers or civilians. In most cases once the British became confident that the refugees were not Nazi sympathisers their suspicions evaporated, giving way to a hospitable and welcoming rapport.

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<sup>24</sup> McLaine, Ian, *The Ministry of Morale: Home Front Morale and the Ministry of Information in World War Two*, (George Allen and Unwin: London 1979), p. 74.

On the whole, refugee servicemen shared very similar experiences. Every refugee was mentally and physically tried and tested by the large number of predicaments they endured from 1933-45. It was very rare that the refugees had any significant say in the decisions that dictated their lives. They were often at the mercy of the policies of ruling authorities. Despite this most refugees generally adapted very well to their changes in surroundings. The refugee servicemen showed strong mental resolve in times of serious dilemmas and there was very little evidence of any major identity crises. From 1933-45 there were only four circumstances when the refugees were able to make their own decisions as to how their lives should progress, (although these were usually made under significant pressure from higher authorities). These were their decision to leave Germany, their decision to join the British army, the decision to change their names and religion on army identity papers and, lastly, their decision to remain in Britain and apply for British citizenship. In most cases the refugees were not afraid of asserting their beliefs that others had wrongly interpreted their identities and were treating them unfairly, but in most cases they often just got on with their lot in order to survive and progress.

There were significant changes in the refugees' Jewish identities between 1933 and 1945. In the case of every refugee, their experiences in Nazi Germany and Austria, and their time in the British army had enhanced their feelings of Jewishness. Before the escalation of Nazi anti-Jewish persecution, most refugees felt a stronger bond towards their Germaness than their Jewish identity. This attitude had completely reversed by the time they left Germany. Being Jewish was the 'cause' of all their anguish up to their escape from the Nazi Reich. Rather than resenting their Jewishness

they embraced it. The persecution had brought the refugee Jews together. Their attitude towards religion, however, did not have such a marked change over the years. Most refugees were non-practising Jews and this did not change to any significant degree during their experiences under the Nazis or in the British army. However, for much of their time in the British army their Jewishness was the strongest form of identity they related to. This was evident in their involvement in Jewish religious services and celebrations in the army. In many cases attendance at religious ceremonies was a demonstration of their sense of loyalty to their Jewish identity and was a chance for them to bond with other Jews whom they felt comfortable with more than ever before. It was a chance to prove their solidarity and keep Judaism alive in the face of threatened destruction by the Nazis. However, divisions between the refugees and the orthodox Jews remained in Britain just as much as they had in Germany.

The period between 1933-45 was one that required constant adjustment by the refugees. They had to acclimatise to a number of different and sometimes hostile environments under the stress of persecution and war. The national and religious identities of the refugees undoubtedly played a major role in the shaping of their lives. Even today, some of the ex-refugee servicemen still feel frustrated and angry that the Nazis had taken away their former German and Austrian identities. However, they all feel proud to have served in the British army and to have helped crush the regime that had murdered many of their relatives.<sup>25</sup> Fritz Lustig explained the legacy of his experiences before and during the war, one that was very similar to that felt by most refugee ex-servicemen. He reflected, "I cannot deny I had my education in Germany

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<sup>25</sup> These conclusions were derived from the interviews with the refugee ex-servicemen.



and I had greatly absorbed German culture. I would not deny its still there. I cannot claim to be British born but consider myself British, just as much as everyone else. I hope I have absorbed just as much of the British culture. When I have travelled in Germany it is just like being abroad in any country. I still feel very much Jewish although not in the religious sense. I feel I am an ex-refugee that had experiences in common with other ex-refugee servicemen and this makes us a special kind of community”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Fritz Lustig, Interview, London, 22 June 2000.

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## Appendix

### Details of Interviewees

NAME	COUNTRY OF BIRTH	RELIGION AT BIRTH	SERVED IN BRITISH ARMY DURING WW2	CHANGED ORIGINAL NAME IN ARMY	REMOVED JEWISH IDENTITY FROM ARMY DOCUMENTS	REMAINED IN BRITAIN AFTER WW2
Henry Adler	Germany	Jewish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Harry Blake	Germany	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Paul Bock	Czechoslovakia	Jewish	No. Czechoslovak Army.	No	No	Yes
Laci Bock	Czechoslovakia	Jewish	No. Czechoslovak Army.	No	No	Yes
Harry Brooke	Germany	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eddie Cohn	England	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes
Suzanne Cotterill	Germany	Jewish	ATS	No	No	Yes
Alfred Fleischacker	Germany	Jewish	No	-	-	No. Germany
Dorothy Fleming	Germany	Jewish	No	-	-	Yes
Dr. Otto Fleming	Austria	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Karl Fraser	Austria	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Peter Frean	Austria	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Eric Freedman	England	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes
Martin Goldenberg	Austria	Jewish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Leon Greenman	England	Jewish	No. Concentration Camp survivor	-	-	Yes
Reverend. Leslie Hardman	Wales	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes
Maurice Hermele	Poland	Jewish	No. Polish Army	No	No	Yes
Hans Jackson	Germany	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Syd Kaplan	South Africa	Jewish	No. South African	No	No	No. South Africa
Julius Kern	England	Jewish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Eric Kenneth	Austria	Catholic	Yes	Yes	-	Yes
Heszel Klepfisz	Poland	Jewish	No. Polish	No	No	No. Israel
Ronald Lawrence	England	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes

NAME	COUNTRY OF BIRTH	RELIGION AT BIRTH	SERVED IN BRITISH ARMY DURING WW2	CHANGED ORIGINAL NAME IN ARMY	REMOVED JEWISH IDENTITY FROM ARMY DOCUMENTS	REMAINED IN BRITAIN AFTER WW2
Shevach Lerner	British controlled Palestine	Jewish	Yes	No	No	No. Israel
Reverend. Dr. Isaac Levy	England	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes
Ian Lowitt	Austria	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Fritz Lustig	Germany	Catholic	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Steven Mendelsson	Germany	Jewish	No	-	-	Yes
David Oren	British controlled Palestine	Jewish	Yes	No	No	No. Israel
Ken Overman	Germany	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shaul Ramati	British controlled Palestine	Jewish	Yes	No	No	No. Israel
Louis Rudnic	Ukraine/Russia	Jewish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Bernard Sarle	Germany	Jewish	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ben Shacher Schwarzman	British controlled Palestine	Jewish	Yes	No	No	No. Israel
David Slevin	South Africa	Jewish	No	No	No	No. South Africa
Morris Spector	England	Jewish	Yes	No	No	Yes
Helmut Turnsek	Austria	Christian	-	-	-	Yes
Henry Van Der Walde	Germany	Jewish	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Reverend Malcolm Weisman	England	Jewish	No	-	-	Yes

