

*Hagedud Ha-Sini:*  
The Jewish Company of the Shanghai  
Volunteer Corps, 1932–42

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The Shanghai Volunteer Corps (SVC) was set up in 1853 as a voluntary international militia by various European countries, and including Russia, Japan and the USA, to protect their foreign-trade missions from the frequent local civil wars and general disorder in Shanghai during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At one time the SVC had volunteers of more than twenty different nationalities. It was usually mobilized in response to riots or to augment regular foreign garrisons in the city (a strategic reserve) or to form expeditionary forces, such as during the Boxer Rebellion in 1900. For most of its existence, the force was funded by the Shanghai Municipal Council, but volunteers received no pay, with the exception of the professional White Russian Company.

It comprized at its peak twenty-three different units, among them Light Horse, Artillery and Air Defence, as well as national units such as Portuguese and Chinese. These included from 1932 a Jewish Company.<sup>1</sup> The SVC's roll at its peak in the late 1930s was 2300 men. Its longest mobilization was in August 1937 during the Sino-Japanese War. The Japanese had surrounded the city from 1932, and the SVC's task was to keep them out and to help patrol the entry points facing the Japanese forces. When the British formally withdrew in 1940, the SVC took permanent control of the so-called International Settlement, the area within the city where the foreign residents lived and mostly worked. The SVC was finally disbanded by the Japanese occupation forces in early 1942, following the attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. The last, albeit unofficial, reunion of the SVC was for the centenary celebrations in April 1954, held in Hong Kong at the Royal Yacht Club.

As was typical at the time, the SVC was not racially integrated. The Commandant was always a Briton and the British A Company, for example, was mostly European and exclusively white, whereas B Company was Eurasian.

<sup>1</sup> See 'Shanghai Volunteer Corps' [www.talesofoldchina.com](http://www.talesofoldchina.com).

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Plate 1 Collar badge of the Jewish Company of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps, 1932–42. This rare survival was presented to the Jewish Military Museum, London, by Dr Alex Katznelson.

Jews had lived in Shanghai for decades. Merchants from all over the world came to Shanghai to set up profitable businesses after the Treaty of Nanking between Britain and China in 1842. Jews were represented by families such as the Sassoons, Hardoons and Kadouries, mostly Sephardim from Baghdad and Bombay. While British profits were repatriated to the UK economy, those of the Jewish community remained in Shanghai and integrated into local business, to whose growth and development Jews were committed. Many nevertheless took British nationality. After the 1917 Russian Revolution a second group of Jews arrived, fleeing pogroms in Russia, and in the 1930s a third group, comprising German and other European Jews, found refuge from the Nazis in Shanghai.<sup>2</sup> Most of the latter two groups were not as financially well off as those of the first, but they were communally well organized.<sup>3</sup> By 1939 there were almost 30,000 Jews in Shanghai, and the *North China Herald* even claimed in 1939 that there were 50,000.<sup>4</sup>

As early as 1914 there had been talk in the Jewish community and the SVC of forming a separate Jewish Company. It was regarded as a way in

<sup>2</sup> B. M. Frank, 'The Jewish Company of the SVC compared with other Jewish Diaspora Fighting Units', [www.lib.byu.edu](http://www.lib.byu.edu), 1992; paper given at 'Jews in China', seminar at Harvard University, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> A. Katznelson, letters to the author, 2004 and 2005.

<sup>4</sup> P. Guang, *The Jews in Shanghai* (Shanghai 1995) 3; *North China Herald* (hereafter *NCH*) 26 July 1939, p. 166.

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which Jewish identity could be reinforced and in which Jews could play an important and dignified part in protecting the foreign enclave. However, some communal leaders spoke against it – notably Edward Ezra – arguing that it would give the impression that ‘Jews had too exclusive a life’.<sup>5</sup> Continuing the age-old discussion and dilemma, he maintained that it was beneficial for Jewish youth to mix with others and join existing units of the SVC to ‘broaden their horizons’. His argument appears to have won on that occasion.

In 1931–2, however, fierce fighting between Chinese and Japanese forces in the area round Shanghai, and the generally strong desire to play a more significant role in promoting community welfare, prompted the leaders of the always civic-minded Jewish community to advance plans to contribute a Jewish unit to the SVC.<sup>6</sup> In the summer of 1932 some former members of the Jewish Scouts and current members of the Shanghai branch of the Zionist movement Betar met at 722 Bubbling Well Road to propose the forming of a Jewish unit of the SVC.<sup>7</sup> The SVC Commandant at the time, Colonel N. Thoms readily agreed, and it was proposed that the first platoon become part of H Company of the SVC, under Captain C. Todd.

The Jewish Company’s first and only commander was the charismatic Noel S. Jacobs (1898–1977). A Methodist, born in Hampshire and brought up in India and Hong Kong, he served in the Hong Kong Volunteer Defence Force in the First World War and moved to Shanghai in the early 1920s, where he worked for the British–American Tobacco Company. There he met a Russian Jewish girl, Dora Bogomolsky, and converted to Judaism to marry her. In 1923 he took over the 5th Shanghai Jewish Boy Scout Troop – made up mostly of Jewish immigrants from Russia – and instilled in them such a sense of discipline, esprit de corps and pride that they became the core of the Jewish Company of the SVC. Jacobs was sometime president of the local Bnai Brith (a worldwide Jewish cultural association) and also Deputy Commissioner of the whole Shanghai Scout movement.<sup>8</sup> Until he left Shanghai in 1949, Jacobs remained deeply involved with the Jewish community.

Fifty-five Jewish Czech citizens who had escaped the Nazis also joined the SVC in the 1930s, but not all were in the Jewish Company. Most had

<sup>5</sup> *Israel’s Messenger (Mevaseret Yisroel*, Shanghai Jewish Sephardic newspaper) 18 October 1938, p. 25, quoted in M. J. Mayer *From the Rivers of Babylon to the Whangpoo: A Century of Sephardi Life in Shanghai* (New York and Oxford 2003) 141.

<sup>6</sup> M. R. Ristaino, *Port of Last Resort* (Stanford 2001) 63.

<sup>7</sup> M. R. Ristaino, ‘White Russian and Jewish Refugees in Shanghai 1920–44, as recorded in the Shanghai Municipal Police files, National Archives, Washington DC’, *Republican China Journal* XVI/1 (1990) 51–62.

<sup>8</sup> *NCH* 19 May 1937, p. 275.

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Plate 2 Jewish Company members patrolling the Bund, Shanghai, in August 1938.

Plate 3 The Jewish Company patrolling the Bund in August 1938. Alex Katznelson stands in front of the lorry, which is mounted with a Lewis Gun.



Plate 4 Advancing with Lewis Guns at a training camp in 1938. Left to right: Freddie Fuchs, Eric Hasser, Isaac Miller, Macky Gaberman, Alex Katznelson.

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Plate 5 After a patrol in August 1937. Left to right: Company Sergeant Major Sam Israel Sheflan, Private Gruenberg, Sergeant Freddie Fuchs and Corporal Pana Samsonovitch.



Plate 6 Members of the Jewish Company in Sector B, August 1937. Left to right: Moses Sakker, Ike Goldfield, Sam Sheflan, Bleiman, Eager.



Plate 7 Lance Corporal Ike Goldfield in Sector B, Shanghai, in August 1937

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been Czech Jewish Scouts and founded their own company with the Czech colours worn as a roundel on their shoulders.<sup>9</sup> (A Jewish Chaplain card at the AJEX Museum, London, names a Major G. T. Goldschmidt as a member of the Shanghai Defence Force in 1927, 1929 and 1939, but it is not clear if he was in the Jewish Company.<sup>10</sup>) Several Jews serving in the SVC had been killed in action in various other companies during the Sino-Japanese disturbances of 1932.<sup>11</sup> Robert B. Bitker (born in Russia in 1907, who had won three Crosses of St George as a Russian soldier, became a member of an American company of the Corps and later an American citizen) and Emmanuel M. Talan (from the Artillery Company) were made platoon sergeants, and it became active on 22 September 1932. Jacobs was appointed Second Lieutenant on 30 September. On 3 December a second platoon was formed, and Bitker was promoted to Lieutenant to command it on 26 May 1933.<sup>12</sup> This made the Jewish Company of the SVC the world's sole legal Jewish regular force at the time, with its own insignia and flag, the latter of which has since become the national flag of Israel.<sup>13</sup>

The Company's first drill took place in the grounds of the Jewish School in Seymour Road<sup>14</sup> and the first local mention of the Company came in the *North China Herald* on 22 March 1933. Strangely, the London-based *Jewish Chronicle* had picked up the story earlier. Brigadier Fleming inspected the company and wrote: 'considering how recently this company has been formed, great credit is due to the officers and NCOs responsible'. In one of the war's ironies, the same issue of the *North China Herald* carried a long article with a photograph of a jack-booted Nazi paramilitary group centred on the German consulate.<sup>15</sup>

On 22 May 1933 the non-Jewish personnel of H Company were transferred to B Company; H Company became officially all Jewish on 1 July and part of A Battalion of the SVC.<sup>16</sup> Talan was promoted to company sergeant major (CSM) and later (15 September) to Second Lieutenant, with Sergeant H. V. Engberg promoted to CSM. A celebratory dinner, held at the Shanghai Jewish Club in Route Pichon (now Fenyang Road) on 18 June,<sup>17</sup> was attended by more than sixty members of the Company.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Peter Meyer, *Czech Republic Jews in Soviet Satellites* (Syracuse 1953) passim.

<sup>10</sup> Prof. A. Jakubowicz, interview with the author, August 2004.

<sup>11</sup> *Jewish Chronicle* (hereafter *JC*) 3 Sept. 1937, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup> I. Kounin, *85 Years of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps* (Shanghai 1938) passim.

<sup>13</sup> Shanghai Municipal Council Annual Report, 1933, p. 68, quoted in P. Guang, 'Zionism in Shanghai', *Studies in Zionism* (now *Journal of Israeli History*) XIV/2 (1995) 73.

<sup>14</sup> A. Katznelson, e-mail to the author, 18 March 2005.

<sup>15</sup> *NCH* 22 March 1933, p. 454; *JC* 13 Jan. 1933, p. 21.

<sup>16</sup> *NCH* 31 May 1933, p. 335.

<sup>17</sup> P. Guang (see n. 4) 15.

<sup>18</sup> *NCH* 28 June 1933, p. 496.

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The company motto (apparently suggested by Colonel Thoms) was allegedly 'No Advance without Security', which may be apocryphal as it was also the 'joke motto' of the Jewish battalions of the Royal Fusiliers in the First World War. According to one veteran, Alex Katznelson, Noel Jacobs composed a ditty sung to the tune of 'Clementine': 'After the Scottish come the Jewish, getting Scottish music free, and their motto is no advance sir, not without security'. Dr Katznelson was born in Tomsk, Russia, on 23 September 1919, his family leaving for Shanghai after the Civil War in Russia. He was in the Shanghai Jewish Boy Scouts from 1930 to 1940 and the Jewish Company of the SVC from 1938 to 1942. After the War he went to live in Israel where he served as a doctor in the War of Independence in 1948 and became a senior orthopaedic surgeon with the rank of lieutenant colonel in the IDF and various Israeli hospitals for many years. He is much published.

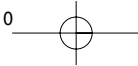
The Jewish Company chaplain was the Reverend Mendel Brown, the spiritual leader of the Sephardi community in Shanghai. A graduate of Jews' College, London, he had arrived in the early 1930s to be headteacher of the Shanghai Jewish School and minister of the Ohel Rachel ('Tent of Rachel') Synagogue in the city. He later married Annie Horowitz.

English military commands and orders were used and the Company wore British-style uniforms, the chaplain wearing a Roman collar, as was customary at the time. Katznelson has described the uniforms and equipment: officers and senior NCOs had 38mm Webley revolvers, and officers carried decorated swords for parades. All ranks had the Short Lee Enfield .303 rifle and long bayonet with box magazine, kept at home or in the armoury, with five rounds (called a 'Peace Pouch') to enable them to reach an assembly point in an emergency with a loaded weapon. Every platoon had a Lewis machine-gun section, which was kept in the armoury. They also wore the British First World War model steel helmet, and there were winter and summer uniforms (the latter including a topee). In a peculiar departure from British army standard issue, their boots had no colour and had to be stained black, involving many hours of applying, brushing and shining for new recruits.<sup>19</sup> The Jewish Company wore the bronze cap badge of the SVC, but on their collars they wore the Star of David with 'SVC' superimposed. Officers had a more elaborate, coloured enamel version as well as an enamelled lapel badge of the Shanghai Municipality.<sup>20</sup>

Most of the Company were of Russian origin, although there were also some Poles, Romanians and British. Some of the British were passport holders from India, Singapore, Hong Kong and even Iraq, but the

<sup>19</sup> A. Katznelson, letter to the author, 5 Jan. 2005.

<sup>20</sup> A. Katznelson, telephone interview with the author, Aug. 2004.



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Company ethos and culture were English, like its marching songs. However, in 1938 they added *Adon Olam*, a familiar Hebrew hymn, to their repertoire, the music for which was composed by a young Palestinian Jew. The Company ate kosher food on duty and at the Jewish Club.<sup>21</sup> The *North China Herald* records the strength of the Jewish Company in September 1937 as 3 officers and 69 men for peace-time service and a further 24 men on call for emergencies, totalling 96.<sup>22</sup> This was larger than some units (the Phillipines Company had 73) and smaller than others (the Portuguese had 140). At its peak the Company numbered about 120 men, organized in three platoons.

Particular praise was heaped on the Jewish Company. A high-ranking British SVC officer wrote in the *North China Herald* in October 1933: 'The Jewish Company are good, thoroughly good, and they are keen, thoroughly keen, and take it from me they will make you chaps sit up. ... why there has not been a Jewish Company before is something of a mystery. A peaceable race, they brought off some pretty big military business under Moses and some first class work under Allenby ... considering numbers, the Shanghai Jews have as fine a recruiting ground as any ... they must succeed. There will be jests innumerable [about them] and none know better how to take a good joke than themselves ... and they have decided to march behind the Shanghai Scottish so as to get the free benefit of the music of that lost tribe.'<sup>23</sup>

A description of the SVC annual inspection parade in the *North China Herald* of 2 May 1934 describes how the Corps marched to the cathedral for a service, where the Scottish and Catholic personnel 'broke away' for their own services. It does not record what the Jewish Company did.

Bitker was promoted to Lieutenant on 26 May 1934, Jacobs to Captain on 29 June and Talan to Lieutenant on 15 September 1935. The Company drilled with the SVC in a huge building known as the Drill Hall on Foochow Street, which included a club, weapons store, rifle range and so on. They practised marksmanship on the range at Hongkew Park, where there were whitewashed barracks and opportunities for setting up barbed wire and sandbag defences, bayonet drill and crowd control. At the SVC shooting competition in May 1936 the Jewish Company finished third out of thirty-three in the Lewis Machine Gun heats<sup>24</sup> and in February 1937

<sup>21</sup> A. Katznelson, correspondence with the author, Aug. 2004.

<sup>22</sup> *NCH* 19 Jan. 1938, p. 95.

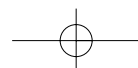
<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 11 Oct. 1933, p. 76.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 13 May 1936, p. 289.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 17 Feb. 1937, p. 282.

<sup>26</sup> A. Katznelson, letter to the author, 1 March 2005.

<sup>27</sup> *NCH* 8 March 1939, p. 426; also M. J. Meyer (see n. 5).





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were fourth out of twenty-four in the SVC speed test for stripping and reassembling the Lewis machine gun, blindfolded in teams of three, being beaten only by the three Russian teams who were regular soldiers.<sup>25</sup> According to Katznelson, 'Shooting competitions between the Companies of the British ("A") battalion were customary during the summer; the Jewish Company took an active part in this. Each company supplied 30 men of mixed ranks and each man received 50 rounds. The rifle range at Hongkew was the location, at the northern end of which was a hill where mechanically operated targets were situated. Firing was from a ten-man cement-lined trench with sandbags, at 300 yards range. Points were allocated per Company and the Jewish Company always did well.'<sup>26</sup>

The Jewish Company also had its own shooting competition in which participants vied for ownership of the Kadoorie Cup.<sup>27</sup> The local Jewish newspaper, *Israel's Messenger*, published a photograph of members of the company posing after such a competition at the firing range, with Lieutenants Gaberman and Bitker in the front row.<sup>28</sup>

In March 1936 the Jewish Company was mobilized in a practice with A Company, simulating preparations for the withdrawal of international forces from the International Settlement.<sup>29</sup> In February 1937 they took part in extensive police-liaison exercises to test readiness in case of a breakdown in law and order.<sup>30</sup>

On 31 October 1935 Talan resigned and left for Hong Kong, where he later became a lieutenant in the Hong Kong militia, fought against the Japanese and was a prisoner of war. In 1954 he was awarded an MBE and later moved to Australia.<sup>31</sup> On 19 October 1936 Bitker also resigned, since he had been called to Mandatory Palestine by the revisionist Zionist leader Jabotinsky to help set up the Irgun (Jewish Fighting Underground). But Bitker was not proficient enough in Hebrew or local knowledge and was released to return to Shanghai. He died in San Francisco in 1977.<sup>32</sup> In place of Talan and Bitker, Sergeants Simon Godkin and William Goldenberg (formerly Artillery) were commissioned as Second Lieutenants on 24 and 26 October 1937.<sup>33</sup> Exactly a year later both were promoted to Lieutenant. Bitker returned from Palestine on 10 August 1938 and became again a Lieutenant and Godkin became second in command.

When fighting flared between Chinese and Japanese forces in August

<sup>28</sup> *Israel's Messenger* 5 July 1935, p. 12; thanks to the Oriental and India Collections, British Library.

<sup>29</sup> *NCH* 11 March 1936, p. 442.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 17 March 1937, p. 452.

<sup>31</sup> Information from Det. Insp. Karl Spencer, Hong Kong Police.

<sup>32</sup> See I. Kounin (see n. 12); letters from A. Katznelson in the author's possession; see also *NCH* 24 Aug. 1938, p. 339.

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1937 the SVC was mobilized for three months from 12 August, and assisted the British forces in their pre-assigned sector B of the Settlement. Together with the Scottish Company and the Air Defence unit the Jewish Company were stationed in the Union Church and billeted in the Rowing Club.<sup>34</sup> These adjacent buildings stood at the confluence of the Soochow Creek where it met the Whangpoo River, opposite the Garden Bridge. This bridge was the symbolic traditional gateway to Shanghai City and therefore a major potential flashpoint with the surrounding Japanese armies. It was a sign of confidence in the Jewish Company's military capability that the British Commander placed it at this volatile strategic point.<sup>35</sup>

The SVC Mobilization Orders show that transport allocated to the Jewish Company was '1 hired lorry and one cook's lorry with hired drivers', and that stores to be carried were '2 cartons of pistol ammo. .45 calibre – 60 rounds; 60 boxes of rifle ammo. – 6000 rounds; 3 boxes of automatic ammo. – 2256 rounds; various stores' and that these were to be collected 'by 1 CQMS, the Mess NCO, and 2 privates'.<sup>36</sup>

At this time the Rapaport incident occurred. As Katznelson has recorded: 'Pte Rapaport appeared for duty with the Jewish Company, but without permission left his position and wandered into the area of defence assigned to "B" Company. Here he was stopped by a sentry and asked to leave; he refused and the sentry repeated his warning. Again Rapaport refused to go and the sentry raised his rifle and warned him yet again. He is alleged to have dared the sentry to shoot, and he did. Rapaport died of his wound and is the only known fatality of the Jewish Company.'<sup>37</sup> The incident appears to have been hushed up and the Municipality agreed a financial settlement with the family, who soon after left Shanghai and settled in San Francisco.

An article in the *Jewish Chronicle* of September 1937 stated that the Jewish Company also kept guard over the Jewish quarter in the International Settlement and provided assistance to Jewish victims of the Japanese bombardment, moving them to the British and French quarters where necessary.<sup>38</sup> Jews living in the Chinese areas were particularly at risk of losing lives and property, and an appeal was made to supply Jewish relief from abroad to several hundred destitute Jewish families in the city. In the northern Chinese city of Tientsin, White Russian Guards fighting with the

<sup>33</sup> *NCH* 8 Dec. 1937, p. 381.

<sup>34</sup> H. Sergeant, *Shanghai: Collision Point of Cultures 1918–39* (New York 1990) 297.

<sup>35</sup> National Archive, Kew (hereafter NA), PRO 30/26/157.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> A. Katznelson, letters to the author, Aug. 2004 and June 2005.

<sup>38</sup> *JC* 3 Sept. 1937, p. 34.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 29 Oct. 1937, p. 20; 5 Nov. 1937, p. 28.

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victorious Japanese forces there attempted a pogrom among the local Jews. The local Jewish Defence Volunteer organization prevented this and moved Jews to the protection of the British and French quarters in the city. This is perhaps another Jewish fighting company in China in need of investigation.

The *Jewish Chronicle* of 29 October 1937 published a photograph of a defensive sandbagged gun emplacement of the Jewish Company, outside the Sassoon Cultural Centre on the Bund, the main riverside and business thoroughfare in the centre of Shanghai. This was followed on 5 November by a report on the Japanese bombing of the city and the damage caused, including major effects on the Jewish community.<sup>39</sup>

On 5 May 1938 the Jewish Company celebrated its fifth anniversary when Sir Elie Kadoorie presented cups for the annual Lewis-gun and rifle competitions to the winning teams; a dinner was followed by 'community singing and witty parodies'.<sup>40</sup> In July, during a huge ceremony held on the Racecourse, eighty-five members of the Jewish Company were presented with the Shanghai Municipal Council Emergency Medal for 1937.<sup>41</sup>

On 11 August 1938 the Company was mobilized for four days in case of hostilities, due to the anniversary of the Sino-Japanese War. Often there were local riots and disorders among rival Chinese political factions, and the Jewish Company took full part in day and night policing operations on such occasions.<sup>42</sup> Indeed it was often necessary, as the Japanese grip round Shanghai tightened, for the SVC and the various foreign Allied garrisons to 'show the flag' and attract more recruits. On 27 February 1938 the Jewish Company, therefore, with the rest of A Battalion, had taken part in a route march round the city in full kit and with fixed bayonets.<sup>43</sup> A similar march took place on 31 March 1940, as reported in the local press.<sup>44</sup> They began from Jessfield Park and were led by the band of the 2nd Loyal Regiment from Britain. There was always time for recreation, such as the shooting competition between A Company and the Jewish Company, who lost narrowly by 964 points to 1029.<sup>45</sup>

A third Jewish platoon was formed on 15 October 1938, with CQMS A. Gaberman promoted to Second Lieutenant on 28 October and a year later to Lieutenant. Sergeant B. A. Slossman then became Second Lieutenant. Meanwhile Noel Jacobs was officially gazetted Captain on 19 October 1938.<sup>46</sup>

Throughout that year the SVC was on constant call and, alongside the Municipal Police and the British and US Garrisons, engaged in search operations, riot control, patrols, training exercises, route marches and

<sup>40</sup> *NCH* 18 May 1938, p. 279.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 24 Aug. 1938, p. 326.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 10 April 1940, p. 332.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* 19 Oct. 1938, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 20 July 1938, p. 104.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 2 March 1938, p. 334.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* 20 July 1938, p. 118.

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Plate 8 Sergeant (later Lieutenant) Benjamin Slossman volunteered to serve in Malaya and Burma. He settled in Hong Kong after the War.



Plate 9 Part of the Jewish Company, with their flag, on manouevers. Sergeant Mara Marguleff crouches in front at the centre.

parades. There was a rise in recruitment as the local situation deteriorated and the foreign population wanted to play their part. The Jewish Company especially attracted more members during this period, helped by the increase in the number of able-bodied male Jewish refugees flowing into the city.<sup>47</sup>

With the British and US forces' gradual withdrawal from Shanghai to other bases throughout 1939 and 1940, as the European war got under way and as the Japanese threat grew, there was increasingly more work for the SVC, especially in their sector of the Garden Bridge, where they faced the Japanese naval landing forces.<sup>48</sup> They also stood guard over the Mixed Court, which arbitrated where mixed nationals were involved, and stood street patrols, especially at night.

As Nazi persecution of Jews in Europe increased, more Jewish refugees made their way to Shanghai. Thus in March 1939 the *Jewish Chronicle* reported that 'The Jewish Company of the SVC ... have been most helpful in meeting new arrivals at the wharf, shepherding them into waiting vehicles and helping them settle into their temporary quarters at the Embankment building. ... camp beds were lent by the military authorities; the Company also gave their services in the Museum Road soup kitchen

<sup>47</sup> Ibid. 1 Feb. 1939, p. 193.

<sup>48</sup> A. Katznelson, letter to the author, Aug. 2004.

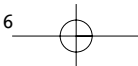
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Plate 10 The Jewish Company on field exercise, led by Captain Noel Jacobs. Front left is Sergeant Ben Slossman, and behind him Private Robret Brinberg, who later died in the Merchant Navy. Front centre is Sergeant Major Harry Engberg, and behind him Private Joseph Ozer. To the right, half hidden, is Macky Gaberman.



Plate 11 The Jewish Company on parade at the race course. Left to right: Lieutenant Simon Godkin (with Emergency and Long Service Medals), Captain Noel Jacobs OC, Lieutenant Robert Bitker (three Russian George Crosses), CSM Harry Engberg, Sergeant Benjamin Slossman, Sergeant Sam Sheflan.



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and do much to cheer up those whose spirits are broken by tragedy and hopelessness.<sup>49</sup>

On 27 April 1939 the Jewish Company held their seventh annual dinner, at which Captain Jacobs (promoted to Major in September 1940<sup>50</sup>) reported in his speech that there was in fact a waiting list to join the Company.<sup>51</sup> In a 'Secret Cipher Telegram' of 29 November 1941 from the Deputy Director Military Intelligence to the War Office in London, describing the strength of the SVC, it was noted that among the Corps at that date stood seventy-five German Jews. It was not made clear which Company they were in.<sup>52</sup>

When it came, the Japanese takeover in early 1942 was calm, but for one small skirmish on the river. The SVC headquarters was sealed (though various silver trophies disappeared) and all Allied 'enemy' nationals had to wear a red armband, but were at first free to move around. Later they were segregated into guarded areas on the city edges. The peaceful nature of the takeover appears to have been amicably agreed by the Shanghai Municipal Council, the British and the Japanese authorities, to avoid bloodshed.<sup>53</sup> The SVC weapons were quietly collected by the Japanese from members' homes. Major Jacobs returned to Shanghai (his wife and three daughters had previously been evacuated to San Francisco) and was interned with many others – including the Reverend Mendel Brown – in a camp reserved for single men on the east bank of the Whangpoo River, some time in early 1944. Katznelson saw him off as he gallantly marched into captivity. He remained a source of inspiration for many POWs throughout their incarceration.<sup>54</sup> Among others interned was Sergeant Marguleff, with his wife and child (they survived and went to live in Israel after the war). Escape was virtually impossible as Europeans were easily identified (Katznelson knows of no examples). Many members of the SVC had tried earlier to leave for Palestine, but very few immigration certificates were available because of the pro-Arab policy of the British Mandate (as noted by the US delegate to the Far East from the United Palestine Appeal, who also remarked that most of the active Jewish Company men were Betar members – Brit Trumpeldor, a Zionist revisionist movement founded by Jabotinsky – and that the company was the pride of the Shanghai Jewish community, upholding Jewish honour at times of unrest and emergency).<sup>55</sup>

<sup>49</sup> *JC* 17 March 1939, p. 41.

<sup>50</sup> Lt Godkin was presented with a pair of gold cufflinks with the Jewish Company insignia on this occasion. *NCH* 2 Oct. 1940, p. 26.

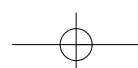
<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 31 May 1939, p. 202.

<sup>52</sup> TNA WO 106/2393.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> A. Katznelson, letter to me, Aug. 2004.

<sup>55</sup> S. Ben-Ami in *JC* 3 Sept. 1937, p. 44.



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Plate 12 Members of the Jewish Company, with Alex Katznelson front left.



Plate 13 Major Noel Jacobs and Lieutenant William Goldenberg lead the Jewish Company westwards along Bubbling Well Road (now West Nankin Road), past the saluting base, during the last march past in April 1940. The Shanghai Municipality honoured the SVC by allowing them to march with bayonets fixed.

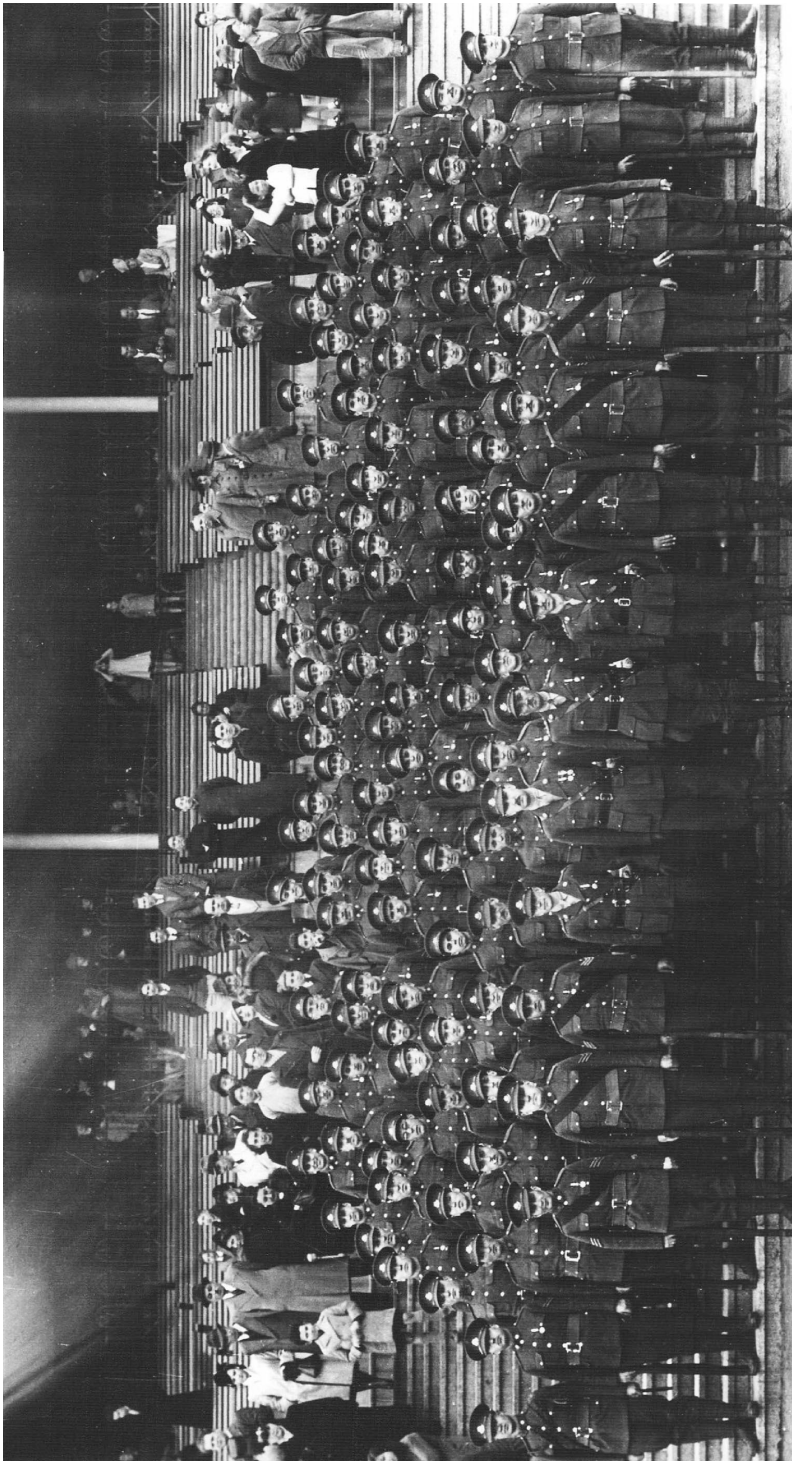


Plate 14 The Jewish Company at the last annual parade of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps. Front row, left to right: Sergeant Monti Palmer, Sergeant Mara Marguleff, Z. Levoff, Lieutenant Ben Slossman, Lieutenant William Goldenberg, Captain Noel Jacobs, Lieutenant Anthony Gaberman, CSM Harry Engberg, Sergeant Macky Gaberman, Sergeant Sam Sheflan, Corporal F. Fuchs. Second row, first on left, Private Isaac Miller, Bugler; tenth from left, Lance Corporal Alex Katznelson.



## 'Hagedud Ha-Sini' 1932–42

At the end of the war, on 16 August 1945, large-scale looting began in Shanghai among the Chinese population. There were thoughts of calling on the disbanded SVC to mobilize and contain the situation. But only the Japanese were armed and in any position to act. Within hours the looting had stopped.<sup>56</sup>

Many local Jews served in other SVC companies also, Jewish names appearing frequently in the chapter on the SVC in A. Harfield's *British and Indian Armies on the China Coast, 1783–1985*.<sup>57</sup> In Kounin's *85 Years of the Shanghai Volunteer Corps* (1938) the following names appear (in many cases with photographs) as serving in other companies during the early twentieth century: Capt. E. Gumpert(z), CO of A Company (British), (p. 201 and p. 58), and with Lance Cpl M. L. Lessner, Pte B. B. Joseph and Pte F. H. Moysky (p. 196); Capt. A. Hertzberg, CO Signals Company (p. 170), and as a bugle boy (p. 49); CQMS (later Staff Officer) Henry Harold Cohen, Light Automatic Company (p. 219); Lt V. L. Kuzmin and Lt V. A. Sokoloff, Russian Company (p. 259); Tprs Cohen, A. L. Moses and Hayim, Kenneth Dabelstein (committed suicide, as reported in the *North China Herald*, 2 October 1935); and Cpl Goldsack and Lt D. Karl C. 'Mosey' Mosberg, CO of the Shanghai Light Horse (p. 160 and passim), before the First World War (and also in a letter to the *North China Herald*, 13 September 1933, p. 424); Lt F. W. Schlobohm of the US Company (p. 125); Sgt Major F. C. Feltz of the HQ Company (p. 123); Lt C. and Lt L. H. Koch of the German Company and later B Company (*North China Herald*, 19 October 1938, p. 110); Pte Aaron Levoff, a Shanghai resident serving in the US Marines, who received the Yangtze Service Medal from Washington HQ (*North China Herald*, 9 August 1933, p. 218). There were also many other Jewish-sounding names in the Russian Company, but names alone cannot be conclusive. Katznelson, for instance, has said that no Jews served in the Russian Companies. See Appendix 2 below for further names discovered.

There is no evidence in the memoirs of members of the Jewish Company of any anti-Semitism in the SVC or even in the wider European community in Shanghai.<sup>58</sup> Katznelson has testified that the whole city, including both the Chinese and European communities, were free of such prejudice, although he admits that each of the various communities had their own clubs, sports societies, schools, hospitals and places of worship, so met only in restaurants, at wider social events or in public spaces.

In 1949 Jacobs returned to England where he continued working for British-American Tobacco, retiring in 1956 to New Milton, Hampshire.

<sup>56</sup> M. Tokayer and M. Swartz, *The Fugu Plan* (London 1979) 268.

<sup>57</sup> A. Harfield, *British and Indian Armies on the China Coast, 1783–1985* (London 2000) 371–434 and appendices.

<sup>58</sup> B. Frank (see n. 2).

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Israeli veterans of the Company sponsored a highly emotional visit to Israel for him and his wife Dora in 1967. Caught up in the Six Day War, he was found filling sandbags outside a school in Tel Aviv.<sup>59</sup>

Noel Jacobs died in England in 1977 aged 79 years. He was cremated in Bournemouth following a service at New Milton Church, where his ashes were later buried. The local news report said nothing about his being Jewish.<sup>60</sup> On 18 May 1980 more than thirty-five veterans and their families from Israel and the USA planted a grove of 3500 trees with a stone marker, in Hebrew and English, at Modi'in near Jerusalem (appropriately, the home of the Maccabees) in Noel's name. His wife and eldest daughter Lorna each planted a symbolic first tree<sup>61</sup> and Mrs Jacobs received a certificate commemorating the planting; the veteran George Miller unveiled the plaque and Anthony Gaberman delivered a moving speech. A reception was held at the home of Dr Katznelson.

### Appendix 1

The following further sources are held at the National Army Museum library, Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, London.

'A Company SVC 1870–1930', a booklet privately published in Shanghai in 1930 by an unnamed officer, mentions several probable Jewish names.

'Feldgrau', a German journal (undated) article of 1956 (photocopy), also mentions several Jewish names.

Lt Col. E. H. McMichael, *History of the Engineers of the SVC* (privately published 1930s) names a Major H. Behrens, though Dr Katznelson says he was a Scandinavian non-Jew.

### Appendix 2

#### Members of the Jewish Company, SVC

N = also in the experimental Jewish Naval Unit, Yamit (see Appendix 4 below). Thanks especially to Alex Katznelson for access to his archive of photographs.

Major Noel S. Jacobs, Commanding Officer – POW of the Japanese  
The Rev. Mendel Brown, Chaplain

<sup>59</sup> Benis Frank Archive, School of Educational Studies, Claremont Graduate University, California; with thanks to Nancy Pine.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> *Igud Yotzei Sin* (1980, Israel) 13; thanks to Benis Frank Archive (see n. 59).

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Pte Ezekiel Abraham (USA – interned by the Japanese)  
Pte Elias Altshuler – N  
Pte David Arzooni or Jacob  
Pte W. Beck  
H. Bernfield  
Lt Robert Boris Bitker  
Pte Bleiman  
Lance Cpl Robert Brinberg – N – (killed in action, Merchant Navy, Red  
Sea 1941?)  
Cpl Moses Cohen – marksman  
Cpl Eager  
Pte J. A. Emihovich  
Sgt Maj. Harry Engberg – marksman and Lewis gun  
Cpl Alex ('Alexisiso') Feldman  
Cpl Julius Feldstein  
Cpl Isaac Finkelstein  
Pte Fodor/Fellor ?  
E. Fomil – N  
D. Frank – N  
I. ('Sam') Frank – N  
Sgt Freddie Fuchs – marksman  
Pte A. or I. or N. Furman – N  
Lt Anthony Gaberman – marksman  
Sgt Macky Gaberman (brother of Anthony)  
Lance Cpl Eric Gabriel  
Lt Simon Godkin/Goetkin – Ten Year Long Service Medal (later lived in  
Israel and New York)  
Pte Raphael Gold  
Lt William Goldenberg – Ten Year Long Service Medal (later POW of  
Japanese)  
Cpl Ike Goldfield/Goldberg ?  
Pte P. Gordin  
Pte Sammy Greenberg  
Pte Louis Greenberg (brother of Sammy; later lived in Israel and Australia)  
Pte Gruenberg  
Pte Grumber  
Pte Serge Haimovitch  
Cpl David Hanin  
Cpl Leo Hanin (brother of David) – marksman  
Pte Harringstock  
Pte Eric Hassar – N  
Pte Henkin

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Pte David Hirschorn (later settled in Nahariya in northern Israel; most of his family were murdered by PLO terrorists in an attack in the 1980s)  
 M. Elias Jacob(s)  
 Pte Lolia Katovitch/Katowitz  
 Pte Mark Kaptzan  
 Pte S. Karlikoff  
 Pte J. Karman  
 ? ? Katzman  
 Dr Alex Katznelson – N (later Lt Col. IDF Medical Corps; lives in Tel Aviv)  
 Dr Daniel Katznelson (brother of Alex) – company bugler (later Major IDF Medical Corps)  
 Yonah Kligman (born Harbin 1914; lives in Jerusalem)  
 Joseph Krupnick  
 Pte W. Kurz  
 Pte Isaac Ladar  
 Pte Abraham/Isaac? Laevsky  
 Pte B Levinsky  
 Pte Alex ('Shura') Levitin  
 Sgt Zelic Levoff  
 Cp. M. Leymanstein – marksman  
 E Luftig  
 Henry Maitland  
 Sgt Mara Marguleff/Margulev – marksman and Lewis gun (born Baku, emigrated to Israel and served in Palestine Police; was security officer for the exiled Emperor Haile Selassie, from whom he received a Gold Medal in 1938; he returned to Shanghai and was a POW there; returned to Israel in 1945 and was in the Israeli Army in War of Independence, 1948)  
 Mike Medovoy – N  
 Pte Isaac Miller – N, bugler  
 Pte Leo ('Leonard') Miller – (three brothers; brother of Abe and David; see below under other SVC companies)  
 Pte Mischa ('Paul') ? Miller  
 Pte Grinka/Hania ? Nissenbaum (brother-in-law of Isaac Shor; lives in Hadera, Israel)  
 Pte Elijah Olmert (uncle of Ehud Olmert, Israeli statesman)  
 Pte Joseph Ozer  
 Pte David Ozeriansky (lives in Hadera, Israel)  
 Sgt Monty Palmer  
 A. Perleman – N (killed in action in Malaya)  
 Pte Ezra Piasetsky  
 Pte Yvsei Polatska/Poltoski ? – N

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Gabriel Rabinovitch

Pte Rapaport – (killed on active service)

Moses Sakker

Cpl Pana Samsonovitch – marksman (emigrated to Israel in 1949; his son was killed in action in Sinai in Six Day War, 1967; had learnt Japanese when working on Japanese merchant ships prewar, so during the occupation was official interpreter for the Jewish community)

Boris ('Ben-Zion') Schafran – N

CSM Samuel Israel Sheflan/Sheiflan – marksman (orphaned cousin of Alex Katznelson, adopted by his family; died in Israel in 2003)

Sherman ?

Cpl Isaac Shor – N

Sam Shornick – N

Pte Max Shussle

Second Lt Benjamin A. Slossman/Slessman – marksman and Lewis gun (later served Burma)

Cpl Reuven Slossman (brother of Benjamin) – N Commander (killed in action, Second World War, Rangoon or Singapore)

Lt Emmanuel Monia Talan/Jalan (POW of the Japanese as member of Hong Kong VDC; later lived in Australia)

Pte A. Tesler (*North China Herald* 26 October 1938, p. 146)

Pte V. F. Tishler

Pte Tsipiris

Pte M. Tzatskin

Lance Cpl Abe Ulanovsky

Naftali Uvadieff

David Volovick/Volvik or Vardy (lives in Jerusalem)

Pte G. Weissenberg

Pte Idel E J Whitgob – medical orderly/marksman (Australian)

Pte Wilner

Boris Zats/Zatz (SVC middle-weight boxing champion)

? ? Zinkewitch

Pte A. Zunterstein

*Naval Unit only*

Victor Schneerson

Abe Miller (fourth Miller brother?)

*Other SVC Companies*<sup>62</sup>

A. Adler – Transport

O. Beer – A Battery, B Company

<sup>62</sup> Thanks to A. Katznelson; WO 106/2393 (see n. 50).

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Driver D. W. G. Belkin – Transport  
 Victor Berch  
 B. Bergman – Transport  
 Lt H. H. Cohen – Long Service Medal<sup>63</sup>  
 Bob Drisin ?  
 A. Adel – Transport  
 D. Ezikiel – Signals  
 J. Fried – A Battery, B Company  
 Jackie Goldenberg (now Yaacov Guri) – Armoured Car, founder Israel  
     Tank Corps  
 John Goldenberg (father of Jackie)  
 Major G. T. Goldschmidt  
 Sgt M. Gotfried – Transport  
 L. K. Hammerstein – Transport  
 Eli Hirsh – USA  
 C. W. Jacobi – Transport  
 Pte M. Katz – Transport<sup>64</sup>  
 R. Klingenberg – Transport  
 W. Kosterlitz – Transport  
 Pte B. Lipkovsky – Transport<sup>65</sup>  
 K. P. Loewenberger – USA  
 Abraham Miller – Transport  
 David Miller – Transport  
 M. R. Nissim – Signals  
 Pte P. Ornstein – A Battery, B Company  
 F. T. Pressburger – A Battery, B Company  
 G. P. Rosenbaum – A Battery, B Company  
 P. Rosenthal – Signals  
 Alex Sampson – USA Machine Gunner  
 A. Schleier – Transport  
 L. Schlesinger – A Battery, B Company  
 J. Seba  
 I. Seelig – Transport  
 Walter Shriro – Light Horse (Second World War interpreter to the British  
     Mission in Murmansk)  
 Lt V. A. Sokoloff<sup>66</sup>  
 A. Sonnenfeld  
 Joe Spunt – USA

<sup>63</sup> *NCH* 18 June 1941, p. 453; *ibid.* 25 June 1941, p. 490.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.* 26 Oct. 1938, p. 146.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.* 19 Oct. 1938, p. 110.

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Eddy Weideman/Weidner ? – A Battery, B Company  
E. Weingart – Transport  
G. Weinstein – USA  
W. Wertheimer – USA

*Shanghai Municipal Police*  
S. Greenberg<sup>67</sup>

**Appendix 3**

**Czech Jewish Scouts in the SVC**

The scouts joined B Company en masse after fleeing Europe.<sup>68</sup>

Sgt C. G. Aschenbrenner  
Pte P. L. Bahr  
Pte K. Bock  
Lance Cpl Pavel V. Donath  
Pte O. Dub  
Pte D. Feder  
Pte P. E. Fedorovsky  
Pte E. Frank  
Pte J. Fried  
Lance Cpl E. Friedberger/Freiberger ?  
Pte Z./E. Grossman/Groszmann  
Pte V. Herz  
Lance Cpl H. Klein  
Pte R. Kroha  
Lance Cpl E. Kulka  
Pte A. Kanterek  
Pte V. Kanterek (brother of A. Kanterek?)  
Pte M. Loewy  
Lance Cpl J. Lux  
Lance Cpl B. Markitant  
Cpl F. Muller  
Pte George (Jiri) Pisk (now lives in Australia)  
Pte F. Popper  
Pte N. G. Poumbura ?  
Pte O. Rebenfeld  
Lance Cpl R. Rebhun  
Pte K. Reitler

<sup>67</sup> Photograph, *NCH* 17 May 1939, p. 207.

<sup>68</sup> Archive of George (Jiri) Pisk, Czech Jewish Scouts; thanks to George and Andrew Jakubowicz.

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Pte P. Resauer  
Pte E. P. Rosenfeld  
Pte V. Saxl  
Pte M. Schneider  
Pte E./K. Schultz  
Pte M. Schwarz  
Lance Cpl J. Soffer  
Pte F. Soyka  
Lance Cpl J. Steiner  
Sgt M. J. Stembera  
Pte E. Stransky  
Lance Cpl S. Subert  
Second Lt V. G. Taussig  
Pte R. Uhlick  
Pte V. Wltzek  
Pte R. Weinstein  
Pte N. Zahowsky

*A Roll of B Company kept by Capt D. W. Mortlock<sup>69</sup>*

CQMS W. C. A. Wolnizer – Company HQ  
Pte E. Grundt – 3 platoon  
Lt F. W. Schlobohm – Battery HQ  
Sgt Louis E. Schusterovitz – top company marksman<sup>70</sup>  
Lance Cpl S. Subert – 4 Platoon  
Lt H. Winburg – Battery HQ  
B. A. F. Wolnizer – 3 platoon  
C. Wolnizer – 3 platoon (brother of B. and J. Wolnizer?)  
J. Wolnizer – 3 platoon

*Platoon Privates*

J. Gohwald  
H. Klepetar  
P. Kohn  
W. Kurz  
O. Lustig  
B. Mandel  
G. Neubauer  
W. Pollack  
J. Schulef  
R. Winter

<sup>69</sup> NA, PRO 30/26/158.

<sup>70</sup> NCH 19 April 1939, p. 117.



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#### Appendix 4

##### The Shanghai Jewish Naval Unit – Yamit

In around 1935 the Betar movement planned the formation of a naval unit, probably designed to assist secret Jewish immigration to Palestine. Shanghai was an unsuitable place to train such a unit since it was far from the sea and nobody then in the Jewish community had any knowledge of sailing or navigation. There were also strict licensing laws about the use of the river in Shanghai.

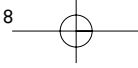
Nevertheless, the Betar leader in Israel, Vladimir Jabotinsky, ordered plans to go ahead. A strip of reclaimed land was rented near the electric power plant on the Shanghai river, at the north shore of the International Settlement. Reuven Slossman was made naval officer in charge and Eric Hassar senior NCO. In August 1937 a riveted steel-plate lifeboat with oak decks and heavy oars was purchased and naval uniforms made by a local tailor. The naval cap had a black band printed in gold with the name 'Brit Trumpeldor' ('Covenant of Trumpeldor') after the Zionist leader, and the Menorah badge resembled that used by the Jewish Legion in the First World War.

The group met one sunny Sunday morning at the boat, but it proved too heavy to handle against the river tide and, after hours of struggle, the crew returned to shore. The Japanese soon captured the mooring area and the Betar Shanghai Jewish Naval Unit never returned. Only a photograph remains.<sup>71</sup>

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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<sup>71</sup> A. Katznelson, letter to the author, June 2005; photograph in P. Guang (see n. 4) 49.



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Nash, Australian Genealogical Association, New South Wales; Dr Nancy Pine, Claremont Graduate University, California; George and Dennis Pisk in Sydney, Australia; Peter Salinger, Library of Judaica and Semitics, SOAS; Det. Sup. Karl Spencer, Hong Kong Police Force. I especially wish to thank Dr Alex Katznelson, of Ramat Gan, Israel, a former Jewish Company member, who provided photographs and lists of names of company members from the legacy and archive of Lt Anthony Gaberman, as well as previously unpublished material on the Jewish Naval Unit. The AJEX Jewish Military Museum, London, has a display of the insignia and uniforms of Lt Gaberman, donated by Dr Katznelson.

