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"Odds and Sods": Minorities in the British Empire's Campaign for Palestine, 1916-1919

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“Odds and Sods”:
Minorities in the British Empire’s Campaign for Palestine, 1916-1919

By
Julian Thiesfeldt Saltman

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History
in the
Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Anthony Adamthwaite, Chair
Professor James Vernon
Professor John Efron
Professor Ron Hassner

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Abstract

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Minorities in the British Empire’s Campaign for Palestine, 1916-1919

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Anthony Adamthwaite, Chair

This dissertation examines the role of minority soldiers in Britain’s Army during the campaign for Palestine in the First World War. It compares the experiences of two distinct, yet parallel, groups—three battalions of black, British West Indians (the British West Indies Regiment) and three battalions of Jewish soldiers (the “Jewish Legion”). Past scholarship has mostly ignored the history of these men, and what does exist has tended to conflate or subsume the specific experiences of the men in Egypt and Palestine within the broader histories of their specific minority groups, generally those that occurred on the Western Front. This work diverges from these past understandings, arguing that a comparative assessment of minority soldiers within the Palestine theater of war yields a new understanding of how Britain fought the First World War, as well as how wartime experience differed significantly amongst various minority groups.

The first main part of this project assesses the specific military experiences of West Indian and Jewish soldiers in Palestine, tracing their recruitment, training, and military roles. By outlining how the British government and military maintained hierarchies of ethno-racial identity, as well as how minority soldiers conceived their own identities, these chapters are able to dispute narratives of homogenous military service. Specifically, West Indians in Palestine viewed themselves as elevated in class and culture not only from other “non-European” colonial soldiers, but also from other West Indian military units, including units of their own regiment stationed in Europe. Similarly, the identity of the Jewish battalions—often viewed historically as distinctly Zionist—was heavily contested by assimilated British Jews, leading to a more diverse military experience than often assumed. Both chapters demonstrate that West Indians and Jews played key roles in the front lines, and suggest that they represented a distinct tier of imperial soldiering, one precariously situated above explicitly colonial units.

The second part of this dissertation explores frameworks of imperial conditioning, offering detailed examinations of military justice and forced athletic training inside the West Indian and Jewish battalions. First, it examines how West Indian and Jewish soldiers encountered military justice, with a specific focus on how their minority identities influenced the application of military law. These chapters conclude that military law was applied in both a punitive and nuanced manner—allowing prejudice and stereotype to affect the sentencing of minority soldiers, but also providing an effective counter through a mechanical system of
appeals, remission, and commutation. The final portion of this section argues that frequent athletic competition amongst soldiers in the EEF was more than a leisure activity or form of military training, but was an indirect means of inculcating potentially disruptive soldiers with a set of British values and norms that would make them amenable to postwar imperial governance. This was a direct reaction to the political radicalism unleashed by the war—namely Bolshevism and the rise of pan-nationalisms inside the British Empire. This dissertation uses military service records, the application of military justice, and a set of wartime and postwar conditioning policies to reveal the ways in which the British Empire was forced to broaden its definitions of who in its empire could serve, what expectations their service would create, where they could bear arms, and how this would affect the postwar empire.
To Mama and Papa
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Any large work is often the sum of its parts, and this project is no different, not least in
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Throughout this dissertation, several problematic and polarizing terms are used freely to promote an ease of analysis. They also accurately contextualize and recreate the beliefs and actions of the early twentieth-century British Empire. The first of these is the use of the term *minority* to encapsulate the wide swath of men from across the Greater Caribbean and of Jewish faith who served in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. One might argue that the Jews were “minority-nationals” and the West Indians were “colonials,” and there is substantial merit to these arguments. However, this project considers them together as minorities because they were distinct from the notions of “Britishness” that pervaded the British armed forces during the Great War, even as they themselves articulated their own British identities. From a purely technical perspective, within the British Army of the First World War, black men who resided in the West Indies and men of Jewish faith could be, and often were, considered distinct from other British forces. The decisions to create the BWIR and Jewish battalions were firmly couched within understandings of these groups as distinct, minority entities within the British imperial war effort, and thus, this project uses the term *minorities* as an encompassing term.

The idea of *race*, specifically in its relation to British military and imperial policy, is a common theme throughout this project. Most historians today understand race as a social construction, or, at the very least, recognize that biological or scientific understandings of human group identity are not predictive or confirmative, and are in fact designed to pigeonhole particular people into hierarchical categories for the benefit of various political and social ideas. However, the British Empire of the early twentieth-century did, in general, believe in various classifications of race that assigned immutable characteristics to certain groups, which in turn enabled the justification of various political, economic, and social hierarchies. To accurately examine the British Empire’s Great War, this dissertation freely mentions, discusses, and analyzes, but does not seek to legitimize, race-based notions of ability and identity.

The term *coloured* is a specific British term that refers to people of mixed racial background—within the scope of this project, almost always of partial African descent—and could carry particular class connotations. It occupies a middle position between white and black in the British worldview of the first half of the twentieth-century, and should be interpreted within that context; not as part of the American terminology of white and colored. Similarly, the use of the then contemporary terms *non-European*, *not of pure European descent*, and *non-white*, all of which deny people identity by describing what they are not as opposed to what they are, are used because they accurately reflect a dominant hierarchical dichotomy of white and other during the period this project examines.

The term *Palestine* refers to Ottoman or British Palestine during the First World War and its aftermath, and is not in any way referential to the modern Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Palestinian* inside this dissertation, therefore, refers to the Jews residing in Ottoman Palestine before 1914 who joined the Jewish battalions, since this was the terminology used to describe them inside the EEF. Similarly, the terms *Zionism* or *Zionist* refer strictly to the idea of creating a Jewish national state in the pre-1948 period. They carry no pejorative, supportive, or modern political weight within this project. Lastly, a number of prominent and sometimes controversial political personalities and organizations are discussed throughout—especially in chapters related to the Jewish Legion. My interest in situating these figures within the context of the British war for Palestine should not be interpreted as providing historical substantiation for any of their former or later beliefs, nor as a legitimization of critiques of their actions.
Abbreviations

AJHS American Jewish Historical Society
ANZAC Australia and New Zealand Army Corps
AWOL Absent without leave
BWIR British West Indies Regiment
CAB Cabinet Office Papers
CO Colonial Office Papers
C.O. Commanding Officer
EEF Egyptian Expeditionary Force
ELC Egyptian Labour Corps
FGCM Field General Court Martial
FP Field Punishment (denoted as “Number 1” or “Number 2”)
GHQ General Headquarters
HO Home Office Papers
ICS Institute for Commonwealth Studies
IWM Imperial War Museum
JAG Judge Advocate General (If deputy attached, DJAG used)
JI Jabotinsky Institute
JRC Jewish Regiment Committee
LOC Library of Congress
NAA National Archives of Australia
NCO Non-Commissioned Officer
NZEF New Zealand Expeditionary Force
OR Ordinary Rank (Soldier without a commission)
POW Prisoner of War
RF Royal Fusiliers
WICC West India Contingent Committee
WIR West India Regiment
WO War Office Papers
WD War Diary
ZMC Zion Mule Corps
Prologue

For several weeks, spotters in the Ottoman Army watched as the British Army built up a massive force across from them in the Jordan River Valley. Great clouds of chalky dust kicked up as columns of troops marched into position during the day, while countless campfires burned through the night. Reconnaissance aircraft overflew the British position and saw thousands of horses, an indication that Indian cavalry and ANZAC mounted infantry were also encamped. Twice in the Spring of 1918 the British had attempted to break through the Ottoman defenses in the Jordan, but had ultimately failed on both occasions. Now in September 1918, it seemed that the British would try once again—placing the bulk of their military manpower in the valley to overwhelm the Turks and consolidate their captures of Jericho and Jerusalem less than a year before. But they did not.

Instead, Britain’s Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) launched a massive offensive several dozen miles to the west of the Jordan. Following the plan laid out by the EEF Commander, General Sir Edmund Allenby, an immense artillery bombardment and waves of infantry created gaps in the Ottoman defenses that mounted troops quickly exploited and exaggerated. The result was perhaps the most resounding victory of the British Army in the First World War—an unanticipated, but nearly total, triumph crowned by the capture of Damascus on October 1. Twenty-nine days later, an armistice that ended hostilities in the Middle East was signed in the harbor of Mudros in the North Aegean Sea. Britain’s victory was so complete that it was named the Battle of Megiddo, for it began near Tel Megiddo, the supposed location of Armageddon.

The attack in the Jordan River Valley had, in fact, come as well—but not in the way the Ottoman commanders had expected. The “massive” British force in the western Jordan hills was an illusion—the product of repeated decoy marches and dummy encampments replete with stick horses. The EEF soldiers who had supposedly been arriving throughout August had actually been secretly positioning themselves in the coastal plain, while the same battalion marched up from Jericho every day, returning secretly at night. But the soldiers in the Jordan valley were also part of Allenby’s actual offensive. Under the command of the New Zealander, Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor, they crossed the Jordan, beat back the Ottoman troops from the bridgeheads and eastern banks of the valley, and blocked the potential routes of escape for the collapsing armies in the coastal plain. They too advanced rapidly, summing the eastern hills of the valley en route to capturing the crucial towns of Es Salt and Amman, the latter a key junction on the Hejaz railway.

Yet, while “Chaytor’s Force” played an important role in the final victory in Palestine, its larger historical significance lies in its composition. For when the Ottoman spotters looked through their binoculars at the amassed troops on the western bank, they would have seen very few traditional British “Tommy’s.” Instead, there were mounted men in ANZAC slouch hats, Indian troops, black and “coloured” men in British Army khaki, and, finally, British infantry who wore the Magen David on their uniforms—the universal symbol of Judaism. Chaytor’s troops were a composite force, an amalgam of different units from across the British Empire brought into service by the crushing casualties of the First World War. The presence of ANZACs and Indians in the British forces would surprise no historian—but the utilization of expressly Jewish and West Indian units in front-line roles reflected important and subtle transformations inside the British Empire. What follows is a history of these men and these transformations.
Introduction

“Odds and sods, like Jewish battalions and regiments of Hottentots,” wrote the British General Sir Edmund Allenby in June 1918, “are useful in a way; but they won’t win wars.,” 1 Although meant as an aside, Allenby’s statement neatly encapsulated a series of assumptions about a portion of the soldiers he commanded in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF), the army that fought the Ottoman Empire in the Sinai and Palestine during the First World War. Chief among these was the implicit equation of Jewish and black soldiers, as well as their middling categorization as “useful” in certain respects, but not essential for victory. For Allenby, these minority soldiers occupied a middle ground between those whom he preferred for fighting and those whom he, or Britain as a whole, might refuse to arm. Yet since taking command of the EEF roughly one year prior, Allenby had been forced to balance competing pressures: the desire for the successful conquest of Ottoman Palestine, but also the decision of the British command to rotate many of the EEF’s British veterans to the Western Front. The result was that the prosecution of the final offensive campaign in Palestine in September 1918 increasingly relied on a diverse swath of empire and minority units, including some whose frontline service reflected a unique series of confluences brought on by the war—the “odds and sods.”

The principal focus of this work is to understand minority military service in the British Army during the First World War through the prism of Jews and black, British West Indians who were part of the EEF in Egypt and Palestine. 2 Both of these groups served within structurally-isolated units that had emerged during the war and supposedly reflected a particular identity and ethnoracial belonging—the British West Indies Regiment and the Jewish battalions, officially part of the City of London Royal Fusiliers, but unofficially known as the Jewish Legion. While British West Indians and Jews had fought on behalf of Britain well before 1914, and served in almost every theater of the First World War, this project illustrates the unique history of those

1 Matthew Hughes, ed, Allenby in Palestine: the Middle East Correspondence of Field Marshal Viscount Allenby, June 1917-October 1919 (London: Army Records Society, 2004), 161. Allenby’s letter was to Sir Henry Wilson, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, and his focus was on requesting veteran manpower. His letter continued, “Americans and lame French Territorials do not make an army; and are merely an encumbrance, if immobilized by lack of transport. Give me some fighting Japanese Divisions, and I’ll give you a lot of help.” Who Allenby meant by the “Hottentots” is unclear; it could be a reference to the British West Indies Regiment, but also to units of African infantry that the War Office had implied might be released to his theater shortly. Regardless, the implication—equating Jewish and black units—remains clear.

2 The term minority is a potentially problematic term that in other instances, particularly after the Versailles Peace Conference, carried legal meaning or denoted a national identity. Within the scope of this project, however, the term connotes those who served in the British Army proper during the First World War, but might be marginalized as somehow distinct—whether on account of race, place of birth, or faith. Thus, even though black British West Indians and British Jews could lay claim to a “British” identity, they came up against a definition of the term in the War Office and army that usually meant “to be white,” not self-identify as someone from the dominions or colonies, practice a Christian faith (generally Anglican), and, possibly, maintain a communal sense against “others,” as Linda Colley has argued. This, as later chapters illustrate, created significant conflict. On the broader history of West Indians and British identity, see Anne Spry Rush, The Bonds of Empire: West Indians and Britishness from Victoria to Decolonization (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). For more on the term as it applies in the context of the British Army, see Jacqueline Jenkinson, “‘All in the Same Uniform’? The Participation of Black Colonial Residents in the British Armed Forces in the First World War,” Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 40 no. 2 (2012): 207-230 and Linda Colley “Britishness and Otherness” Journal of British Studies 31 no. 4 (October 1992): 309-329, especially 326. For how the term minority has been used in war studies, a good starting place is Panikos Panayi, ed. Minorities in Wartime: National and Racial Groupings in Europe, North America and Australia during the Two World Wars (Berg Publishers: Oxford, 1993).
who fought for British Palestine. In that specific theater of war, West Indian and Jewish military service was significantly less constrained by prevailing assumptions about who was capable of bearing arms for Britain, enabling black and “coloured” men from the Anglophone Caribbean and a global panoply of Jews (many of whom were not British nationals) to serve alongside both each other and a host of other empire soldiers. As it so happened, Allenby’s flippant equation of these two units occurred while he prepared for them to play similar roles in the build-up and prosecution of his final offensive, indicating a broader equivalency within British imperial and military policy, and suggesting the need for a more nuanced understanding of how the British Empire fought the Great War. Thus, by divorcing the units who served in Palestine from histories that provide a broad narrative across the entire war, and instead placing them in focused dialogue with each other, a new avenue opens for understanding minority military service in the First World War.

The study that follows is the first to sustain a juxtaposed history of these two groups, although it often eschews explicit comparison in order to provide the requisite empirical depth. Rather, it offers a series of snapshots of how these specific units formed within the contours of political advocacy and ethnoracial prejudices, how they were trained and utilized, how they were viewed by other British and imperial forces, and what transpired in the months that followed the fighting’s end in the late autumn of 1918. As this dissertation demonstrates, despite differentiation along religious, ethnic, and racial lines, the men of the BWIR and Jewish battalions enlisted specifically as British Army soldiers, thus creating a critical contradiction between wartime policy and prewar attitudes, since despite their “minority” identity, they were supposedly entitled to the same rights, privileges, and protections as any other British “Tommy.” Moving beyond how this affected their role as soldiers, this project is the first to investigate how this contradiction played out within the realm of military justice, specifically the hundreds of field courts-martial used to formally discipline the West Indian and Jewish soldiers. It also offers a new interpretation on the topic of athletics and minority soldiers, treating sports as part of a process of social and cultural conditioning designed to reinforce other forms of military and imperial authority. Threaded throughout these discussions is an illumination of how the West Indians and Jews reworked their own conceptions of imperial and military identity, the ways in which this both reinforced and challenged dominant British views, and how their self-conceptualization and service fused to generate a variety of expectations about their place in the postwar British empire. While the West Indians and Jews were not the only minority soldiers in the Palestine theater, their unique and shifting military roles, as well as broader political importance, offers a unique and compelling window into a poorly understood aspect of how Britain and its empire fought the First World War.

Great War, Global War

The history of the Great War has long been a European one—a story of unforeseen carnage and stagnation on the Western Front, and of a flawed peace that led to another horrific, general conflict. The established Eurocentric focus is not surprising given the scale of bloodshed along the Western, Eastern, and Southern European Fronts; the majority of the nine million dead, twenty-one million wounded, and nearly eight million missing became a casualty on a European

Great War, Global War
battleground. Yet, the Great War was also a global war, a conflict in which vast empires marshaled men from around the world to fight each other far from their homes.

In recent decades, histories of the Great War have increasingly recognized the conflict’s global scope. Influenced by the imperial turn in scholarship, historians of the First World War have worked to understand the global nature of the conflict by focusing on its colonial and imperial dimensions. The narrative tapestry of the war has broadened as new works examine Senegalese, North African, and Indochinese soldiers in the French Army, Indians stationed in British trenches, African askari in the German Army, and the African, Chinese, and Egyptian labor corps who built much of the battlefield infrastructure. When combined with a parallel body of material on the contributions of the white, British Dominions—notably Australia, New Zealand, and Canada—a much fuller picture of the conflict has emerged. But despite this growth in scholarship, the majority of these works still confine themselves to European fronts and the ensuing metropolitan-colonial relationship. While understandable for the continental combatants, the British Empire, more than any other belligerent, fought a truly global war.

As the short, localized conflict of August 1914 grew into a protracted struggle, Britain had no choice but to draw upon the economies and populations of its dominions and colonies. The empire was transformed into a great reservoir of manpower—yielding well over 1 million Indians, roughly 1 million Africans, 600,000 Canadians, over a half million men from British Oceania, and over 100,000 white South Africans. Other less-populated parts of the empire also

3 Of the 900,000 British men killed during the war, no less than 750,000 perished on the Western Front. John Morrow, The Great War: An Imperial History (London: Routledge, 2004), 285.
5 The historiography around the contributions of these Dominions is immense, especially from the Australian perspective. Outside of official histories, good starting points include: David MacKenzie, ed. Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005); Bill Gammage The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War (Canberra: ANU Press, 1974); Christopher Pugsley, The ANZAC Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War (Auckland: Reed, 2004).
6 Morrow, The Great War, 285, 310-313. For slightly more conservative enlistment numbers (but roughly the same), see Robert Holland, “The British Empire and the Great War,” in Judith M. Brown and Wm.Roger Louis, eds., The Oxford History of the British Empire, vol. IV: The Twentieth Century (Oxford University Press, 1999), 117. Oceania provided over 400,000 Australians and over 100,000 New Zealanders, of which 59,000 Australians were killed in action, a higher proportion than the 57,000 Canadian dead. There is some dispute over the number of Africans serving in the war, with estimates ranging from ½ million to 1.5 million. Most were forcibly conscripted, often into roles as porters, bearers, or laborers. For more on Britain and Africa in the war, see Albert Grundlingh, Fighting their own war: South African Blacks and the First World War (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987); Tim Stapleton, No Insignificant Part: The Rhodesia Native Regiment and the East Africa Campaign of the First World War (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Byron Farwell, The Great War In Africa (1914-1918), (New York: WW Norton, 1986); David Killingray and James Matthews. “Beasts of Burden: British West African Carriers in the First World War,” Canadian Journal of African Studies, 13, no 1/2 (1979): 7-23; Bill Nasson, “Why
contributed, sending tens of thousands to the battlefield, including contingents of Rarotongans, Maori, Fijians, and Burmese. Some of these empire forces—particularly the Canadians and contingents from Australia and New Zealand—fought in France, as did portions of the Indian Army in the first years of the war. Yet the War Office’s continued belief that the Western Front required the inherent racial superiority of the white, British soldier ensured that much of the empire’s manpower also fought in the “secondary” theaters, the majority of them against the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean, Mesopotamia, and the Middle East.

Many men served bravely in these campaigns, but empire soldiers took on such significant roles in them that they often became points of symbolic focus. The ANZAC contribution at Gallipoli, an ill-fated attempt to relieve pressure on the Western Front, helped develop a critical component of national mythology in both Australia and New Zealand. In Mesopotamia, the Indian Army composed most of the British force, and garnered much attention for weathering the siege of Kut and seizing Baghdad, in the process helping consolidate the defense of India’s northwestern flank. In contrast, the British campaign for the Sinai and Palestine was, in the words of one historian, “a multinational, multicultural, imperial effort.” It featured such a diversity of manpower, as well as enough relatively distinct phases, that it lacks the prevailing and dominant identity of other campaigns and is consequently less understood than the rest of the war. While Palestine may not have affected the war against Germany in Europe, it was a military theater of great historical consequence—more members of the British army spent time in Egypt and Palestine than in any other theater of war outside the Western Front—and one that set many of the twentieth century’s most important debates.

Initially tasked with defending the Suez Canal after the Ottoman declaration of war in November 1914, the British military presence in Egypt slowly evolved into an offensive

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7 Both countries hold days of remembrance on April 25, the date of the initial landing. Two good, recent overviews on Gallipoli are Robin Prior, Gallipoli: The End of the Myth (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010) and Peter Hart Gallipoli (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Hart, in particular, has refocused attention on the importance of the French military contribution. For the New Zealander perspective, see Terry Kinloch, Echoes of Gallipoli: in the words of New Zealand’s mounted riflemen (Auckland: Exisle, 2005).


9 Hughes, Allenby in Palestine, 17.

10 The most immediate explanation of this is that the entire conflict in Palestine has been consistently under-examined by most general histories. Among recent histories from popular historians, John Keegan’s The First World War (New York: Vintage Books, 2000) reduced the Palestine campaign from mid-1917 until 1918 to a mere nine lines, while Hew Strachan devoted just two paragraphs of his general study, The First World War (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), to the campaign. See Keegan 415, Strachan 284-5, 323. Some historians—Ian Beckett and Martin Gilbert, and John Morrow—have recognized the importance of the theater in their general studies, but they are a distinct minority; even histories of the global dimensions of the First World War barely address the conflict in Palestine. See Martin Gilbert The First World War: A Complete History (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1994); Ian Beckett The Great War, 1914-1918 (Harlow: Longman Pearson, 2007); John Morrow, The Great War, and for examples of neglect, Ashley Jackson, Distant Drums: The Role of Colonies in British Imperial Warfare (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2010) and V.D. Kierrnan, Colonial Empires and Armies, 1815-1960 (Phoenix Mill: Sutton Publishing Limited, 1998).

11 Approximately 2.5 million men in the British forces served in the Middle East during WWI—roughly 1 million of whom were stationed there after the Armistices. The breakdown of the total number of men who served in each theater is approximately: 5.4 million men on the Western Front, 1.2 million in Egypt and Palestine, 890,000 in Mesopotamia, 470,000 at Gallipoli, and 145,000 on the Italian front. David Fromkin, A Peace to End All Peace: The Fall of the Ottoman Empire and the Creation of the Modern Middle East (New York: Henry Holt and Co, 1989) 385.
campaign for the Sinai Peninsula and Ottoman Palestine. The early portion of this evolution took place under the command of the British General, Sir Archibald Murray, who had taken command of the newly created EEF in March 1916. Much of Murray’s focus in 1916 was on an active defense of Egypt by crossing the Sinai Peninsula and pushing Ottoman forces back from the Suez Canal, a strategy that required the creation of significant infrastructure. Although the EEF firmly moved into a more offensive role with victory at Romani in August 1916, their primary mission was still reasonably limited—to ensure the defense of Egypt while also rotating troops back to the more important Western Front.

The ascendency of David Lloyd George to the office of Prime Minister in December 1916 heralded a significant shift in British aims in Egypt and Palestine. An ardent bible scholar and astute politician, Lloyd George saw the Palestine front as an opportunity for victories to boost both his political capital and Allied morale—particularly if they might entice the United States into joining the Allies’ cause. After Murray failed to break through the Ottoman defenses at Gaza twice in the Spring of 1917, Lloyd George looked for a replacement, settling on General Sir Edmund Allenby in June 1917. Under Allenby, the Egyptian Expeditionary Force waged a wildly successful war bookended by the breakthrough at Beersheba at the very end of October 1917 and the capture of Aleppo almost exactly one year later. In between, the EEF conquered Gaza, Jerusalem, and Jaffa (November to December 1917), Jericho (February 1918), Haifa and Amman (September 1918), and Damascus (October 1918). Britain finally had a war of movement, and Lloyd George had his victories.

12 Previously, British forces had been organized in the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force and a garrisoning force in Egypt. One British soldier recalled the constant dearth of necessary infrastructure as they advanced: “There was practically nothing in the country. We wanted sleepers, rails, and locomotives for the railway; pipes, pumps, and other materials for the water-supply; waggons, motor-lorries and light-cars for transport purposes…” Antony Bluett, *With Our Army in Palestine* (London: Andrew Melrose Lts, 1919), 44. For an interesting take on the evolution of infrastructure and imperial rule, see Kristian Coates Ulrichsen *The Logistics and Politics of the British Campaigns in the Middle East, 1914-1922* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

13 The War Office had Murray send almost a quarter-million troops and nine heavy artillery batteries to France by July 1916. As late as December 15, 1916, the Imperial General Staff maintained to Murray that “your primary mission remains unchanged, that is to say, it is the defence of Egypt. You will be informed if and when the War Cabinet changes this policy.” One month later, it informed him that no offensive operations should begin in Palestine until Fall 1917. See WO 33/905/6323, Chief of the Imp General Staff to CinC Egypt, Dec 15, 1916, and 33/905/6495a, Chief of the Imperial General Staff to CinC Egypt, January 11 1917, No 27761. On manpower, see David Woodward, *Forgotten Soldiers of the First World War* (Stroud: Tempus Publishing Ltd, 2006), 37.

14 Lloyd George quickly asserted himself—an April 1917 Cabinet memorandum noted that “British Palestine…is undoubtedly what is hoped for by the great mass of the inhabitants of Palestine proper. The delivery of Jerusalem from the Turk would be hailed by every Christian, Jew, and Arab…would have world wide moral and political effect.” See CAB 21/15. Memorandum by Captain Ormsby Gore entitled “Campaign in Palestine and Syria,” April 1, 1917. There is a vast literature on Lloyd George during the First World War, not least of which are the seven volumes of his own memoirs. For an introduction, see Bentley Brinkerhoff Gilbert *David Lloyd George: A political life: Organizer of Victory, 1912-1916* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992), George Cassar, *Lloyd George at War, 1916-1918* (London: Anthem Press, 2009), and David Woodward, *Lloyd George and the Generals* (Newark, University of Delaware Press: 1983).

15 Matthew Hughes, the preeminent historian of Allenby’s strategy, argued that Murray “lacked the verve to move from logistics to operational success,” while George Cassar argued that Lloyd George’s decision was because Murray “deceived the War Cabinet about the First Battle of Gaza” in March 1917. Allenby was Lloyd George’s second choice; his first was the South African Jan Smuts, who declined. See Hughes, *Allenby in Palestine*, 7; Cassar, *Lloyd George at War*, 151-2.

16 For many years, the works of the official war correspondents—W.T. Massey and Henry Gullett—in conjunction with a series of memoirs published in the 1920s, served as the dominant histories of the British war in Palestine. W.T. Massey, *The desert campaigns* (London: GP Putnam, 1918), *How Jerusalem was won, being the record of

17 This map depicts the movements of Murray, Allenby, and Arab forces. The “2” depicts both the unsuccessful Trans-Jordan raids of Spring 1918, as well as the approximate location of Chaytor’s Force, including the BWIR and Jewish battalions, who took those positions in Summer 1918. Chaytor’s offensive in September 1918 followed a similar route to the raids, although the map arrow is misleading and should be located just above the northern tip of the Dead Sea. Modified from Matthew Hughes and William J. Philpott, The Palgrave Concise Historical Atlas of the First World War (Houndsmill: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), Map 35.
Allenby, or “Bull”, as his soldiers sometimes referred to him, could have simply been remembered as a failed commander on the Western Front, a former cavalryman who simply could not tactically adapt to the conditions of the trenches. Instead, his success in Palestine, particularly his impressive defeat of the Turkish armies at Megiddo in September 1918, provided him with a wholly more positive reputation. Together with T.E. Lawrence, Allenby anchored the history of the Palestine campaign. Both men embodied a familiar British romanticism; one in which white, British men displayed their ingenuity and martial ability against an easily Orientalized enemy, achieving overwhelming victory. Such history provided a sunnier counterpoint to the wastage of the trenches, particularly as the postwar glow faded into the dark introspection of later decades. Yet while Lawrence still captures popular imagination and Allenby the attention of many military historians, the history of the First World War in Egypt and Palestine has begun to broaden to include all those who served.

More than any other military force in the war, the EEF was a diverse collection of British, imperial, colonial, minority, and minority-national soldiers that tended to reflect shifting perceptions of military ability. For much of the war, it had a substantial “Territorial” contingent, who despite being English, had initially been derided as a “town-clerks army” and subject to similar obstacles as dominion and minority troops. Once these men became needed on the

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18 Two biographies of Allenby are Sir Archibald Wavell, Allenby: A Study in Greatness (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941) and Lawrence James, Imperial Warrior: The Life and Times of Field-Marshal Viscount Allenby, 1861-1936 (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1994). The best introduction to his time in Palestine is Jonathan Newell, “Allenby and the Palestine Campaign,” in Brian Bond, ed. The First World War and British Military History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991) and the best overview of his strategy is Matthew Hughes, Allenby and British Strategy in the Middle East, 1917-1919 (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1999). Allenby’s use of ground-air tactics, as well as a highly mobile piercing-attack, has led some to argue that he was the first to successfully utilize modern “combined arms,” (thus perfecting blitzkrieg thirty years before the Wermacht conquered most of Europe).

19 Lawrence as the intellectual commander “gone native”, with Allenby as the military mastermind were, and still are, easily digestible themes to the public. These assumptions were aided by the physical and historical geography of Palestine. A European military campaign against the Ottomans had obvious parallels to the Crusades, and this retrograde context was only further enhanced by the biblical allure of both religious sites and battlefields in Palestine. Megiddo—the final major battle of the Palestine theater—was not only the site of several biblical contests involving Egyptian Pharaohs, but it was supposedly the site of Armageddon—yet another “final” battle. Further romantic synchronicities developed around Allenby—whose name translated phonetically to “prophet of Allah”—and who supposedly fulfilled an ancient prophecy about transporting the Nile to Palestine (the Sinai water pipeline) and driving the Turks from Jerusalem. (The phonetic forms are: Allah ‘nbi, al-Nabi, or Allah-nebi). It seems that the British may have been more enthused by this parallel than their Islamic allies). For overviews of the romanticized literature, often in the form of crusading, see Eitan Bar Yosef, “The Last Crusade? British Propaganda and the Palestine Campaign, 1917-1918,” in Journal of Contemporary History 36, no. 1 (Jan 2001): 87-109 and Jonathan Newell, “Allenby and the Palestine Campaign,” Op. cit. For a contemporary example of this trend, see Anthony Bruce, The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War (London: John Murray, 2002). On Lawrence, good starting places are Brian Holden Reid “T.E. Lawrence and his Biographers,” in Brian Bond, ed. Op. cit. and his “authorized” biography: Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1989).

20 David Woodward, in Forgotten Soldiers of the First World War Op. cit. has argued that the Territorials were a key and forgotten piece of victory in Palestine. For a broader overview, see Ian Beckett, The Amateur Military Tradition, 1558-1945 (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1991), 226-235. Beckett points out that the Territorials initially were used to release regular army troops from imperial garrison duties, and once sent to France, found themselves facing Lines of Communication duties instead of front line service, discrimination in pay and benefits, perceptions of “lax discipline,” and a hostility from other Army units. These, as this dissertation reveals, were commonalities with the minority units in the EEF.
Western Front, the result was what some scholars have termed the “Indianization” of the force—British men ordered to Europe had their units “diluted” with or replaced by Indian soldiers (a policy known as “substitution”). This intensified with the major German offensive of Spring 1918 along the Western Front (the Kaiserschlacht or “Ludendorff Offensive”), as incorrectly inflated intelligence about Ottoman troop strength led the British General Staff to relocate British troops to France before they were killed in a “secondary theater.” Indian troops replaced two British divisions in April 1918 and twenty-four more British battalions between May and early August—requiring an expansion in the “martial race” doctrine in India to include seventy-five new classes of Indians, as well as a lessening of physical enlistment criteria. Throughout this transformation, a substantial core of ANZACs remained, a significant proportion of whom had arrived in the theater after serving at Gallipoli. By the time Allenby launched his final offensive near Megiddo in September 1918, his front-line force of almost 70,000 men contained only a small number of British soldiers. Thus, the EEF could not maintain the racial dichotomy of the Western Front in which whites bore arms and “non-whites” and minorities generally did not—it had to both train and allow men from minority groups to fight. But these men tend not to fit the dominant contours of the broader imperial experience, and thus are either neglected or examined in isolation from similar groups, usually via works that are bounded by national or ethnic identifiers.

Broader histories provide an overview of the imperial war effort in Egypt and Palestine, but unsurprisingly, tend to focus on the history of the largest groups. Thus, while there is a

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22 Yigal Sheffy, British Military Intelligence in the Palestine Campaign 1914-1918 (London: Frank Cass & Co, 1998), 288. On the condition of the Ottoman Army in Palestine, see Edward J. Erickson, Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A comparative study (London: Routledge, 2007). British soldiers in Egypt and Palestine were often aware of their future transfer. One noted in his diary, “the rumours that we are going to France…had been recurrent ever since the great, German offensive began in March.” They also knew they were being replaced by troops from British India. See IWM 84/52/1. Diary of J. Wilson, June 1, 1918, pg 39.

23 The 52nd and 74th were replaced by the 7th Meerut and 3rd Lahore Divisions. For notes on the exact substitutions, see WO 161/81. “A Brief Record of The Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force Under the Command of General Sir Edmund HH Allenby, GCB GCMG” July 1917 to October 1918, Compiled from Official Sources and Published by The Palestine News. (Cairo: Government Press and Survey of Egypt, 1919) pg 21-2. For information on changes in Indian recruitment, see Omissi, Indian Voices of the Great War, pg 16 and Beckett, The Great War (2nd ed), 94. For two good discussions of “martial races,” see Heather Streets-Salter, Martial races: the military, race and masculinity in British imperial culture, 1857-1914 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004) and Timothy Parsons, The African rank-and-file: social implications of colonial military service in the King’s African Rifles, 1902-1964 (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999), especially Chapter 3. Parsons’ examination is particularly useful in light of the shifting parameters of what was meant by “martial” in the recruitment of Indians into the EEF.

24 In fact, there was only one entirely British division in Allenby’s force (the 54th East Anglians, known unflatteringly as “Allenby’s pets”). In contrast, there were 51 British infantry divisions in France. See Holland, “The British Empire and the Great War,” 136. The size of divisions changed during the war, but each consisted of three brigades (each between 3000-4000 men), plus divisional troops.

25 For discussion of this, see Chapter 1 of Laura Tabili, We ask for British justice: workers and racial difference in late Imperial Britain (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994). How to fit the Indian Army into this framework is trickier than Tabili lets on.
substantial canon of scholarship addressing the Australian and New Zealander contribution, as well as growing work on Indian forces, smaller minority and imperial forces are often confined to small asides. Yet perhaps the most remarkable aspect of Allenby’s EEF was its diversity—outside of the dominant imperial groups there were American and Russian Jews, Arabs, Armenians, Burmese, Canadians, Egyptians, Francophone Africans, Italian Bersaglieri, Rarotongans, South Africans, and West Indians. With the exception of two recent monographs that aim for inclusivity, yet both of which maintain much larger scopes of analysis, studies of these less-dominant constituents are bounded by a variety of geographic, national, religious, and ethnic boundaries that isolate their subjects from the broader historical context.

For the most part, the small canon of histories focused on minority soldiers in the Britain’s Great War forces has tended to be both unitary and isolated in focus. The experiences of a particular group are discussed in a unified manner, but the study is isolated from broader parallels and comparative possibilities. While often well-researched and well-argued, these specialized histories are often hamstrung by their inability to assess the uniqueness of the situations faced by their subject. They are, in many ways, micro-histories of the units, albeit with broader import to their specific colonial and imperial canons. Their isolation from the broader immediate context of the other similar participants, however, results in a historiography that lacks a connection between the broad imperial and colonial history of the Palestine Campaign itself and the postwar British Empire.

It is not surprising that while military historians have mostly ignored them, historians of empire have often fixated on minority and colonial units after decades of neglect, as they tend to fit dominant historiographical narratives of colonial “othering.” Many explore the obstacles faced by minority soldiers: official discrimination, trumped up charges and verdicts, racially motivated presumptions of inferiority, not to mention a pervasive atmosphere of dislike, distrust, and disgust. While the historical record demonstrates that all of the above occurred, the major problem to grapple with is that, sometimes, the opposite occurred.

The trajectory in many studies of the BWIR, for example, is that miserable service conditions, false promises, and racist abuse triggered an explosion of discontent, helping to catalyze several nationalist movements in the postwar-Caribbean. Less linear studies also tend

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28 There are plenty of micro-histories of British units too. See Michael Mortlock, *The Egyptian Expeditionary Force in World War I: A History of the British-Led Campaigns in Egypt, Palestine and Syria* (Jefferson: Mcfarland, 2010), which is really a study of the 5th Battalion of the Suffolk Regiment.

29 Perhaps the classic example is WF Elkins, “A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy,” in *Science & Society* 34, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 99-103. For a more
to allow an interest in the development of Caribbean identity and nationalism to shape discussions of wartime experience. The problem is that there was no unitary West Indian wartime experience—some battalions were combat troops in Palestine, others were support troops in France and Mesopotamia, some served in Africa, and still others were essentially forced into labor duties while in Italy. Similarly, how can we accept a unified history of discrimination against West Indian soldiers, culminating in the Taranto mutiny and trials in Italy in December 1918, when three battalions of West Indians in Palestine were not only nowhere near Taranto, but were actually publicly well-regarded as soldiers and imperial citizens by their peer units—including white soldiers?

Similar issues constrain the history of the Jewish battalions inside the EEF, which tend to be discussed within the contours of the history of Anglo-Jewry or Zionism. In both cases, the battalions themselves are often a mere aside to broader political and social focuses, either as a tangible manifestation of the unsteady Zionist and British relationship or as part of the rupture in the Anglo-Jewish community. Often, the battalions are discussed only in terms of the service of certain key Jewish figures in the Mandate and post-1948 period, reducing a much broader and complex wartime story. How can the history of the Jewish Legion be merely the prehistory of the Haganah, a critical stepping stone in the Zionist narrative from Bar Kochba to 1948, when the first Jewish battalion, the one with the most illustrious combat record, was dominated by British Jews, including Russia-born East-Enders, who generally had minimal interest in settling in a Jewish Palestine?

Overall, in fact, despite their fertile histories, both the Jewish Legion and the British West Indies Regiment have been under-examined by modern historians. Glenford Howe’s *Race, War, and Nationalism* is still the only work to focus on the contributions of the entire West Indies during the war, while more recent work by Richard Smith tends to fixate on the Jamaican experience during the war. While groundbreaking, the work of both these scholars has significantly minimized the West Indian story in Palestine, preferring to focus on both the Caribbean and the Western Front. The story of the Jewish battalions in Palestine has also been told—principally by Martin Watt’s balanced and well-researched work, as well as Michael and Shlomit Keren’s anthology of experience. However, neither is able to fully assess the

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uniqueness of the situations encountered by Jewish troop in the EEF, and outside, comparative context is often minimal. While all of these volumes make important contributions to the canon of Great War scholarship, the examination put forth in this dissertation better illuminates the intersections of imperial policy and military experience across the Palestine front for all historians of empire and war.

When viewed in isolation from each other, each unit appears of minor significance to both the war and broader imperial history. Yet, when considered together, it is clear that there are similarities—possibly to the point of congruence—between some of the minority battalions inside the EEF. While the BWIR as a whole has been well-situated against the African and Afro-colonial experiences in the war, the divergent history of the battalions in Palestine, which tends not to fit completely within these narratives, is generally minimized. Similarly, isolated Jewish battalions should not simply be compared to Jewish soldiers in other theaters of war—they should be examined within the context of similarly-constructed units engaged in similar tasks, regardless of divergences in ethnoracial identity. It’s even possible to consider these structurally isolated units of several thousand men, generally grouped together by perceived common ties in ethnicity, religion, and race, as a distinct “tier” within Allenby’s force. Yet, because of their small size and strategic flexibility, most military historians of the Palestine theater have ignored or misunderstood their contributions, but they were a unique, and at times essential, part of Allenby’s fighting force, and one which has much to offer historians of both empire and the First World War.

This dissertation eschews a focus rooted in shared regional, national, or ethnic identity, and instead looks for similarity and dissimilarity inside the actual theater of war—in this case, Egypt and Palestine.33 In the case of the West Indians, this involves separating them from the dominant narrative predicated on European experience. For the Jewish battalions, the focus is on deconstructing the unitary notion of a “Legion” and exposing the distinctions between its component battalions. Throughout, the project recognizes that the minority composition of these battalions ensured that as a unit, they were imbued with deep political and social significance. While some constituent men worked to reinforce and uphold these parameters, others might attempt to counter them, and still more remained either indifferent or unaware of these broader undertones. This work also makes a point of not ignoring the key British personalities, like Allenby, but rather works to integrate him and the rest of the EEF into a series of smaller narratives about the various colonial and minority soldiers that fought in this campaign. Contextualization is key for such a polyglot force, for it illuminates the broader contours of British military and imperial policy.

This is not, however, strictly an account of either imperial politics or military history, for it does not focus exclusively on either high politics or tactical and strategic issues. Instead, it veers between these two canons to chart and illuminate issues and experiences that are usually overlooked, including the training of minorities for war, their encounters with military justice,
and processes of social and cultural conditioning through sport and education. It also attempts to bridge the gap between military histories that tend to end with the Armistice at Mudros, Mandate histories that begin with the war’s end, and the empire micro-histories that discuss postwar discontent only as it pertains to their subject, often decontextualizing the topic from broader issues. There is, therefore, plenty of room in the historical canon for a study that offers a middle approach: a comparative and synthetic examination of some minority soldiers situated within the broader context of the British empire at war.

The significance of this project, then, lies in its unique comparative structure and its examination of previously undiscussed elements of imperial and minority soldiering in the Palestine theater. It revitalizes the military history of the British war for Palestine, demonstrating the crucial—and often neglected—role of minority forces in defeating the Ottoman Army. By offering a comparative examination, it helps clarify why the marginalized men of one empire fought to destroy a different empire in a part of the world far from their homes and families. More importantly, this work provides a clear sense of the “functional existence” of these men—using them as a prism for understanding the transitory nature of British imperial policy during a war that uniquely reshaped both Europe and European empire. This means deviating from a simple combat narrative in favor of a broader analysis of military service, one expanded to encounters with the military justice system and the various education and training schemes created by the British Army. Moving beyond capital courts-martial, a close examination of military justice helps uncover the conflict between minority military service, discrimination, and the structures of liberal empire. Education and training, on the other hand, demonstrates the way in which the empire—in this case via the Army—sought to acculturate and mold potential postwar destabilizers into amenable imperial participants. All of this was contextualized not only by the crisis of manpower in Britain and the debate between the Colonial Office and War Office over the enlistment of previously impermissible men, but also by British fears of the rise of Bolshevism in Europe. An examination of these areas illuminates the relationships in Palestine between minority soldiers and the state, and between the soldiers themselves, providing an important foundation for understanding the broader frustrations of veterans in the postwar British empire.

West Indians and Jews: The Case for an Integrated Understanding

Despite appearing a somewhat unusual comparison at first, the West Indian and Jewish units in the EEF were actually quite analogous. From a technical standpoint, they were similar in terms of size and military designation. The Jewish troops in Palestine in 1918 were the 38th, 39th, and 40th Royal Fusiliers, with the first two battalions employed as regular service units and the latter essentially serving as a “reserve” battalion. Similarly, the British West Indies Regiment had its 1st and 2nd battalions as regular service units, and the 5th Battalion as a reserve unit.

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34 Importantly, despite its detail, this project does not attempt to recite fully the wartime “experience” of these men. Although this is a common theme in military history, there are deep methodological problems of recapturing lived experience from limited sources. In recognition of this issue, this project focuses instead on the functional existence of the units, examining their actions and reactions within the broader context of imperial and military policy. Additionally, while particular military encounters are recounted in detail, it is not due to any great attachment to military history, but because these details refute contemporary and scholarly perceptions of minimal military involvement for most minority soldiers.

35 The size of these battalions could fluctuate, but usually the battalions marked for “service” had approximately 1,000 men, while the reserve units generally contained several hundred more (sometimes well-over that number, in
Both units maintained a flexible role throughout their service, executing a range of primary and secondary military duties, as well as some labor and defensive infrastructure projects. Primary roles revolved around front-line service, raids, or combat, while secondary roles encapsulated the garrisoning of towns, the escorting or guarding of POW’s, the patrolling of supply and communication lines, and a range of other militarily necessary tasks that did not involve direct, adversarial contact with the enemy.

While they arrived in the theater at different times, both units held the line in the Jordan Valley as part of “Chaytor’s Force” during the September 1918 offensive, and both had sustained military and social interaction with the other imperial troops in the force. Outside of the Jordan Valley offensive, they performed a similarly wide range of military tasks, had comparable wartime and postwar training programs, and faced similar types of political, social, and military obstacles. Interestingly, there was an attempt to brigade the Jewish units and West Indians together, into one united military force. This order appears to have driven by military protocol (although various Jewish soldiers allege it was designed to eliminate the Jewish character of their units), but it seems to betray an intrinsic hierarchy inside the British Army that placed these two different groups of men together.

Importantly, both units fell under the aegis of the British Army, and not a separate command or autonomous expeditionary force (like the Indian Army or various Dominion forces), nor was either unit marked as a “colonial” force. Rather, they both maintained the status of official units of the British Army, just as any distinct unit of Englishmen did. As a consequence, they technically held the same rights and privileges of any other British soldier under the Army Act of 1914, which offered them not only certain legal protections, but gave them a platform from which to express grievances and make claims. This, in turn, allowed them to generate their own versions of British identity, which often led to service and disciplinary situations that fully illuminated the complexities and contradictions of imperial rule.

Yet with the exception of officers, most of the men within these two units were considered by much of British officialdom to be at least somewhat distinct from normative British identity—whether due to religious faith, racial background, or place of birth. The result was that their soldiering abilities could be assumptively questioned because of engrained prejudice—generally relating to discipline, courage, and martial intellect. Yet these units were only homogenous in their composition within the sense of how the British Army and government constructed identity. There were few commonalities between Yiddish-speaking, Russian immigrants from London’s East End who enlisted in the Jewish battalions under the threat of deportation to Russia, and American Zionists who willingly enlisted in the British army for a chance to forge Eretz Yisrael. Similarly, the British West Indies Regiment represented the entire Anglophone Caribbean—an area encompassing thousands of square miles—and composed of islands with a multitude of political, social, economic, and cultural distinctions.

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36 For an introduction to the issues of autonomy and separation in Britain’s imperial forces, see Holland, “The British Empire and the Great War,” 130.

37 The distance between the Bahamas and Trinidad & Tobago is nearly 2.5 times the length of England and Scotland, and shipping routes were often indirect. As late as the 1920s, letters from Jamaica to locations like Barbados, Trinidad, or British Guiana often routed through London, New York City, or Halifax due to the lack of direct shipping routes. For more, see Elisabeth Wallace, *The British Caribbean: From the decline of colonialism to the end of Federation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 26.
The consequence of these shared divergences was that members of both the Jewish battalions and BWIR differentiated themselves from groups that some British officials might lump them in with. Inside the Jewish battalions, many drew distinctions between assimilated British Jews, Russian-born immigrants, Zionist volunteers, and the various Jews who had settled in Egypt and Ottoman Palestine before the war. Likewise, the BWIR articulated its difference from the long-existing professional body of West Indian soldiers, the West India Regiment (WIR). Members of the BWIR referred to themselves as “imperial” troops, a distinct contrast to the pejorative “colonial” they termed the WIR, and a difference underscored by the BWIR’s regular khaki versus the WIR’s distinctive zouave uniform. The internal support for such differentiation stemmed from the BWIR’s self-conscious status as volunteers, in itself code for the middle class status many of the regiment’s soldiers maintained before the war.

The final point in favor of juxtaposition is that both units reflected certain political goals—the Jews’ and West Indians’ service in supposedly homogenous units had an express political purpose. The Colonial Office wanted to federate the West Indies and defuse the rise of pan-African nationalism, while the Jewish Legion represented the goals of pro-Zionist elements of the British government to create a body of men attuned to future British governance in the Middle East. Thus, their status as military units was unique to the time (and ultimately fleeting), for the divergences from prevailing ideas about their incapability of effective soldiering was due to a unique set of political circumstance and lobbying, the combination of an offensive war in Palestine, and the attrition of the Western Front.

By the armistice, the British military command consistently feared these units’ exposure to, and potential participation in, future political disturbances (Bolshevism and black nationalism, mainly) as a result of slow demobilization. While they had swallowed their discomfort in arming and training minority soldiers during the war itself, afterwards, old stereotypes quickly coalesced with new fears. The result was a diffuse attempt to ensure their amenability to empire, utilizing both athletics and education as a means to both acculturate and counter potentially destabilizing politics. However, this process helped inadvertently to reinforce preexisting relationships between minority and Dominion soldiers, and thus underline new notions of imperial service and community.

By juxtaposing these units, while also situating them within the broad contours of military and imperial policy, it is possible to show how the British Empire utilized all of its available manpower to extend its territorial boundaries in the Middle East. This is the gap which this work seeks to fill—to understand how Britain chose parts of its Empire to fight the war in the Middle East, how that war was fought, and to suggest how this would lead to broader consequences for the postwar, imperial world.

Chapters and Sources

This dissertation is divided into two major parts. Part I traces the creation, training, and military service of both sets of minority battalions. More specifically, it illustrates how the battalions in Palestine reflected various British political motivations, assumptions about martial ability, and understandings of West Indian and Jewish identity. It also reveals counter-motivations and understandings on the part of the battalions, illuminating the ways in which this generated conflict and disruption. Part II grapples with two underexplored facets of minority wartime experience related to the maintenance of imperial authority. The first of these is military justice, specifically courts-martial in the field, which exhibited prejudicial variants, but also a
surprisingly liberal counterbalancing through judicial review. The second is the idea of imperial and cultural conditioning through a process long assumed to simply be a postwar distraction—athletics. In both cases, a broad, contextual backdrop is provided by the unrest inside the EEF in 1919.

Chapter 1 examines the battalions of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt and Palestine, and argues that they not only self-differentiated from other “non-white” military units, but that these beliefs were reinforced by Colonial officials interested in Caribbean federation. In contrast, the War Office maintained a prejudiced view of all black troops, and refused to differentiate these battalions from any other black military or labor unit except in cases of military necessity and Colonial Office pressure. These divergences shaped the military service of the battalions and created conflicting expectations, especially after they were fully trained as combat forces in the EEF and given a more significant military role than normally assumed after Allenby’s arrival in 1917.

Chapter 2 follows a similar analytical trajectory to relate the history of the Jewish battalions. It fleshes out the conflicts between Zionists and assimilated Anglo-Jewry over the creation of the battalions, and reveals how this shaped the identity of each individual battalion in the period prior to the armistice. The result is a disputation of the idea of a unified “Jewish Legion” experience in Egypt and Palestine, as the chapter shows how some of the most prominent Legionnaires in the postwar period played very minimal roles in the actual September offensives.

The focus of the project shifts in Chapter 3, which begins Part II. After outlining the mechanics of military courts-martial, this chapter illuminates how race-based perceptions of indiscipline led to a higher frequency of British West Indian soldiers being charged with infringements of military order, and how most were sentenced more harshly than other army soldiers. However, it also demonstrates how West Indian soldiers were still entitled to processes of judicial review, which often commuted or remitted their sentences to levels similar to other soldiers inside the EEF. Thus, West Indians faced a contradictory judicial process of punitive sentencing that was often followed by compensatory revision.

Chapter 4 switches to the Jewish battalions’ encounter with military justice in Egypt and Palestine. It points out that while the disciplinary records of the front-line battalions have some similarities to the West Indian story, the overwhelming majority of Jewish soldiers faced courts-martial after fighting concluded, and therefore most disciplinary infractions stemmed from localized issues like demobilization into British Palestine. It also disputes the idea of unrelenting prejudicial sentencing of Jewish soldiers, pointing out that access to educated men in the battalion as defense representatives as well as disciplinary flexibility on the part of battalion officers meant lower conviction rates than often assumed. As the chapter illustrates, this specifically occurred during the battalion “mutinies” of Sumer 1919, a series of incidents that are contextualized within the broader unrest inside the entire EEF.

Lastly, Chapter 5 shifts the focus from visible and entrenched governance to the more subtle cultural and social realm of acculturation. It argues that athletics, traditionally understood as simply a leisure activity in the army, were a form of imperial conditioning in Palestine. Demonstrating how EEF soldiers, especially minority troops, were forced to compete athletically and attend various educational schemes in the armistice period, it contends that these actions reflected the attempt of British officers to counter rising discontent inside the EEF and to prevent it from developing into more significant political radicalization. It also shows, however, that minority and imperial troops utilized games as a means to dispute imperial hierarchies and
assumptions of marginalized ability, and in the process developed a nascent sense of imperial community with other like-minded groups.

To support these arguments, this project relies on a wide range of archival sources, many of which have been unused or underutilized by historians of the First World War in Palestine. The holdings of the British National Archives—particularly the files of the Colonial Office (CO) and War Office (WO)—compose the policy skeleton for this work. The military narrative is provided via battalion war diaries, a day-to-day accounting of active service maintained by a commanding officer, much like a ship’s log. Further depth is provided by written correspondence and recorded interviews located in the Imperial War Museum (IWM), as well as the holdings of the British Library (BL) and the National Archives of Australia (NAA). The specific West Indian dimensions of the project are fleshed out by the holdings of the Institute for Commonwealth Studies (ICS), which holds the valuable collections of the West India Contingent Committee. For the Jewish perspective, the material of the Jabotinsky Institute (JI) in Tel Aviv is key, as are the holdings of the YIVO Institute and American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) in New York City.

The presence of Jewish and Afro-Caribbean men in the British armed forces of the First World War was not new—both had fought on Britain’s behalf well before the twentieth century. But there was novelty in how they served in the EEF, who they served with, how they understood their service, and how these all held deeper ramifications for postwar British imperial policy. Part of this was reflected in the very structure of the units, which held distinct identities inside the armed forces, carried much broader political motivations, and existed within a military framework that maintained an uneasy contradiction between discrimination and recognition as British soldiers. While no general military history would give them more than a passing mention, this is not necessarily an indication of their importance, which lies outside their numerical total.

By shining a comparative spotlight on what, in the larger context of the war, appear to be fringe units in a secondary theater, this dissertation is able to not only uncover new dimensions of the First World War, but also to lay the groundwork for a more complete understanding of the pervasive disturbances of the interwar period across the British Empire. The assumption has often been that the wartime experience of minority and colonial soldiers prompted interwar reactions, but there has been little focused and contextualized examination of what actually

38 These official files include formal policy decisions, the official war diaries of each unit, (secret) instructions to colonial or military figures, reports and memorandums, courts-martial records, and copies of letters sent to the respective ministry. In addition to the files themselves, internal ministry discussions were recorded in shorthand on memo sheets, many of which still remain, and provide an important window into how decisions were reached.

39 Common updates include personnel movements, training exercises, orders, combat updates, commendations, medical reports, and summaries of health and discipline. These diaries are particularly useful at determining when various imperial and minority battalions interacted with one another. The war diary of the 1st BWIR is more detailed than most war diaries, providing the exactitudes of daily life inside the BWIR during periods of training and active service. For example, the exact hour-by-hour training schedule of the unit during its time in Egypt is provided, as well as extremely detailed accounts (written by Commanding Officers) of periods of combat.

40 When possible, the subjects of this project speak for themselves. However, the paucity of personal documentation from the BWIR in the Middle East has forced me to reconstruct West Indian opinion by combing through various archives for copies of letters to Commanders, Colonial Government Officials, and friends. In contrast, is the wide variety of material from Jewish soldiers, much of which is dually dominated by the narratives of British officers and the perceptions of Zionist volunteers (most of whom played little role in 1918).
occurred during the war in Palestine. The juxtaposition presented in this project enables an evaluation of the extent of discrimination against minority troops in not only military roles, but also within application of military law and postwar demobilization. Thus, the aim of this project is not only to revitalize the minority story inside the Palestine theater of war, but also to provide new foundations for scholarship on the post-1919 period.

Yet the West Indians and Jews in Palestine should also be understood as a prism for the transitory nature of British imperialism in that their existence, and directed homogeneity, was the result of both political visions of Empire and the fierce exigency of modern war. At the same time, the varying objectives of these men in offering military service to the Crown illuminates not just their own agency, but the ways in which Britain’s imperial vision was modified, mitigated, and restructured by its soldiers. This dual focus reveals the policies of an empire at war: the massive marshalling of manpower according to particular frameworks, the mitigation and modification of certain policies in the face of resistance and exigency, the attempts to structure and control combat, and the ways in which policymakers sought to look past the war’s conclusion, planning for a victorious postwar period. Instead of another isolated chronicle of bravery and discrimination, this work peels back the imperial skin, providing an intimate look at the functioning machinery of history’s largest empire at war.

These men reveal important insights into how Britain marshaled more than just English manpower during the Great War, and provide a firm foundation for understanding the ruptures caused by the postwar political struggles across Britain’s imperial possessions. The broad significance of colonial, imperial, and minority-national military units during the First World War is their encapsulation of the old order and the new—the systems of traditional imperial governance that existed before 1914, and the shifts into the short twentieth century that the First World War catalyzed. Minority soldiers are critically important in demonstrating that Britain’s First World War was not merely a national struggle, but that of a complex and often contradictory empire. An entity which can be better understood through a historical interpretation of the use and experience of minority soldiers inside the EEF.
Chapter 1
“Their one aim and object was to go to the Front”: The British West Indies Regiment in Palestine, 1916-1918

“Little has been said in the war news of the British West Indies Regiment, but when the history of the Empire’s sacrifices has been written down a foremost place will surely be given to the deeds of the gallant fighters from these remote islands.”
- The Daily Graphic 1916

In the center of London, four large columns of grey Portland stone straddle the road from Wellington Arch towards Buckingham Palace. They are a relatively new addition to the area of Constitution Hill, officially opened by Queen Elizabeth II on November 6, 2002 as the “Memorial Gates.” Most people scurry along the path without a second glance at yet another monument in a city full of them, but those that do often pause at a small cupola, where they find the names of men from the British Empire who won either the Victoria or George Cross in service of that empire during the First or Second World War. For this is a monument to the wartime contributions of men from India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal, Africa, and the Caribbean—those whose bravery and service had too often been ignored on account of their skin color.

Near the cupola, a sleek metal panel informs the curious of the “15,000 men who served in the British West Indies Regiment and saw action in France, Palestine, Egypt, and Italy” during the First World War. Drawn from across the greater Caribbean—including the Bahamas,

41 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Meeting of Nov 25, 1917
42 ICS 96/2/3 WICC Scrap Book, 16, Daily Graphic, Aug 19, 1916
Barbados, British Guiana, British Honduras, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and both the Leeward and Windward Islands—the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR) consisted of eleven battalions of black and “coloured” men who served not only the theaters of war named on the panel, but also in Mesopotamia and East Africa. Despite the unitary memory projected at Memorial Gates, the truth is that the BWIR was a force divided during the war, its battalions fulfilling completely different military roles, while reacting in divergent ways to the contradictory mix of discrimination and opportunity presented by Britain’s imperial system.

This chapter illuminates this division by examining the three battalions of the British West Indies Regiment who served in Palestine as part of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF). It argues that these “service” battalions—the 1st, 2nd, and 5th (Reserve)—were well-trained, combat troops who had a markedly different war experience than the other BWIR battalions, most of which served in Europe in an array of military support and labor capacities. In addition, it argues that an array of Colonial officials viewed the members of the service battalions within a hierarchy that mixed race with class, and thus elevated these men over many of their colonial peers—including other troops from the British West Indies—due to their socioeconomic standing inside the Caribbean. This imperial vision was in part governed by a desire to achieve political federation of the British West Indies after the war, a goal that helped govern the formation and constitution of the first battalions. Thus, while the BWIR experienced racial prejudice in all theaters of the war, especially from a deeply racist War Office, this chapter demonstrates that the combination of Colonial Office advocacy with the diverse composition of the EEF helped protect, and offer opportunities to, the men of the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine. All of these strands come together in the final portion of this chapter, which details the various responses to one Army order and their broader reflection of imperial identity.

The contributions of the British West Indies Regiment during the Great War were ignored by historians for much of the twentieth century, the battalions’ presence reduced to asides or footnotes in various official histories. The general attitude was that the BWIR performance had been “no mean one” or, at best, “mixed,” and most chose to focus on the Caribbean contributions during the Second World War, which offered a more compelling foundation for discussions of Caribbean federation and independence. The only sustained scholarly discussion of the BWIR before the early 1970s was in CLR James’ biography of the Trinidadian labor leader, Arthur Andrew Cipirani, who had served as a Captain inside the regiment. James’ work provided an exposé of the racist mistreatment of West Indian soldiers, although he was careful to note a variety of mitigating factors, not least the differences between the Palestine and European theaters.


Shortly after the declassification of official British records, two foundational articles appeared on the British West Indians. One, by C.L. Joseph, provided the first archive-based narrative of the BWIR battalions, in which he condemned “the deliberate misuse of West Indian manpower by the War Office and the failure of the Colonial Office to challenge this development.”46 The other article, W.F. Elkins’ landmark essay, “A Source of Black Nationalism in the Caribbean: The Revolt of the British West Indies Regiment at Taranto, Italy,” argued that racism and abuse meted out to the BWIR during the war had triggered an explosion of discontent in December 1918 while the battalions were at the port of Taranto. To Elkins, “[t]he soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment began the national liberation struggle that eventually led to the demise of open colonial rule in most of the British Caribbean.”47 Thus, the early history of the BWIR pivoted off linear connections between wartime mistreatment and the development of anti-colonial movements.

The influence of Taranto and other instances of racial discrimination during the First World War pervaded subsequent discussions of the BWIR, which tended to be encompassed within broader narratives of blacks in the British Empire.48 Yet at roughly the same time of the Memorial Gates’ unveiling, two monographs emerged that finally afforded the BWIR a fuller history. The first was Glenford Howe’s Race, War and Nationalism: A Social History of West Indians in the First World War, which traced the myriad ways in which the British West Indies experienced the Great War, and offered foundational connections between the issues of racial hierarchy, war, and the development of Caribbean anti-Colonialism.49 Howe demonstrated the ways in which political, economic, social, and racial frameworks not only influenced the recruitment and use of West Indian soldiers, including the BWIR, but how they altered the contours of the Anglophone Caribbean itself. The other major work was Richard Smith’s Jamaican Volunteers in the First World War: Race, masculinity and the development of national consciousness, which discussed the BWIR via the prism of Jamaican soldiers.50 Smith carefully

50 Richard Smith, Jamaican volunteers in the First World War: Race, masculinity and the development of national consciousness (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). See also Richard Smith “‘Heaven grant you the strength to fight the battle for your race’: nationalism, Pan-Africanism and the First World War in Jamaican
reconstructs the interplay between racial frameworks and contested notions of masculinity in the Empire, and demonstrates how they informed and intersected various postwar political ideologies. What is missing from this resurgent discussion is a more careful understanding of how the wartime experience of BWIR battalions differed based on where they served, and what this means for the broader linkage of wartime mistreatment and postwar anti-colonialism. Too often the history of the BWIR has been conflated across theaters and experience, even though the battalions in Egypt and Palestine were not only trained, combat troops, but not present at Taranto during the foundational revolt—a fact that Elkins himself clearly noted. To fully understand the West Indian role in Britain’s imperial military effort, as well as the complexities of imperial rule, the battalions in Egypt and Palestine must be examined within their own narrative, as well as the broader story of the EEF’s war in Palestine.

The Politics of West Indian Service

Britain greeted the outbreak of war with Germany on August 4, 1914 with a professional army of nearly a quarter-million men, a contingent that the British Cabinet quickly realized required supplementing, especially as half were stationed across the Empire. In response to Lord Horatio Kitchener’s initial appeal on August 7 for 100,000 men, a burst of patriotism swept over England and well over 700,000 men volunteered in the initial two months of the war. But the carnage of this new conflict—around 44,000 Britons died in the first four months of war with many more wounded or missing—meant that Britain would also need to turn to its empire for additional manpower. Within the first week of war, Britain had accepted Australia’s offer of 20,000 men, as well as 20,000 from Canada and 8,000 from New Zealand. These imperial contributions would multiply into the hundreds of thousands over the next years, but British India would be the dominant supplier of imperial manpower, providing approximately one out of every ten soldiers in the British forces. Despite a consistent attempt to grow Britain’s forces during the first year of the war, the War Office consistently worked to avoid enlisting men of African descent, believing that their racial background precluded effective and timely training.
that they might later destabilize British rule, and that it violated the norms of war to field them in battle against European armies.

As the war continued and casualties mounted, pressure grew on the War Office to allow “coloured” and black men to enlist, especially those from the British West Indies. The War Office argued that the small populations of the West Indies and distance from Europe precluded effective recruiting and transport, and thus only permitted men “of pure European descent” to enlist if they paid their own passage to England. It was men “not of pure European descent,” however, who were the dominant male population in the Anglophone Caribbean, and there was substantial enthusiasm amongst them for Britain’s war against Germany. As the Trinidadian Arthur Andrew Cipriani pointed out, “not only is the existence of the Mother Country at stake, but the very Empire of which we are all proud to be a part. We should feel not only isolated but slighted if our services are declined.” Unless “non-European” men were allowed to enlist, the British West Indies would essentially be shut out of the fighting.

Twice, the Colonial Office attempted and failed to create a Caribbean black contingent—the first halfhearted attempt in August 1914 and another, more robust attempt in December 1914. In the latter attempt, the Colonial Office rejected the War Office’s offer to create a West Indian force for service only in East Africa, demanding a more significant deployment. Clashes between the Colonial Office and the War Office over the parameters of West Indian military service were common throughout the war. There was a history of antagonism between the ministries, and during the war itself, Colonial Office officials frequently vented about War Office attitudes towards the different imperial and colonial forces, specifically their insistence on bifurcating British forces as white and European, or non-white and “not of pure European descent,” regardless of the soldiers’ roles or socioeconomic positions. This conflict was particularly critical for the BWIR battalions in Palestine, who tended to reflect the acculturated middle class of the Caribbean and fervently objected to being lumped in with “natives” by the War Office.

Pressure for a black West Indian contingent, however, finally became acute when King George V involved himself in April 1915. The King’s involvement likely stemmed from a combination of petitions and entreaties to enlist from the West Indies—where the British monarch was held in extreme esteem—combined with an awareness of other imperial military

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58 CLR James, *Captain Cipriani*, 23.

59 Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 32-33. Howe views the Colonial Office as reluctant advocates for black West Indians, arguing that they were primarily concerned with diffusing regional instability. There is merit to this explanation for the early portion of the war, but later instances of advocacy—often when politically unnecessary—suggest explanations beyond regional politics.

contributions and casualty rates. The King first wrote to the Colonial Office on April 17 about a West Indian contingent, and after being told of its undesirability, persisted, penning another note on the 22nd after a conversation with Lord Kitchener. This second letter forced the War Office’s hand, and by the end of May, the decision to allow a contingent became known inside the Caribbean.

Glenford Howe has argued implicitly that pressures to enlist black West Indians developed progressively in reaction to various contexts—the Governors of the British West Indies urged enlistment because of local unrest, the Colonial Office pushed for enlistment as localized unrest threatened to develop into regional instability, and the War Office only conceded after political pressure emerged from the monarchy. There is merit to this particular interpretation, but it is also important to note that there were examples of other minority units developing simultaneously in different parts of the Empire. While some Maori, for example had enlisted in New Zealand units despite color barriers, many others followed a similar trajectory to the British West Indians and became part of a small, distinct unit—the Maori Pioneer Battalion—which arrived at Gallipoli in July 1915. Similarly, the first distinctly Jewish unit—the Zion Mule Corps—also formed in the Spring of 1915 for service in Gallipoli. The creation of the BWIR, then, should also be considered within the broader context of a war being fought on increasingly numerous fronts that required more manpower. Lurking behind this, importantly, was a unflinching War Office refusal to employ men of African descent as combat troops in Europe. To fight at the front, minority troops would have to serve in the secondary theaters.

Following the decision to enlist “non-white” West Indians in May were several contentious months of proposals and spats between the Colonial and War Offices. Much of the problem stemmed from the War Office’s reluctance to give West Indians equivalence in rights and privileges with British soldiers, something the Colonial Office pushed for. The War Office raised a “serious objection” to one proposal to enlist black West Indians directly into existing units, an idea that was favored in places like the Bahamas and Barbados. Part of the impasse stemmed from initial Colonial Office estimates that the Caribbean would produce approximately 950 to 1150 men (the vast majority from Jamaica and British Guiana)—only enough for around one battalion. However, as it quickly became clear that these numbers would be exceeded, the decision was made to create a specific regiment of black and “coloured” men from the British

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61 CL Joseph has identified at least one petition, which came from a British Lady engaged in war work in the West Indies. “The BWIR,” 98.
62 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 37-9. Incidentally, Bonar Law became Colonial Secretary right at this time (May 27, 1915). See also Killingray, “All the King’s Men?” 173
63 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 29-40.
64 Christopher Pugsley, Te Hokowhitu a Tu: The Maori Pioneer Battalion in the First World War (Auckland: Reed Books, 1995), 9, 36. Pugsley’s claim that the provincial battalions in which they enlisted as “not conscious or concerned about race” may be somewhat of a stretch. However, there was certainly an appreciation of the Maori that elevated them to a higher level of the imperial racial hierarchy.
65 It is worth pointing out that while in the secondary theaters, black men were used to fight against German troops. The issue for the War Office, then, was the context of Europe itself, not the European identity of its opponents; a point further borne out by the use of Indian Army troops on the Western Front.
66 CO 318/336/29508 War Office to Colonial Office, June 25, 1915. The day of the month is penciled in with a ?. See also CO 318/336/29508 HJ Read, Colonial Office to War Office, July 7, 1915 and CO 23/276/39657 Allardyce to Arthur Bonar Law, Colonial Office, August 9, 1915. The War Office ultimately caved on this issue by June 1918. See CO 137/727/49204 Governor Probyn to Secretary Long, CO, September 20, 1918. This correspondence acknowledged the receipt of a July 15 communiqué informing him of the War Office decision. See CO 318/347/25696 for the June discussions.
67 CO 318/336/29508 Handwritten Memorandum, Signed “OGRW” June 28, 1915
West Indies to serve in Egypt. Service in Egypt was, in itself, a significant concession from the War Office, which had stated in December 1914 that West Indian troops would not be “suitable” for Egypt. Most importantly, with a “few minor exceptions”, the BWIR was “recruited on the same terms and conditions as British recruits,” a likely War Office concession to avoid enlisting West Indians directly into preexisting units. This was a major concession—despite their “non-European” status, the newly created British West Indies Regiment was a unit of the New Army, not a separate colonial force.

By the time Arthur Bonar Law presented the Cabinet with a memorandum on the Question of Raising Native Troops for Imperial Service in October 1915, the first two BWIR battalions existed. Bonar Law’s memorandum, however, marked an important shift in British military policy; the declared realization that “non-European” manpower from the Empire would be needed if Britain had any chance of winning a long war. The dilemma to British official minds, however, was the postwar cost. The issue was put forth immediately at the memorandum’s start; despite the need for soldiers, there was a possibility that a “large body of trained and disciplined black men would create obvious difficulties, and might seriously menace the supremacy of the white.” Arming “non-Europeans” might help win the war, but might end Britain’s colonial empire. West Indians, however, were an exception.

West Indians were included in the list of potential colonial manpower—but they were elevated above Africans and other colonial groups. The memorandum acknowledged the “African origin” of the West Indian, but in contrast to descriptions of other sources of manpower, argued that the West Indian “should make a good soldier, though it will probably take rather longer to train him than to train a European” and that he would be best employed in the Middle East instead of in a “European winter campaign.” While this was possibly political cover for the embryonic BWIR, it more likely reflected the views of the Colonial Office that West Indians were better acculturated to the imperial system and, therefore, substantially less politically dangerous. As one ex-Governor argued later in the war, “the West Indian soldier…though generally a man of colour, is of a very different educational and social status from the West African and some other soldiers from the Crown Colonies…” In the eyes of British officialdom, the Empire had less to fear from black West Indians.

Despite the BWIR’s supposed unique status within the imperial system, the War Office still wanted to maintain as clear a racial hierarchy as possible. While “coloured” and black men could serve as non-commissioned officers (NCOs), the War Office prohibited them from receiving commissions, no matter their socioeconomic standing or education. Interestingly, when it notified the Colonial Office that it was “averse” to any mixed-race man holding a commission inside the BWIR, the War Office requested this policy be passed back to the Caribbean.
suggesting that without this notification, the colonial governments might have commissioned black and “coloured” men of high social standing.\textsuperscript{74} Later, as the war dragged on into 1918, the War Office was forced to begrudgingly allow “slightly coloured gentlemen...if in every way suitable” to take officer training courses if they had performed with “credit” in the war and been recommended by their officers.\textsuperscript{75} Pressure for this had, in part, stemmed from the West Indies, which had essentially run out of men to officer its battalions and administer the colonies.\textsuperscript{76} These continuing shifts in War Office policy, many of the product of Colonial Office pressure, reflect the ways in which cracks emerged in the racial hierarchies that governed the British military as the war ground on—cracks which the BWIR was instrumental in creating, and which it was surprised to find quickly plastered up when the war ended.

The WICC and the Idea of Imperial Federation

The Colonial Office officially oversaw efforts to integrate colonial manpower into the British Army, but in the case of the British West Indies, a smaller ad-hoc organization played a crucial role, the West India Contingent Committee (WICC). In many ways, the WICC represented a form of colonial policy outsourcing, focusing its attentions on the day-to-day affairs of the BWIR, and serving as a prominent focal point for West Indian soldiers, Colonial policy makers, newspapers, and the general public.\textsuperscript{77} Once the decision was taken to enlist West Indians, the WICC pledged to “not only...look after the comfort of the [West Indian] men, but to take up large questions of policy and carry them through.”\textsuperscript{78} Often this involved helping to resolve policy disputes between the War and Colonial Offices, especially if instigated by

\textsuperscript{74} CO 318/336/57697 War Office to Colonial Office, December 1915. In fact, this appears to have occurred anyways, albeit not in the BWIR. One Colonial official noted internally that some of the “practically white men” from Trinidad had already been accepted to officer training courses inside England. See CO 318/336/57697 Handwritten Memo, Signed ORW, December 17, 1915. In addition, George EK Bernard, a mixed-race engineering student before the war, held a commission in the Royal Field Artillery, and Walter Tull, a mixed-race Afro-Caribbean and popular prewar footballer for Tottenham Hotspur, held a commission in the 23rd Middlesex. Stuart Halifax (an Oxford PhD) has pointed out that while Bernard lied about being of “pure European descent” at the urging of his superiors, Tull very clearly wrote “no”, but was still commissioned in 1916. For more see “Great War London” at \url{http://greatwarlondon.wordpress.com/2012/10/01/tull-black-heroes-british-army/} [Accessed August 11, 2013].

\textsuperscript{75} CO 318/347/20749 War Office to Colonial Office, April 1918 (No date noted, but received the 29th) and CO 318/347/25696 Handwritten Memorandum by G. Grindle, June 5, 1918. The policy still prevented new enlees from gaining commissions and was “secret,” and thus deniable if necessary.

\textsuperscript{76} For early warning of this, see CO 323/757/2213 Memorandum on steps taken to Increase the Supply of a) Coloured Troops, b) Coloured Labour, December 30 1916 Draft pg 8. The Colonial Office estimated that 1/3 of “European officials” from the Colonies had already enlisted, and that almost no “unofficial” were left.

\textsuperscript{77} In some ways, it was modeled after the much older West India Committee, which since the 18th century had lobbied for the economic interests of the Anglophone Caribbean (although certainly not for many of its residents), performed public relations work, and assisted the British Government on certain policy matters. But as a product of the war itself, it occupied the same extra-governmental position of a variety of other wartime “committees.” Some of the more famous examples of these types of committees, like the Parliamentary Recruiting Committee and the National War Aims Committee, dealt with recruitment and domestic propaganda.

\textsuperscript{78} ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of May 21, 1919 meeting. One particularly important example of the WICC’s work was in September 1918, when they handled the aftermath of a false news story accusing hospitalized West Indian soldiers in Liverpool of attacking British soldiers and killing a white nurse in the process. After asking to play a role in the enquiry, the WICC released corrective statements to the press after it was determined that the story was exaggerated and no West Indians were at fault. See WICC 97/1/6/1 Sept 27, 1918-Nov 1, 1918 for more.
grievances from West Indian soldiers. When BWIR men protested over being barred from estaminets in France for being black, for example, the WICC succeeded in having the prohibition order reversed in six weeks, restoring West Indian access. While not part of official British government, the WICC consisted of many former colonial officials and maintained close enough ties with the Colonial Office to enable them to exercise significant authority.

The key members of the WICC all had substantial experience in the West Indies as figures of colonial authority, usually as Governors. Among its members were the former Governors of Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, the Windward Islands, the Leeward Islands, the Bahamas, and Fiji. Despite their ex-officio status, these men still maintained political clout inside the Colonial Office, and all had familiarity with how England dealt with her West Indian possessions from a broader policy perspective. Meetings of the WICC frequently occurred at the Colonial Office, and there was generally at least one key Colonial Office figure at each meeting (usually G. Grindle, the Assistant Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies or JFN Green, the Chief Clerk of the West India Department of the Colonial Office). The Colonial Office maintained close written contact with the WICC about various policy issues—the committee secretary Algernon Aspinall often relayed correspondence from potential or current soldiers directly to the ministry—and its chairman, Sir Everard im Thurn, appears to have received relevant Colonial Office memoranda. The WICC was in a position to influence the broader policy of Empire, and it so by attempting to forge closer links between the West Indian islands themselves and with the “mother-country” through the BWIR itself.

The formation of a volunteer fighting force from across the British West Indies represented an opportunity to the WICC to not only renew the bond between Britain and the Caribbean, but to politically federate the islands themselves. The decreasing importance of the Caribbean to Britain—“the slums of the Empire” in Lloyd George’s view—was a source of consternation to these men, and the war offered a unique, corrective opportunity. After the war, the WICC member Sir William Grey-Wilson confirmed the WICC’s intentions and reiterated points made during the war:

war had been to the West Indies of the greatest national and political importance. The story of the prowess and the doings of the Contingents would be told from generation to generation, and would be an incentive and a link with the Empire it might not otherwise be easy to forge.

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79 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book Jan 18, March 4, 1918. Their enlistment status as a New Army unit supposedly guaranteed their access.
80 For more information, see: Letter from the WICC to Walter Long, CO Secretary, Dec 30, 1918. Loose letter tucked into ICS BWIR War Diary. One of these was the Fabian Sir Sydney Olivier, who had been the Governor of Jamaica.
81 See CO 318/336/40323. Confidential minutes from the first WICC meeting reveal that it took place on August 30, 1915 at the Colonial Office, with Mr. Darnley representing the CO.
82 For an example, see: ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Nov 26, 1915 Meeting, which noted that “correspondence with the Colonial Office respecting the objects of the Contingent Committee” was presented to the entire committee. See CO 318/347/6167 for an example of im Thurn commenting on CO memo sheets.
83 Williams, From Columbus to, 443. AJP Taylor more courteously termed them “not much more than a relic from a vanished past.” A.J.P. Taylor, English History 1914-1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), 151.
84 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of Jan 22, 1920 meeting. Arthur Bonar Law articulated this argument during the war, proclaiming that the WICC’s “personal care and kindness” to West Indian soldiers “would strengthen the bonds uniting the West India colonies to the mother country.” See WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of Sept 22, 1916 meeting. For more, see Spry Rush, Bonds of Empire, 49-56.
As this and subsequent chapters detail, links with the Empire did emerge, but not in the way that the WICC may have intended.

The more immediate WICC goal, which would aid a closer connection with Britain, was to acquaint and integrate the residents of the geographically dispersed West Indian islands through the BWIR—essentially, to push for political federation. The Chairman of the WICC and former Governor of Fiji, Sir Everard im Thurn, offered the clearest rendering of this particular objective in a speech at a September 1916 meeting:

There will be many benefits arising out of the War, and it will be a great benefit to the West Indies if they are taught to work in harmony. Undoubtedly that will be a great gain—a great step towards the realisation of the desire for a federated West Indies with power to act as a strong unit of Empire...

The welding together of the various units from the West Indies into a homogenous force would have established bond of fellowship which should bring nearer a solution of the problem of a closer federation of the West Indies. 85

A volunteer unit of West Indians, then, would act as the vanguard of regional political and economic integration. Interestingly, two key Colonial Office figures—Grindle and Green—attended the meeting, thus indicating some level of tacit acceptance inside their ministry for the ideas expressed by im Thurn. This was unsurprising; federation might eventually help the economically depressed and tiny Caribbean colonies move towards the supposed imperial criteria necessary for self-sufficiency and, consequently, independence. 86

Other key figures in the BWIR, such as Lt. Colonel Charles Wood-Hill, the commanding officer of the 1st battalion and probably the most influential BWIR officer, agreed with the idea of federation. After the war, Wood-Hill argued that no future existed for the West Indies unless there were “federated under one Governor and Government with adequate representation in London” and that the driving force for federation would be men with a shared wartime experience. 87 These intentions did not go unnoticed inside the Caribbean during the war, and there were localized fears of federation inside individual islands. A letter to the Editor of the Nassau Guardian insisted that “many of our bravest boys have lost their Bahaman identity” as a result of the broader regimental structure in the BWIR, a direct challenge to a broader Caribbean identity. 88 The possibility of localized identities resistant to broader integration may explain why

85 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of Sept 22, 1916 meeting. This political intent has been missed by historians. See, for example, the work of Samuel Hurwitz who argued that “the First World War put off other possible plans or suggestions for federation of any part of the West Indies.” Samuel J. Hurwitz, “The Federation of the West Indies: A Study in Nationalisms,” The Journal of British Studies 6, no. 1 (Nov 1966), 150. For a broader overview on the links between the idea of federation and the colonial service, see Ged Martin “The Idea of ‘Imperial Federation,’” in Ronald Hyam and Ged Martin eds, Reappraisals in British Imperial History (London: Macmillan Press, 1975) 121-138.

86 Elisabeth Wallace, The British Caribbean: From the decline of colonialism to the end of Federation (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 20. Whether these criteria could ever actually be met is another story entirely.

87 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 8, 3. In Wood-Hill’s view, the shared experience was one of discrimination, which interestingly, he did not seem to think would push the British West Indies towards the goal of political independence.

88 Scrap Book, pg 35, Nassau Guardian, May 8, 1917. The Bahamas desire to maintain independence from a West Indian federation is not surprising. Many of its residents, and many across the West Indies, viewed it as a distinct entity. Wood-Hill, for example, felt that the Bahamas did not belong in a political federation because they “were not in the Tropics and did not form a part of the West Indies.” See Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 8, 3. One work, however, has argued that the mixing of distinct island groups led to conflict inside the BWIR. See Metzgen & Graham, Caribbean Wars Untold, 94.
the goal of a federated West Indies did not materialize until 1958, and lasted a mere four years before dissolving. Yet the intent in recruiting, at least for the early battalions of the BWIR, was to find the men best-suited for advancing these political interests.

Recruitment

Recruitment for the first enlistees to the British West Indies Regiment—the men who would form the battalions that fought in Palestine—tended to target the black and “coloured” middle classes of the Anglophone Caribbean. Early appeals were often literary and couched in existential terms—local newspapers articulated the political need for service, arguing that it would “prove that the distinction between God-made creatures of one empire because of skin, colour or complexion differences, should no longer exist, and that some opportunities should be afforded the Coloured subjects of the empire as fall by right of race to its citizens.”89 While the goals articulated in this statement would have appealed to any West Indian, its literary form, as well as its political content, suggest it was targeted towards a very specific group. Similar themes emerged in some recruitment poster, like one that offered a sheet of text fixed on the existential struggle that Britain found itself in:

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89 The Federalist quoted in Metzgen & Graham, Caribbean Wars Untold, 89. The quoted editorial is from an undated clipping, and the authors note that the paper was one of the more “conservatively ‘British’” in the Caribbean. Importantly, this particular editorial was from a Barbados newspaper, where historically racial differences had been more muted than other parts of the Caribbean, and where political rights for non-whites had been a consistent part of the political agenda for decades. See also Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 41.
While the poster urged “MEN OF EVERY CLASS, CREED AND COLOUR” to save the Empire, the appeal, perhaps inadvertently, was towards educated men. In tone, the poster was similar to the appeal Cipriani had made for recruits in Trindad: “we must do our duty as a unit of the British Empire…I appeal to you to-day in the name of the King to enlist, and I do so irrespective of class, colour or creed.” Another poster urged men to fight for the ideals of “Justice and Truth,” while depicting figures such as Raymond Poincaré, Woodrow Wilson, Sir Douglas Haig, King Albert of Belgium, and King George V of England. While King George, and perhaps Woodrow Wilson, were easily identifiable figures, identifying the rest of the men required the audience to have followed the military and political course of the war. In fact, it was only King George himself who formed an easy focal point for the casual passerby.

The prominence of King George in recruiting materials was not surprising given his role in establishing the BWIR, as well as the emphasis on “monarchism” in the “imperial

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91 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 25.
propaganda” that dominated British Empire culture and education in the post-Victorian period. Personal duty to the monarch was reinforced primarily through the education system, but also through the spectacle of Empire Day celebrations and other royal occasions like coronations or birthdays. The result was that many in the British Empire viewed the King as “the principal figure in an idealized nuclear family as well as the head of the larger imperial family of which [West Indians] themselves were members.” This is clear in the message of condolence from Jamaican ex-servicemen over the death of George V two decades later:

We feel we have lost a father, a very compassionate parent, whose honour, prestige, and integrity we were happy to assist to uphold in the time of the Empire’s darkest hour...Amid our sorrow we rejoice that a true-hearted comrade, Edward VIII, has come to the Throne. We are happy to reaffirm our allegiance to him, even to the supreme sacrifice we gave during the Great War....We think of his Majesty as the best brother we have had.

Early West Indian volunteers had internalized the combination of existential conflict and monarchical loyalty. One private wrote how “we’ll surprise, William the Kaiser / with our bayonets sharp as razor” while another focused on the “fight for liberty,” a clear reference to propaganda that depicted Britain as the defender of freedom against an aggressive, imperial Germany. At the very least, fixation on the King revealed a stake in the imperial system.

To the British government, drawing volunteers from the most acculturated residents of the West Indies—a middle class that through education had internalized the hierarchies and priorities of Empire—was far less dangerous than arming and organizing “black” laborers. Initial recruiting standards, therefore, not only focused on health, but also on class and culture—early volunteers were enlisted “only if they were likely to be a credit to the colony from which they came” and were literate. Literacy was a critical underpinning of the Caribbean middle classes, for it reflected the ability to both absorb and project British culture. This was something of a divergence from general imperial recruiting policy; the British recruited the least educated members of Indian society to the Indian Army over fears that the better educated would be susceptible to anti-imperial sentiment and spread it through the army. It is likely that the rationale behind this divergence was that West Indians who were educated had been imperially

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92 See John MacKenzie, Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880-1960 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 2-4. Although MacKenzie points out the gradual transformation of the monarchy (contenting that only by 1897 had anti-monarchism truly dissipated), he argues that by the turn of the century, royalty became one of the principal means for commercial exhibitions of imperialism.
94 Spry Rush, Bonds of Empire, 49.
96 WM Misc 200, Item 2928 “Nurse’s Autograph Books Containing Contributions by the West Indian Contingent, First World War.” Poems of Private John Henry Lyken and Private Jacob Stanishaus Cunningham. Other BWIR men offered comic drawings of the Kaiser and British lions, an internalization of a different imperial trope. Indian soldiers also fixed on the monarch in their letters home, demonstrating a “very clear sense of personal duty” to him. See Omissi, Indian Voices of the Great War, 20-1, which argues that it is possible to interpret this devotion as a suggestion that “in one important respect, at least, the peasant-soldiers were (or had become) the very people that their colonial masters wished them to be.”
97 Metzgen & Graham, Caribbean Wars Untold, 92.
98 Bridget Brereton has argued that it was not skin color or wealth that was necessary for entry into the middle class, but rather it was “command of European culture [that] was the essential qualification for membership.” See Bridgit Brereton, Race Relations in Colonial Trinidad 1870-1900 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 5-6, 94.
99 Morrow, The Great War, 82.
acculturated through schools and work, and represented the least likely threat to British authority. This sentiment was on display in October 1915, when several in the early battalions were branded “a most undesirable type…agitators…trying to cause discontent” and sent home, in part because “the majority of the West Indian Contingent” belonged to the “better class of West Indian” and disliked the agitators. In addition, several dozen East Indians were also discharged, officially for language and ration issues, but also due to adversarial relationships with the West Indians, who “looked down” on them.

Ultimately, the exactitudes of socioeconomic standing within the BWIR battalions in Palestine are beyond the scale of this project. However, work that has examined the occupation of the first 4000 men to enlist in Jamaica discovered that 42% were laborers or cultivators, but critically, that the rest tend to be drawn from a more skilled or respected pool of men—356 carpenters, 249 clerks, 245 bakers, 196 engineers or mechanics, 176 shoemakers, 165 tailors, 102 masons, and there also dozens of teachers, printers, shop-keepers, and constable. It is not possible to correlate when certain professions enlisted, but given the high standards for enlistment in 1915 when the Palestine battalions were raised, and the less dominant presence of Jamaicans in the early battalions (only 723 out of the first 2406 men), it is quite possible that the earlier recruits were drawn from higher social classes.

The generally higher class of early recruits to the BWIR was confirmed in a letter by the Chairman of the Barbados Recruiting Committee to the Colonial Office. “The men comprising those early Contingents”—he wrote—“were, like their white brothers in England who first responded, some of the best.” Detailing the petitioners’ socioeconomic standing to underline his point, he noted that one private was an elementary school teacher, another was “middle class and well-connected”, a third was “the son of a Planter and the grandson of a Judge,” while another’s brother had won a prestigious Barbados Scholarship. To reiterate the distinctions between battalions, he noted that after men like those detailed were sent to Egypt, a “request for labour battalions came later and men from a different class were sent.” As the accompanying correspondence from the Governor of Barbados stated, the early volunteers were “men of good character and standing in the Colony” and imbued with imperial patriotism.

The idea of differentiation based on socioeconomic standing was not limited to colonial officials; it was also expressed by the BWIR volunteers themselves. For the most part, this was done via self-differentiation from the West India Regiment (WIR), a colonial force composed of

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100 CO 318/336/47970 Col AE Barchard to Colonial Office, October 17, 1915. Barchard claimed there were 10 agitators, although it may have been less. See also Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 93. Howe points out the importance of Barchard’s decision to not try the men for mutiny, but rather simply send them home.
102 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 45.
103 CO 28/294/56561 Letter from JC Lynch to TE Fell, Colonial Office. Oct 9, 1918. Other records indicate that the 1st BWIR also contained members from the police force of British Guiana, as well as men like Roydon Taylor, who had been a Clerk Registrar at the Magistrate Court in Grenada. Brizan, Brave Young Grenadians, 25; CO 318/351/31276, May 14, 1919.
104 CO 28/294/56561 Letter from JC Lynch to TE Fell, Colonial Office. Oct 9, 1918. Whether Lynch is conflating the later BWIR battalions with their duties or discussing a unique labor corps is unclear. Recruiting standards did decrease for later contingents at various points in 1916—some later recruits apparently chose military service over a prison sentence. See Metzgen & Graham, Caribbean Wars Untold, 94.
black West Indians that had existed since the late eighteenth century. 106 The WIR were professional soldiers, and therefore lacked the socioeconomic pedigree of many early volunteers to the BWIR. Distinctions abounded—illiterate applicants to the BWIR were rejected and sent to the WIR in the early stages of recruitment, promising musical talents in a Kingston orphanage were plucked for the West India Regiment band (the fruits of subsidizing their tuition), and WIR soldiers were paid less than the BWIR. 107 Colonial officials acknowledged and supported these divisions. In a sharply-worded letter, the Colonial Office rebuked the Ministry of Pensions over the latter’s assumption that the BWIR and WIR “were drawn from precisely the same classes and the same geographical areas.” 108 The Colonial Office’s response was that these assertions were “scarcely correct”, and that the WIR mostly came from Jamaica, while the BWIR was a more diverse group of men “drawn from a much superior class.” 109 Differentiation also occurred visually. The members of the BWIR wore standard issue, British uniforms, while the WIR dress uniform was distinctly colonial—featuring a braided scarlet sleeveless jacket, dark blue trousers, a white turban, and red fez with colored tassels. 110 BWIR men, therefore, could claim visually and socioeconomically, to be part of a new, broad volunteerism in the Empire, while the WIR reflected retrograde colonial rule.

This differentiation was taken very seriously, even well into the war. In March 1918, when a portion of the 1st BWIR was ordered to merge with the 2nd West India Regiment, the BWIR soldiers became so “restless” over the issue that their commanding officer asked for a “temporary cancellation” of the order due to the “seriousness of the matter.” 111 Similar events transpired in East Africa. Referencing the possible “amalgamation” of BWIR troops into the 2nd WIR, a telegram to the War Office noted that it was “so repugnant to the former unit” that the order had been canceled to avoid “serious trouble…involving riot and probable murder.” 112 Critically, when faced with discrimination and entrenched prejudice later in the war—especially from the War Office—the BWIR would argue for particular rights and privileges by detailing their difference from the WIR. It was in part through self-differentiation from the perceived lower classes of the Caribbean that the BWIR articulated their own identity and sense of imperial value.

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106 For more on the WIR, see Bryan Dyde, The Empty Sleeve: The story of The West India Regiments of the British Army (St Johns: Hansib Caribbean. 1997). Dyde views the WIR as a superior military unit to the BWIR, and contends they would have performed better if given the BWIR’s opportunities. For a discussion of the “Africanization” of British forces in the Caribbean that led to the WIR’s creation, see Roger Norman Buckley, The British Army in the West Indies: Society and the Military in the Revolutionary Age (Gainsville: University Press of Florida, 1998).


108 CO 318/348/12239. Unsigned and undated letter from Ministry of Pensions to Colonial Office. Portions of this letter were clearly damaged in a fire, but the quoted content is clear.

109 CO 318/348/12239. G. Grindle, CO to Ministry of Pensions, March 24, 1919. Importantly, the initial draft of the correspondence stated that it was the “earlier battalions” of the BWIR that were of the superior class. This important detail was removed in the official letter.

110 Dyde, 149-150. The uniform was approved in October 1856.

111 WO 95/5318. War Diary for March 1918. Entries of March 24 and March 31. Importantly, the BWIR was content to combine with Indian troops, Italians, and Algerian tirailleurs in one “composite force,” and later with ANZACs and Jewish soldiers in Chaytor’s force (also a “composite” style unit).

112 CO 318/347/17779, Telegram from GOC Africa to War Office, #2733, April 9, 1918. The telegram closed with “The units well behaved in other respects.”
By the beginning of October 1915, 2,120 West Indians had volunteered for the BWIR, a number that rose to 2,406 by the end of the year. The initial drafts to England had drawn heavily from British Guyana, Trinidad, Grenada, Barbados, and the Windward Islands, and were quickly supplemented with volunteers from the Bahamas, British Honduras, and Jamaica. These men formed the core of the 1st and 2nd battalions, and critically, were far more representative of the different Caribbean islands than the later BWIR battalions, which drew extensively on the more populous Jamaica. This broad geographic scope was unsurprising given the political goals and class filtration attached to the unit, and critically, these early battalions would have a markedly different wartime experience than other British West Indians—the result of policy, circumstance, geography, and identity.

From the Islands to the War

The contingents that would become the first battalions of the BWIR began to arrive in England at the end of September 1915. They were sent to southeastern England to begin training, arriving at Seaford in East Sussex as the weather worsened in October 1915. The climate was cold and wet, and the West Indians were housed in “hastily knocked-up huts” that were really only suitable for summer conditions. Their training, meanwhile, took place outside in the rain, cold, and mud. Jack Cunningham, a convalescent private suffering from pneumonia, composed a song with a refrain fixated on the chill—“For I’m cold, cold, cold, boys; Cold in my hands and hair; In my mouth and my nose from my eyes to my toes; And even the clothes I wear.” Another invalided private, Lionel French, struck a similar tone, writing of “[s]hivering in camp with fever and cold.” The climate took an immediate toll—the battalions lost their first man when Private TD Primo from British Guiana died of pneumonia in October. As the weather rapidly turned colder in December, the situation became increasingly dangerous.

113 CO 318/336/45120 Handwritten “Summary of replies to SoS’s telegram of 4 Oct as to increase of West Indian Contingent.” According to the CO, the breakdown was: British Guiana 272, Trinidad 500, Barbados 123, Grenada 200, St Lucia 110, St Vincent 55, Leeward Islands ~120, Jamaica 500, British Honduras 110, Bahamas 130 for a total of 2120 men, 86 more than needed for 2 battalions. An additional 40 officers joined by the end of 1915, the majority of whom came from Trinidad and Jamaica. An updated, handwritten chart is enclosed at the end of CO 318/336/52746 and corresponds very closely to the troop strengths reported in WO 95/4427. It gives the breakdown of other ranks by as follows. British Guiana 330, Trinidad 531, Barbados 193, Grenada 201, St Lucia 110, St Vincent 55, Leeward Islands 106, Jamaica 723, Bahamas 29, British Honduras 129.

114 See Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 1, 3-4 where he explains that the 3rd and 4th battalions of the BWIR were composed of almost entirely Jamaicans. Initially, the companies of battalions were allotted to particular groups (inside the 1st BWIR, A Company= British Guiana, B Company= Trinidad, C Company= Trinidad and St. Vincent, D Company= Grenada and Barbados). These designations clearly became more malleable once in the Middle East, when personnel were moved between battalions and companies depending on need. See WO 95/4427 for initial company designations.

115 IWM Misc 200, Item 2928 “Nurse’s Autograph Books Containing Contributions by the West Indian Contingent, First World War”, Folded Letter inside front cover, dated Oct 9, 1915. That these low ranking soldiers picked up a pen is not surprising, given how many of the early West Indian contingent were educated.


118 CO 318/336/49511 G. Grindle to Colonel Barchard, November 2, 1915. Primo’s death would foreshadow the West Indian experience; although expecting death on the battlefield, the majority of West Indian casualties were the result of illness.
The deterioration of the new West Indian force—which had required significant political jockeying to create—was cause for concern amongst British colonial officialdom. Members of the WICC visited Seaford on several occasions and attempted to improve both living conditions and the clothing available to the West Indian troops, as well as providing a variety of creature comforts.\footnote{CO 318/341/47768 Report of the West India Contingent Committee for the ten months ended June 30, 1916. A variety of clothing was provided, but there was a focus on socks, gloves, and headgear. Creature comforts included cigarettes, games, sporting equipment, and reading and writing material.} Despite this, the West Indians’ commanding officers realized that their force was being rapidly depleted without being anywhere near the war, and sent Lieutenant-Colonel C. Wood-Hill to London to quickly engineer the transfer of the West Indians to warmer conditions for training.\footnote{Wood-Hill, \textit{A Few Notes}, 2. Wood-Hill had accompanied the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Contingent to England, and while initially in command of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Battalion, would take over the 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion when the 3\textsuperscript{rd} went to France. He became a crucial advocate for the West Indians inside Egypt and Palestine, and often liaised with the EEF command, the Colonial Office, the WICC, and the War Office.} Although there is evidence in mid-December 1915 that the War Office planned to transfer the BWIR to Egypt soon, it appears that Wood-Hill’s visit expedited the process.\footnote{See CO 318/336/57983 War Office to Colonial Office, December 15, 1915. The letter notes “arrangements for the despatch at an early date of the West Indian Contingent already in this country to Egypt,” as well as the impossibility of shipping reinforcements directly to Egypt from the Caribbean.} Three weeks after Wood-Hill’s trip, the several thousand men of the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion began to ship out from Plymouth for Egypt.

The first detachment of West Indian volunteers—consisting of the entire 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion and approximately four hundred men from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion—arrived at the port of Alexandria on February 2, 1916 aboard HMT \textit{Marathon}.\footnote{WO 95/4427. 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Jan 20-21, 1916. The journey seems to have taken twelve days, and no record exists of what occurred on-board.} The remainder of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} battalion followed several weeks later aboard the \textit{Hawkes Bay}, arriving at Alexandria on February 21 and quickly rejoining the other members of their unit.\footnote{WO 95/4427. 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR War Diary, Feb 9, 21, 1916.} As additional West Indian recruits continued to arrive in Egypt, the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} battalions of the BWIR emerged as independent units in subsequent weeks. A 5\textsuperscript{th} battalion was also formed in Egypt and designated a “reserve” battalion; its soldiers would replace and strengthen the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR battalions when necessary. Each battalion was meant to contain 1025 men broken down into four companies, although the total strength could be temporarily higher or lower for a variety of reasons.\footnote{CO 318/344/3144 “One Battalion: British West Indies Regiment.” According to this breakdown, there were 247 men in each of the four companies. The remaining 37 men were either commanding officers or attached to headquarters duty. The 5\textsuperscript{th}’s status as a reserve battalion meant that it fluctuated the most in size as drafts moved in and out, but it often contained well over 1000 men, sometimes several hundred more.}

When the 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR arrived in Egypt, it immediately received orders to head for Sollum, on Egypt’s western frontier, to quell an uprising in the Western Desert. Islamic tribesmen—the Senussi—had revolted in late November 1915 after some prodding by the Ottomans and Germany. The result was a mobile, desert campaign, in which British cavalry and armored cars chased several thousand mounted Senussi, eventually forcing and winning a decisive action at Agagiya on February 26.\footnote{Woodward, 32-34. For a fuller account of the campaign, see SC Rolls, \textit{Steel Chariots in the Desert: the story of an armoured-car driver with the Duke of Westminster in Libya and in Arabia with TE Lawrence} (London: J. Cape, 1937).} The order to the BWIR arrived before the engagement at Agagiya, and represented an immediate opportunity for active service. However, the rapid departure from England meant that the West Indian battalions had left England relatively untrained, and when
the battalion’s then-commander, Colonel AE Barchard, notified headquarters that his unit had not begun a basic rifle-firing course, the order was cancelled.126 The order to send black men from the empire into combat against native tribesmen was not a departure from past precedent; West Indians of African descent had consistently fought for the British against various “non-European” foes throughout earlier conflicts.127 Even so, the order represents an important differentiator for the BWIR in Palestine and set a precedent. In this theater of war they could be used to fight due to manpower requirements, and equally importantly, a continuing pattern of advocacy from their officers would help to protect them from some poor policy decisions.

The order to Sollum in early 1916, however, was the only direct order of the BWIR into combat that year. This had little to do with the BWIR, but rather the fact that there was little military action to speak of in the theater. The only substantive engagement of the year was the battle of Romani near the Suez Canal in August 1916, and to a lesser extent, the small-scale attack at Magdhaba at year’s end. The British had adopted a generally defensive posture in 1916—a fact underlined by a December 1916 communication to General Archibald Murray: “your primary mission remains unchanged, that is to say, it is the defence of Egypt.”128 In fact, Murray was under orders not to begin an offensive into Ottoman Palestine until Autumn 1917; his focus was to be on defending the Suez Canal and eventually building the infrastructure needed for his forces to cross the Sinai Peninsula.129 The BWIR, then, would spend most of 1916 training to become combat troops, which would pay dividends when they reached the front.

After arrival in Egypt, the BWIR headed to Mex Camp near Alexandria. Here they were fully outfitted, allotted specialist roles, and began to train.130 Training was multi-faceted—it included tactical and physical exercises with their unit, a wide range of guest lectures and courses at one of several schools of instruction created by the British Army. Sundays were free, as was Saturday afternoon. On other days, the West Indians rose early—between 5am and 6:45am. The order of activities rotated, but usually consisted of various drilling, physical training, and musketry training, with a break for breakfast between 7:45 and 9am. One day each week, the West Indians would embark on a long march, after which there was time for bathing.131 After a break for lunch between 12:30 and 2pm, the West Indians focused on tactical and strategic training at the platoon level until 4:30pm. Most of the focus was on basic techniques like shooting and fire discipline, bayonet fighting, entrenching, attack and retreat formations, and judging distances.132 While quite standard, this program was significant in light of the fears expressed in Balfour’s Memorandum about the potential menace of militarily-trained black men to white supremacy. The West Indians in Palestine were being trained, by the British, to become a disciplined and tactically proficient force.

126 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 2. Howe claims that Wood-Hill had the order overturned, but I believe it was Barchard, who was in command of the 1st battalion at that time.
127 The West India Regiment, in particular, had served in Africa, most notably in the 3rd Anglo-Ashanti War (1873-4) and in Sierra Leone, although it’s not possible to determine whether this history influenced the order to Sollum. See Byron Farwell, Queen Victoria’s Little Wars, 7th ed. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1985), 190-199.
128 WO 33/905/6323, Chief of the Imp General Staff to CinC Egypt, Dec 15, 1916, No 26624
129 Terry Kinloch, Devils on Horses: In the Words of the ANZACs in the Middle East, 1916-19 (Auckland: Exisle, 2007), 153.
130 WO 95/4427 WJ Murray, C in C EEF to Secretary of WO, June 24 1917, Report entitled “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt”
131 BWIR Training Programs, February Weekly Training Schedules in WO 95/4427, 1st BWIR War Diary, Sept 5, 1915- April 24, 1916. There was a break for Breakfast.
132 WO 95/4427, 1st BWIR War Diary, Feb-April, 1916.
West Indian troops also became specialists in a range of military skills by attending several “schools of instruction” that the army had created in Egypt at Zeitoun and Ismailia. The most important of these schools was the Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun, a Cairo suburb, which had been created to provide training courses for officer and NCO candidates in 1915. It quickly expanded to provide additional instruction in other areas, and by June of 1917, the 1st BWIR alone had sent 43 officers and 243 other ranks there to attend courses. These courses varied in length—the officer and NCO class took 3 weeks and was probably the broadest subject—but appear to have averaged around 1-2 weeks. At Zeitoun, West Indians studied a range of topics, including advanced telephony, range finding, topography, and various forms of machine-gunning. This in of itself was somewhat noteworthy, since the French Army refused to provide specialist training to “indigenous” soldiers, believing them incapable of mastering skills like signaling or machine-gunning.

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134 WO 95/4427, WJ Murray, C in C EEF to Secretary of WO, June 24 1917, Report entitled “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt”

135 ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary *Resurvé of last 6 months covering period January 1917 to June 1917*. The ICS holds a type-script copy of the 1st Battalion War Diary, which contains some extra additions, particularly about combat situations. I use the original War Office documents, except when I cite any supplemental information from the ICS version.

136 WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, “Zeitoun”, Vol 19 Sept 1917. According to a 1st BWIR report, 153 ordinary ranks studied grenade throwing at a Brigade School, while at Zeitoun the most frequently taken courses were: Machine Gun (56), Signaling (36), NCO Training (31), Cookery (27), and Grenade Throwing (22), with 20 others studying more specific and advanced firing and tactical techniques.

Other West Indians headed to the Central Gas School in Rafa near the Sinai to receive instruction in gas warfare, while others headed to trade schools to learn smithing or mechanical skills, or to the School of Field Cookery in Ismailia, Egypt. During the war, the goal of these courses was to enhance tactical ability, as well as to refocus men with skilled and technical backgrounds on performing similar and related tasks for the army. Other goals developed nearer the war’s end, namely the ways in which these technical proficiencies might increase the chance that demobilized West Indian soldiers could apply these new skills in the postwar workforce. The West Indians that passed these courses—and most of them did—became specialists, and frequently led training sessions on their area of expertise when they returned to their companies.

139 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, May 11, 1918; WO 95/4410, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 24, Feb 9, 1918
and platoons. Whether becoming a specialist led to proficiency pay is unclear, but the broader impact of the schools was that it provided black and “coloured” West Indians with advanced military and technical training, as well as placing them in close contact with other British and imperial troops taking the courses, thus exposing them to both friendly and prejudiced attitudes.

By June 1916, the BWIR had completed the necessary basic training, and were sent to the major British encampments at the Suez Canal. Here, they learned from British soldiers how to construct defensive positions, were attached to British units to learn how to man front-line trenches, and saw their first real action when a German airplane bombed the 3rd BWIR while on inspection parade.\(^{140}\) The process of military education via attachment to other units—one historian has referred to them “stage-managed” combat situations—was common inside the EEF throughout the war.\(^ {141}\) The goal appears to have been two-fold: to acquaint less-experienced troops with realistic fighting conditions, but probably also to evaluate their potential fighting efficacy. In August 1917, for example, eight platoons of the 1st BWIR were attached to the 1/6th Highland Light Infantry for instruction in Trench Warfare, during which they were shelled by Turkish artillery daily.\(^ {142}\) As this chapter later points out, August 1917 was a moment of critical transition in the role of the BWIR in Palestine, and the decision to train in a live-fire situation cannot be considered coincidental.

But the Summer of 1916 was a period of detrimental transition for the BWIR. As they completed training and began to take on various military roles in the canal defenses, the BWIR fractured. The War Office ordered the 3rd and 4th battalions to France as support troops for British artillery, where they essentially became shell-carriers. It then sent 500 men to East Africa as service troops, and another 100 to Mesopotamia to perform a range of support duties.\(^ {143}\) These decisions not only broke up the West Indian force, they shifted the role of West Indians to support roles—a slippery slope towards becoming labor units, despite the fact that West Indians had enlisted as regular service troops. In addition, this fracture ensured that subsequently formed BWIR battalions would be sent to Europe, while the 1st, 2nd and 5th battalions remained in Egypt and Palestine. After the war, Wood-Hill—who took command of the 1st BWIR during the transition—argued that these decisions destroyed the possibility of a West Indian Brigade, which he felt might have developed into a meaningful fighting force inside the EEF.\(^ {144}\)

Why exactly the War Office chose to fracture the BWIR is unclear. Some have suggested it was a racially-prejudiced decision to prevent the regiment from becoming a legitimate combat force, while others view it as one result of the indirect and haphazard way the BWIR had formed.\(^ {145}\) Circumstantial evidence points to an intention, at least while the unit formed in 1915,

\(^{140}\) The 2nd BWIR, for example, was attached to the 214th RW Kent Regiment to learn about holding trenches. See WO 95/4427, 2nd BWIR War Diary, Vol 3, June 12 and June 29, 1916.

\(^{141}\) Edward Erickson, *Ottoman Army Effectiveness in World War I: A comparative study* (London: Routledge, 2007), 136. This appears to have intensified under Allenby.

\(^{142}\) WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, August 26, 1917 and “Training and Works”, Vol 19, Sept 1917. 10 officers and 419 other ranks, according to the war diary.

\(^{143}\) WO 95/4427 WJ Murray, C in C EEF to Secretary of WO, June 24 1917, Report entitled “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt.” The troops dispatched to East Africa would return to Palestine in 1918. The Mesopotamian contingent ultimately grew to 397 men who “have been of great value,” with 101 as motor boat drivers, 81 as guards, 71 as clerks, 23 as carpenters, 16 as camp police, 12 as blacksmiths, 11 as fitters, 6 as telephone operators, and 76 others in “miscellaneous duties.” CO 318/347/18005 Copy of Letter Lt Gen. FS Maude, GOC Mesopotamian Expedtional Force to War Office, June 23, 1917.


\(^{145}\) See Joseph, “The BWIR.” 105 for the former explanation, and for the argument that “their status as soldiers was not altogether clear,” Howe, *Race, War and Nationalism*, 38. Howe discusses Joseph’s argument on pg 100.
to use the early BWIR battalions as active service units. The War Office wanted future drafts equal to 100% of the first battalions’ manpower to “maintain” the battalions for one year, a level of replacement that assumed significant casualties inside the battalions.146 The other immediate question, of course, was why some battalions were able to remain in Egypt.

One explanation is that General Murray himself, in fact, blocked the War Office’s attempt to convert the entire BWIR into “pioneer” labor units. According to CL Joseph, Murray refused to endorse the wholesale conversion of the BWIR, arguing that the battalions (and one must assume especially the early battalions) “saw themselves as representing the West Indies and were anxious to fight for the Empire.”147 It is not clear whether this sentiment originated with Murray himself, or resulted from pressure from Wood-Hill and others, whose postwar political plans for the British West Indies pivoted off military service during the war, not labor. Nor did Murray’s argument fully satisfy the War Office. In the Fall of 1916, after receiving positive feedback about British Honduras soldiers in Mesopotamia—particularly how “useful” they had proved in non-combat duties—the War Office attempted to shift “the remainder of the first contingent” to Iraq.148 Yet again, Wood-Hill had to protect the status of the BWIR.

On the morning of November 20, 1916, a conference took place at the Savoy Hotel in Cairo—the location of the EEF’s general headquarters under Murray—to clarify the role of the BWIR battalions. There, Wood-Hill lobbied the Chief of the General Staff, Major General Lynden Bell, to write privately to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (Sir William Robertson) on the need for the West Indian battalions to take a more active role in Egypt. Wood-Hill expressed the “considerable dissatisfaction” inside the 1st and 2nd BWIR over their lack of front-line service, and also headed off an attempt by the Quarter Master General to turn them into a “Mechanical Section.” Ultimately, the conference concurred that the battalions should “be moved forward and allowed to take a more active part in proceedings in Egypt” and the officers present “state[d] that they have noted the good work done by the two Battalions. They are universally spoken well of and in sympathy with any movement for getting fair play with the West Indians.”149 The command of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force would support the BWIR.

One outcome of this conference was an attempt to re-concentrate all West Indians in Egypt, returning the BWIR battalions from France. This attempt was blocked by the commanding officers of the battalions in France, who expressed their desire to remain there, and claimed that their battalions preferred to remain in their duties in France.150 The veracity of this statement is unclear. The West Indians may have felt that they were closer to the “real” war in France, and assumed they would eventually go to the front-line.151 It is also possible that the response stemmed from a careerist motivation from the officers to be in the main theater of war, rather than a “sideshow.”152 Regardless, the second, and ultimately final, attempt to create a unified BWIR for active service in Palestine fizzled out. More importantly, the apparent rupture

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146 CO 318/336/52746 War Office to Colonial Office, November 13, 1915
148 WO 33/905/5957, Chief of the Imperial General Staff to CinC Egypt, October 19, 1916. No 24037
149 ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary, November 1916
150 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 28. Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 4-10.
151 Howe, Race, War and Nationalism, 100. Howe has uncovered evidence of this sentiment amongst some of the BWIR soldiers in Egypt in 1915 and late 1917.
152 Interestingly, up until the November armistice, none of the Commanding Officers (C.O.) of the BWIR battalions in Europe had received any distinction for service in the field, while the C.O.’s of the 1st and 2nd BWIR battalions in Egypt both received the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O).
of opinion between BWIR battalion officers allowed the War Office one final opportunity to create confusion about the wartime role of West Indians.

1917: A Pivotal Year

Ian Beckett has suggested that 1917 was the pivotal year of the First World War outside the Western Front, and it certainly marked a series of important shifts for the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine. In the first months of the year, the West Indian role as active service troops was again endangered by a War Office desire to concentrate all battalions in Europe as artillery support troops or laborers, regardless of past pledges. Again, however, the BWIR in Egypt resisted the decision, and importantly, significant shifts inside the EEF took place in the Summer of 1917 that finally placed them in a more prominent military role.

Initially it seemed that the EEF conference on the BWIR had finally clarified the battalions’ role—a January 16, 1917 letter from the War Office to the Colonial Office stated unequivocally that “it has been decided that the 1st and 2nd Battalions and the 5th Reserve Battalion, West Indies Regiment, are to remain in Egypt.” Based on this decision, the War Office requested the Colonial Office’s assistance in raising another two battalions for service in France, setting several requirements for the new recruits who would fill the position not assigned to the service battalions in Palestine. However, less than one week later, an internal War Office minute noted that the BWIR artillery carriers “were quite a success in the Spring and Summer, and we hope to have 4,000 next Spring.” The problem was that the prior request to the Colonial Office for two additional battalions would only yield roughly 2,000 men—where would the others come from?

One month later, the answer became clear when the BWIR in Palestine received notification from the War Office that they would be “reorganised…as shell carriers to heavy batteries in France,” an unexpected and infuriating reversal of policy. One possible motivation may have been thriftiness. An internal War Office memorandum on finding labor sources noted that while West Indians were more desirable than men from African or “Eastern” Colonies for war labor, they could not “be paid more than white soldiers without prejudice to discipline, and that for labour abroad the West Indian can command more than army pay.” By enlisting West Indians as troops, the War Office was able to circumvent this pay issue by paying them as soldiers, but using them as laborers. Unlike other contentious issues, no discussion of the order exists in various WICC committee files, even though it was likely that the WICC received protestations from the West Indians. Ultimately, the order was reversed, and a telegram on April 8 notified the three BWIR battalions in Palestine that they would “return to their former

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153 Beckett, “Introduction” in 1917: Beyond the Western Front (Leiden: Brill, 2009). Beckett closes his introduction by arguing that “1917 was a decisive year in terms of the eventual outcome of the war and, while Germany would ultimately be defeated on the Western Front, it was not anything that occurred in the fields of France and Flanders during 1917 that ensured that result.”
155 WO 32/5094. Minute of Jan 22, 1917
156 ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary, Feb 17, 1917
157 CO 323/757/2213 Memorandum on steps taken to Increase the Supply of a) Coloured Troops, b) Coloured Labour, December 30 1916, pg 8
158 This explanation, however, may better explain the decision to use BWIR battalions as labor troops at the port of Taranto in Italy, rather than as artillery support, which was ostensibly a military, and not labor, duty.
establishment” as regular service troops in the Middle East.\textsuperscript{159} While the debate unfolded, the first British attack at Gaza had begun in March, and it is possible that the BWIR would have played some role there had their status not been in the air.

Another attempt to transform all West Indian volunteers into non-combat troops, when combined with over a year of military inactivity for the BWIR in Egypt, seem clear evidence of embedded discrimination inside British policy. However, that the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine had successfully withstood War Office attempts to reconfigure their role is the first indicator that a more nuanced understanding of their specific history is required. The continued advocacy for West Indians as combat soldiers offered by officers like Wood-Hill and General Murray, as well as the efforts of the WICC and Colonial Office to halt War Office meddling (even if it motivated by broader political goals like federation) reveal key differences in the policy surrounding these earlier battalions. The second indicator, and the one now focused upon, is the ways in which the British West Indies battalions were utilized inside Egypt and Palestine, which finally broke in significant ways from the West Indian experience in Europe after the Summer of 1917.

When not training, the BWIR battalions in the EEF were employed in three capacities—primary military roles, secondary military roles, and labor projects. Primary roles revolved around front-line service, raids, or combat, while secondary roles encapsulated the garrisoning of towns, the escorting or guarding of POW’s, the patrolling of supply and communication lines, and a range of other militarily necessary tasks that did not involve direct, adversarial contact with the enemy. For the year between the summer of 1916 and 1917, BWIR responsibilities were almost always secondary roles or labor projects. To Wood-Hill, this was a “somewhat ‘passive existence’.”\textsuperscript{160} Of course, secondary military duties were not uneventful, and could provide martial opportunities. While patrolling behind front-line positions, for example, the BWIR engaged in multiple surface-to-air firefights with German aircraft intent on bombing EEF positions (shooting one plane down in May 1917 and attempting to capture its pilot).\textsuperscript{161} The 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR, which had been aerially strafed earlier in April 1917, also came close to capturing an aircraft that had landed in an attempt to lay explosives on the British railway.\textsuperscript{162} Simultaneously, tensions erupted with local Bedouins over their apparent involvement in the murder of a private in the 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion.\textsuperscript{163} While Wood-Hill’s assessment of passivity is fair—combat came to the BWIR in Spring 1917—much of the supposed symmetry between West Indian duties in France and the role played by BWIR troops in Egypt and Palestine revolves around the issue of labor.

The British Army in the First World War relied heavily on exploitable labor corps to build the infrastructure needed to fight. Chinese and African laborers, amongst others, built railways and dug trenches on the Western Front, while in Egypt and Palestine, the EEF relied on the Egyptian Labour Corps for a host of tasks, including the construction of pipelines, roads,

\textsuperscript{159} ICS 96/3/14 Lt Col AAG to GHQ EEF, April 8, 1917, Telegram MFC 10119, R1. Located in 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary. The BWIR had never actually changed duties, despite the wording of the orders.
\textsuperscript{160} WO 95/4732, 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Wood-Hill to GHQ Eastern Force, June 17, 1917
\textsuperscript{161} ICS 96/3/14 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary: April-May 1917.
\textsuperscript{162} WO 95/4433 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR War Diary, April 4, May 25, 1917. The patrol that caught the plane wounded one of its occupants, and Lance-Corporal HE Butcher (who had been a private during the incident), won a Distinguished Cross Medal in March 1918 for his actions that day. See WO 95/4732 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR War Diary, March 30, 1918.
\textsuperscript{163} ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary; April 18-19, 1917
railroads, and draining of marshes. However, the large amount of territory captured as the EEF pushed across the Sinai Peninsula and Palestine ensured that soldiers often found themselves building more specific military infrastructure. Thus, detailed to sites in platoons or companies, rotating portions of the West Indian battalions found themselves laboring. In June 1917, for example, one hundred and fifty members of the 1st BWIR constructed offices for the Headquarters of the Eastern Force by cutting into the face of cliffs, another one hundred and ninety-three soldiers buried cables and wires between observation posts and artillery batteries, while another hundred soldiers were sent to Umm Jerrar to dig emplacements. These duties seem to have cycled frequently—in the case of the headquarters construction, almost every day a different group of West Indians would take over the work, and there was often a balance between labor and secondary military roles. A detachment might be assigned to construct defensive redoubts, while at the same time stationing outposts, patrolling railways and other supply and communication lines, or performing other guard duties. Rotating duties, then, prevented West Indians from only being used as military labor. In many ways, these rotations were the outgrowth of the EEF’s success—newly occupied territory needed to be both guarded and consolidated, but infrastructure damaged in fighting needed to be replaced.

Military labor, more importantly, was a ubiquitous part of the wartime experience of many combatant units in Egypt and Palestine. Major engagements in Palestine were concentrated in the spring and autumn, generally avoiding the hot summer and rainy winter. The result was that all soldiers in the EEF spent a significant portion of their service not fighting, but usually training, patrolling, or building military infrastructure. It is common to find entries in British soldiers’ diaries like: “have been on a digging fatigue, making trenches for a bayonet obstacle course at the School of Instruction just over the road.” The diaries of a soldier in the 4th Royal Scots reveal that in the months before and after the battles at Gaza, his, and many other British units, alternated between training and labor fatigues—digging wells, trenches, and building roads. Other less martial roles were also ordered to British soldiers—the 10th Garrison Cheshire Regiment replaced the 2nd BWIR’s “salvage operations” on the Gaza battlefield in November 1917. Nor were white soldiers exempted from labor during the hot season; the records of various ANZAC combat units reveal that during the stifling, 100+ degree heat of the summer of 1918, they built roads from their encampments to fresh water, constructed defenses in the Jordan Valley, and unloaded the contents of lorries at supply dumps.

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164 WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, June 1, 2, 23, 29 1917, Vol 16. These assignments were not without danger—the cable buriers were shelled heavily.
165 WO 95/4433 1st BWIR War Diary May 1917. 100 men would be drawn from one of four battalion companies, with 50 from another. The next day, those same numbers would be drawn from different companies, and the work continued to rotate.
166 ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary; Resurvé of last 6 months covering period January 1917 to June 1917
167 IWM 84/52/1. Diary of J. Wilson, Oct 25, 1917, pg 9. Wilson was a member of the 179th Machine Gun Corps.
169 WO 95/4732 2nd BWIR War Diary, November 9, 1917
170 WO 95/4546. War Diary of NZ Canterbury Mounted Rifles, June 1-4, 1918; WO 95/4545. War Diary of NZ Auckland Mounted Rifles, Sept 1918; May 23, 1918; June 3, 1918; June 1918. Labor, of course, was far from valueless, even if combat has been glorified as the barometer of military worth. Christopher Pugsley, for example, has argued that despite being “pioneers” (i.e. laborers), the Maori Pioneer Battalion were far from “second-class soldiers” and rather “an essential part of the New Zealand Division’s fighting effort” at Gallipoli. Christopher Pugsley, Te Hokowhitu a Tu: The Maori Pioneer Battalion in the First World War (Auckland: Reed Books, 1995), 9, 36.
Critically, the labor projects undertaken by the BWIR in Palestine tended to be for functional purposes like defense or infrastructure, rather than rote means of occupying their time. This was distinct from the BWIR experience in France, where harsh winters sometimes forced them away from the front and into Southern France.\footnote{This seems to have been a British version of the French policy of *hivernage*, or “wintering” of warm-weather troops. The West Indians were “sent to the South of France as they could not stand the Winter in the North.” WO 32/5094. Field Marshall, C in C France to War Office, March 4, 1917. No. OB/1980. For a discussion of *hivernage*, see Fogarty, *Race and War in France*, 88-89.} One non-commissioned officer recalled the mindless work forced upon the West Indians when he ended up supervising them while waiting for boat passage back to Egypt:

\begin{quote}
Any good at discipline? I said, meaning what? And they said, well we’ve got to keep a crowd of West Indian troops here from getting down into the town, into the red light, red lamp area. And so, they’ve got a job of building a camp and striking it, just keeping them out of mischief. So I went up to see what it was all about. Apparently, what did happen, what I was told, and this was it. They got them to build a camp before breakfast. Have breakfast. Go back again to tidy up the camp and do all the guy ropes and this kind of thing, Strike the camp before the midday meal. Then have their meal. Build the camp again [laughs] after the midday meal. Strike it for the evening, and they’d be marched back to camp, and they were kept inside a guarded camp. And I did that for about a fortnight. They were good-tempered enough, they knew what it was all about. They made no attempt to, uh, because they knew jolly well if they broke camp they’d be in worse trouble than anything else. I did it for about a fortnight.\footnote{IWM 10733. Interview with Edward Henry Tyler Robinson, Recorded in 1989.}
\end{quote}

This mindless and rote work had zero military utility; it was merely a means to occupy the West Indians’ time, in part because the War Office continued to refuse them greater responsibility or transfer them away from Europe. In contrast, when the battalions in Egypt and Palestine labored, it was always on projects reflective of evolving and necessary military infrastructure. However, even in Palestine prejudice could govern attitudes towards “non-white” troops, and labor projects could affect perceptions of the West Indians. One British soldier, for example, made reference to “a large party of West Indians from a labour battalion” near El Shault.\footnote{IWM 03/31/1. CR Hennessey.} Such a labor unit did not exist—the West Indians were BWIR men, yet to that observer, they were no more than pioneers. This sort of misperception could further entrench racial views of Afro-Caribbean men as incapable of more important military roles; a nonsensical stereotype that many in the BWIR were desperate to overturn.

Despite the importance of their secondary role and the value of military labor, it is impossible not to note that in the early Summer of 1917 close to two-thirds of the 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR, despite extensive training, were not performing military work.\footnote{This calculation includes roughly two hundred men who worked on the railway near Gamli.} Around the same time, a report on manpower substitution conducted in Egypt examined the possibility of taking “suitable men” from garrison battalions and the BWIR to staff a variety of positions behind the front lines. Some positions were a clear affront (servants and grooms), while others were administrative positions across a variety of logistical units.\footnote{WO 158/985. *Man-Power in Egypt*” Report by Lt-General HM Lawson, 1917, pg 23. Lawson’s inquiries took place in June 1917, and were discussed with Allenby in early July. The report implicitly noted the rather peculiar situation of the BWIR inside the EEF. The battalions were considered an effective rifle strength of 1767 men, and included with regular EEF units, as opposed to garrison battalions, administrative troops, miscellaneous, or civilians, natives, and followers. See pg 30-33.} It was not surprising then, that in a June 1917 letter bemoaning the inability to achieve promotion, one officer in the 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR cryptically assessed...
the likelihood of the West Indians fighting: “[w]e have not been sent into the firing line out here, and for military reasons which I’m not allowed to state, will never be.”¹⁷⁶ This letter ultimately proved to be inaccurate, as the BWIR did enter the front lines, but the letter implied that an irresolvable issue, almost certainly their race, prevented the West Indians from active combat. But Wood-Hill, and perhaps other BWIR officers, persisted in agitating throughout June and July of 1917 for a more primary role—arguing that the West Indians had completed the necessary training and were capable of front-line duty. Before full deployments orders came, however, the BWIR would have to prove its ability to the EEF command in a combat situation.

A Demonstration of Ability

In July 1917, while some West Indians labored, several dozen men comprising the machine gun detachments of the 1st BWIR were ordered to join the 162nd Machine Gun company in the front lines at Gaza, where they would participate in a raid on Turkish positions. The attack took place on the night of July 20th at Umbrella Hill near Gaza, during which the West Indians covered the attacking infantry with fifty rounds a minute for forty-five minutes, despite being shelled with high explosives by Turkish batteries.¹⁷⁷ Five days later, the West Indians again demonstrated their martial worth in another raid on Umbrella Hill, which although of smaller scope, did involve hand-to-hand bayonet fighting in the trenches.¹⁷⁸

The raids were deemed a success, and the West Indian performance did not go unnoticed. Reporting on the initial engagement, the officer in charge of the 162nd reported that the West Indians “worked exceedingly well displaying the qualifications necessary for a Machine Gun Section viz. a keen interest in the work, cheerfulness and energy, cool-ness [sic] under shell fire and an intelligent application of what was required of them and the ability to carry it out.”¹⁷⁹ Decades later, the officer, now Lord Harding, remembered the work of the West Indians in an oral interview, and still maintained a positive view of their military ability.¹⁸⁰ Critically, the EEF command appears to have paid attention to these reports, for it awarded the Military Medal to a member of the BWIR machine gun section. The recipient, Lance Corporal T.N. Alexander, had maintained one of the machine gun barrages on the nights of the 20th and 27th despite heavy artillery shelling and having his weapon hit by enemy rifle fire on both occasions.¹⁸¹ If this deployment had been a test of the BWIR as combat troops, they had certainly passed.

¹⁷⁶ CO 137/725/10162 Copy of a Communication from an Officer of the Second Battalion, BWI, Egypt, dated June 12, 1917.
¹⁷⁷ WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, July 1917. While these numbers fluctuated, the 1st BWIR machine gun detachment in one report was listed as 1 Officer, 2 NCOs, and 35 men, with a reserve detachment of 1 Officer, 1 NCO, and 21 men.
¹⁷⁸ WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, July 27-8 1917
¹⁷⁹ WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, July 1917. The strong showing by the West Indians was of particular note, as they were issued a new type of machine gun, with which they were less familiar, only a few days before their deployment.
¹⁸⁰ IWM #8736, Recorded Interview with John Lord Harding, 1984.
¹⁸¹ WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, Aug 2, 1917
After the attacks at Umbrella Hill, Wood-Hill capitalized on the West Indian performance to push harder for sustained front-line duty. Writing to Headquarters in August 1917 he estimated that he could put eight platoons of the 1st BWIR, approximately four hundred men, in the front lines on short notice, and agitated for the deployment of his men. Shortly afterwards, the role of the BWIR began to shift, either the result of Wood-Hill’s lobbying, Allenby’s troop requirements for attacking Gaza in the Autumn of 1917, or both. Allenby, who had replaced Murray in July, was caught between the need for an offensive campaign into Palestine and the need to rotate British troops out of his command and into the Western Front. That August, he had been ordered to “press the Turks opposed to you to the fullest extent of your variable resources”—a message that persisted for the several months. Ever a pragmatist, the availability of unused, disciplined, and well-trained troops, even if they were black, would have been attractive to Allenby.

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183 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Draft Letter, Wood-Hill to GHQ, August 19, 1917
184 WO 158/611 London to Allenby, Desp 1840 August 10, 1917.
Shortly after the Umbrella Hill raid, the EEF notified the War Office of its intention to use the BWIR battalions in combat. A minute written by Egyptian Expeditionary Force officers noted the request of the 1st BWIR to update its armaments, and asked General Headquarters “to place this Battalion on same footing as any other. It will probably take its place in the line soon if it can be arranged.” The result was the replacement of some BWIR equipment and gear with those more suited to desert warfare. Later, when the fluidity of the war in Palestine became apparent, the battalion’s less portable Vickers machine guns were replaced with the more desirable Lewis guns. Ultimately, consistent pressure from Wood-Hill, the well-regarded military performance of small groups of West Indians in 1917, and Allenby’s need to find alternate sources of combat troops fused to present the BWIR with a front-line opportunity that has often bit misunderstood or overlooked—the Composite Force.

The Composite Force

In September 1917, the EEF placed the 1st BWIR into a “composite force” of several different units. Relatively understudied by military historians, these forces often encompassed un-brigaded units and other individual forces into a unit sizeable enough for more major tactical uses. By composing a broader “force,” the chain-of-command could be streamlined and a larger position could be held. These seem to have been popular in Egypt and Palestine; one early composite force of cavalry squadrons and artillery had performed well at the Battle of Romani in 1916. In September 1917, as the EEF prepared for its third assault on Gaza, the British command formed a composite force out of the 1st BWIR, the Imperial Service Cavalry Brigade (generally Indian), the 20th Indian Infantry Brigade, the 121st Indian Field Ambulances, three hundred Italian Bersaglieri attached to the 20th Indians, and a French contingent of around eight hundred soldiers that consisted of several companies of Algerian soldiers. Perhaps the only

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185 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, S.O. 8 of XXIst Corps of August 1917; WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Wood-Hill to GHQ, August 19, 1917.
186 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Wood-Hill to GHQ, August 19, 1917. Originally, the BWIR had been outfitted with leather belts and pouches, which while appropriate for the European climate, were ill-suited for the dry, sandy conditions in the Middle East. After the leather cracked and peeled, Wood-Hill requested and received “Web Equipment,” which the other units stationed in the Middle East preferred (and which had been Army standard issue before wartime enlistment outpaced production).
187 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Wood-Hill to GHQ, August 19, 1917; WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, May 27, 1918. This process clearly took time; the War Diary of the 2nd BWIR noted as late as June 14, 1918 that their Vickers guns were replaced with Lewis Guns to as to join the “scale” of an “Infantry Battalion in Egypt.”
188 Despite his advocacy, Wood-Hill has been the subject of critique. Richard Smith has argued that “an obsession with military honour and discipline,” and not any particular “desire to redress racial discrimination,” motivated his actions. See Richard Smith, “West Indians at War,” Caribbean Studies, 36, no 1 (January-June 2008): 228. Much of the evidence for Smith’s contention stems from Arthur Andrew Cipriani, who disliked Wood-Hill enough that his biographer, CLR James referred to the officer as “an autocrat of the first order.” Cipriani and James preferred the commander of the 5th Battalion—Colonel A. Wilson—noting that he “would allow no discrimination against his regiment.” See CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 30. These critiques seem unfair. Even if he was merely motivated by military honor—or by the goal of political federation—Wood-Hill, along with Wilson, consistently protected the BWIR from War Office abuses, as well as seeking the combat role which the West Indians had enlisted for.

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189 Kinloch, Devils on Horses, 84, 90.
190 WO 95/4410, 1st BWIR War Diary, “Training and Works,” Vol 19, Sept 1917; WO 95/4731 Order Z/77/CB in Composite Force War Diary, Vol 1, Sept 1917 The 20th Indian Brigade contained the 110th Mahrratta Light Infantry, the Alwar, Gwalior, and Patiala Imperial Service Infantry, a British signal section, and a transport train. It had been stationed in Egypt since November 1914. For more, see WO 161/81. “A Brief Record of The Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force Under the Command of General Sir Edmund HH Allenby, GCB GCMG” July 1917
description of the entire Composite Force was recorded by Cecil Sommers after the 3rd Battle of Gaza, even though it seems unlikely he knew what he was describing:

Yesterday we met a batch of several hundred Turkish prisoners who were being escorted down the line by Indian lancers. The Indians seemed to like the job better than the Turks. About the same time there caught us up a squadron of French African Cavalry, fine looking men on splendid white Arab chargers. They looked very picturesque beside our drab infantry. Bersaglieri waved to us from their encampment under a couple of cypress-trees, and dusky West Indians were busy sinking a well.  

While the Italians had been placed in Palestine as “a nominal force…in order to show the Italian flag,” the Indian troops, particularly the Imperial Service men, were well-respected as a combat force, as were the French North Africans.  

The combination of units suggests some level of equivalency between the groups in the minds of EEF commanders, especially as duties on the front line appear to have been parcelled out relatively equally. There was also likely a pragmatic reason; the EEF required men for the Gaza attack, and combined several available, smaller units—a position not uncommon for many minority and empire units that lacked larger brigade structures—into a bigger force. The problems endemic to such a force were obvious—language, different tactical training, and overall unit cohesion—but this force did play an active role in British operations in the final attack on Gaza.  

After its formation in September, the Composite Force patrolled behind the lines as they waited to move into the trenches. Perhaps in a way to build cohesion, or possibly simply to kill boredom, the various Imperial units occupied themselves by frequently playing sports. Interestingly, the BWIR had interacted with the 20th Indian Infantry before in the Spring of 1917, often relieving each other of, and occasionally overlapping in, various positions and duties. The rapport between units is unknown, but had it been poor, it’s unlikely the units would have found themselves together in the Composite Force. On October 1, the 1st BWIR entered the front-line trenches at Dumbbell Hill, and were later joined by machine guns sections from the 2nd BWIR on November 1. Other machine gun sections from the 2nd BWIR had been attached to the 162nd Machine Guns—the same unit from Umbrella Hill—and in the trenches since September 16. The West Indian position was a dangerous one; it faced the Turks from such an angle that they could be shelled by both Turkish positions opposite and to the north. These positions, the Tank and Atawineh Redoubts, were two of the only Turkish positions to hold out

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191 Cecil Sommers, *Temporary Crusaders* (London: John Lane, 1919), Dec 23, 1917, p 29-30. Despite his diary date, it’s difficult to precisely ascertain when Sommers encountered this scene. The Composite Force disbanded as a force in November 1917, but his description of all the various component units in one scene meant that he either encountered them earlier, or that the now disbanded force remained in extremely close proximity to each other.


193 WO 95/4731, Composite Force War Diary, Vol 1, Sept 13, 18, 20, 22 1917

194 WO 95/4433 War Diary of 20th Indian Infantry Brigade March and April 1917.

195 WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 20, Oct 1, 1917; WO 95/4731, Composite Force War Diary, Vol 3, Nov 1, 1917. As was the case in the European trenches, the British in the Middle East took to naming the various junctions in the trenches after places in England. A map (no 57) in the October 1917 War Diary of the 1st BWIR reveals that the West Indian positions at Dumbbell Hill feature a Charing Cross, a Brighton, and a Carfax.

196 WO 95/4732 2nd BWIR War Diary, September 16, 1917.
during the offensive in Gaza towards Beersheba during the first week of November.\textsuperscript{197} In part, this was because the EEF had limited desire to attack these positions; an Australian force had been thrashed there during the 2\textsuperscript{nd} battle of Gaza.\textsuperscript{198} Instead, the Composite Force’s position was designed to prevent Allenby’s forces from being flanked.

Throughout October, the BWIR patrolled the locality in conjunction with Indian troops from the 20\textsuperscript{th} Indian Infantry and from the Imperial Service Cavalry, capturing several Turkish prisoners.\textsuperscript{199} When Allenby’s attack finally began on the last day of October, the West Indians feinted towards the strong Turkish positions at Atawineh, in order “to induce the enemy to believe that an attack may be expected in that section.”\textsuperscript{200} No doubt this maneuver was designed to trick the Ottoman forces into believing a repeat of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Gaza was underway, as the BWIR proudly noted its success in “drawing and holding” a large number of Turks away from the key points on the line.\textsuperscript{201} As the offensive progressed along the rest of the line, the EEF claimed to receive intelligence that a counter-attack in the West Indian sector was likely, pulling the force back from its advance in order to defend the right flank. It is worth noting that this preservation of predominantly “non-European” soldiers from attacking an entrenched position is a noticeable difference from, for example, the ways in which French commanders used similar troops as essentially cannon fodder on the Western Front.\textsuperscript{202} The result was that the West Indians and others returned to their positions on Dumbbell Hill, where for the next several days they were heavily shelled—causing several cases of shell shock.\textsuperscript{203}

By November 7, the battle for Gaza was mostly over. That day, however, a German airplane bombed the 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR near Beersheba—wounding three and killing Lance Corporal R. Wason.\textsuperscript{204} That same day, expecting the Turks to have retreated, two platoons of the 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR (around one hundred soldiers) and a squadron of Imperial Service Cavalry set out to reconnoiter the Atawineh Redoubt. Reaching a wadi, the cavalry dismounted and moved towards what had been the Turkish line, while the West Indians took up a support position at a nearby farm. The cavalry crept on foot to within six hundred feet of the barbed wire when Turkish forces sprang an ambush. Turkish machine guns decimated the exposed cavalry, and when their commander was killed, they fell back in complete disarray towards the West Indian position.\textsuperscript{205}

The BWIR responded to the chaotic situation like veteran troops. As Turkish units began to advance, a West Indian stretcher party dashed forward to retrieve the body of the cavalry commander (a Lieutenant Kelly), while other West Indians laid down covering fire. Turkish artillery then began shelling the West Indians, but the BWIR did not break. Instead, they retreated in an orderly and staggered fashion, which required West Indians to offer covering fire as further advanced troops moved backwards. Upon reaching a strong defensive position held by a different platoon from the 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR, they forced the Turkish troops to retreat.\textsuperscript{206}

\phantomsection\footnotetext[197]{Anthony Bruce, \textit{The Last Crusade: The Palestine Campaign in the First World War} (London: John Murray, 2002), 141.}
\footnotetext[198]{Kinloch, \textit{Devils on Horses}, 169-170}
\footnotetext[199]{WO 95/4410, 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Vol 20, “Operations,” Oct 1917}
\footnotetext[200]{WO 95/4410 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Vol 21, “Intelligence and Operations,” November 1917}
\footnotetext[201]{WO 95/4410, 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Vol 21, “Intelligence and Operations,” Nov 1917}
\footnotetext[202]{Fogarty, \textit{Race and War in France}, 134-168. Fogarty details how the French army used Senegalese soldiers as \\textit{troupe de choc} (“shock troops”), providing them with insufficient military training and then placing them in front of poilus, where they would bear the brunt of defensive fire.}
\footnotetext[203]{WO 95/4731, Composite Force War Diary, Vol 3, Nov 3, 4, 6, 7, 17 1917}
\footnotetext[204]{WO 95/4732 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR War Diary, November 7, 1917}
\footnotetext[205]{WO 95/4410 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Vol 21, “Intelligence and Operations,” Nov 1917}
\footnotetext[206]{WO 95/4410 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, Vol 21, “Intelligence and Operations,” Nov 1917}
The cool, methodical manner in which the West Indians had fought saved many lives, and the Army Council of Egypt again rewarded them. Lance Corporal VE Johns won the Military Medal for running a telephone line between Battalion HQ and the exposed platoons, enabling Captain R. Fink, who took over upon Lt. Kelly’s death, to organize the withdrawal, for which he earned the Military Cross. Two other privates, CA Hyudrman and F. Pullar also won the Military Medal, the first for running messages under heavy fire, and the latter for his scout work before and after the battle. Since their front-line service began, four “coloured” West Indians had decorations for bravery sanctioned and awarded by senior, white British officers. It was clear that the BWIR in Palestine could provide a valuable contribution to the EEF, yet for a variety of reasons, the BWIR did not return to front-line service until the Summer of 1918.

Still, the BWIR’s service in the Composite Force was key for several reasons. From a tactical perspective, they demonstrated their ability to maintain positions under fire and perform in difficult combat situations. A significant portion of West Indian soldiers were now in the line and facing enemy fire—an accomplishment that should not be overlooked in light of the prior War Office attitude. Strategically, as the following map illustrates, the West Indians’ positioning prevented Ottoman and German forces from flanking Allenby’s troops during a counter-attack:

Figure 1.5 Map depicting the strategic situation on November 2, 1917 at 6pm
(British forces in red, Composite Force circled in yellow)

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208 WO 161/81 A Brief Record of The Advance of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force Under the Command of General Sir Edmund HH Allenby, GCB GCMG July 1917 to October 1918. Author’s photograph.
Had the initial attacks on Gaza gone poorly and the Composite Force weakened or collapsed, a major portion of Allenby’s force could have been outflanked, or possibly encircled. The casual assumption, therefore, that the role played by the West Indians in this force was minor or unimportant is mistaken.

Lastly, BWIR participation in the Composite Force illustrated their ability to coexist closely with a broader imperial force, an increasingly key skill as empire troops replaced British ones in 1918. The result was that the BWIR’s other major military contribution would come as part of a broad, imperial force named after its leader—Major-General Sir Edward Chaytor—in which imperial coexistence, tactical coordination, and the ability to withstand strategic isolation would be key.

![Figure 1.6 A screen-grab of a platoon of the 1st BWIR from the film, “Deir el Belah.” Filmed around the Composite Force period in November 1917](http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/1060022568)

1918 and the Megiddo Offensive

Allenby’s attack at Gaza had been a massive success. Exploiting gaps in the Turkish line, his forces raced towards Jaffa and Jerusalem, which prevented infantry units with inadequate transport from keeping pace. This included the BWIR, who found itself in a familiar and unsatisfactory position when the Composite Force dissolved in November. Instead of continuing a combat role, the battalions returned to the Lines of Communication to patrol the rapidly expanding supply lines, guard captured munitions and clean up battlefields. After the surrender of Jerusalem on December 9 (Allenby entered the city two days later) and some consolidation of gains around Jaffa before Christmas, the EEF essentially came to a halt. Assuming defensive positions for the rainy season, Allenby’s forces would not go on the offensive again until the large raids across the Jordan River on Es Salt and Amman in March and

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210 WO 95/4410 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 21, “Intelligence and Operations,” Nov 1917. It is unclear why the force was dissolved.
April 1918. In the meantime, the 2nd BWIR took over the defenses around Beersheba in December, while the 1st BWIR guarded the Lines of Communication inside Palestine.\textsuperscript{211} Having recently been in the front lines, these duties, with the exception of an occasional clash with Bedouins, must have bored the West Indians.\textsuperscript{212} More importantly—as when they were ordered to bury the bodies of EEF soldiers left on the Gaza battlefield—their role probably offended them. However, they had set important precedents throughout the second half of 1917, and they would return to a front-line position when Allenby developed the parameters of his September offensive in Summer 1918.

As Allenby reconfigured his forces—sending British units to the Western Front and taking on thousands of relatively raw and untrained Indian soldiers, the entire EEF began an intensive program of training in the Spring of 1918. With the exception of the forces that briefly—and unsuccessfully—raided across the Jordan River, most of the EEF spent April and May 1918 internalizing the tactical lessons learned from nearly four years of conflict. The training was extremely intensive: the West Indians spent eight hours each day in some form of preparatory work, in addition to other responsibilities.\textsuperscript{213} There was an emphasis on physical fitness throughout the EEF, as Allenby’s plan required his infantry to cover long distances quickly to consolidate newly won positions. The West Indian battalions therefore undertook progressively longer and more difficult training marches. Outside of physical training, they listened to educational lectures on military topics, or received hands-on instruction from specialists in patrolling, bayonet fighting, and setting up sniper and observer teams, amongst others.\textsuperscript{214} Generally, this type of instruction was provided by white soldiers from other British units; for example, a lieutenant from the 1/6th Essex Regiment and thirteen soldiers from the 163rd Infantry Brigade joined the D Company of the 1st BWIR to provide instruction for the Lewis machine gun.\textsuperscript{215} The next day, two more soldiers (this time from the 1/7th Essex Regiment) joined D Company as bomb and rifle grenade instructors, while the A Company of the 1st BWIR was joined by four outside inspectors of bayonet fighting.\textsuperscript{216} Tactical training also developed in 1918 into specialist tasks—conducting reconnaissance, conducting field communications, and “spotting” targets for artillery.\textsuperscript{217}

As Allenby’s former forces rotated towards France, the West Indians became an increasingly attractive option for front line service in the next offensive. They were better trained than newer Indian units and had acquitted themselves well in action in the latter half of 1917. After weeks of training, General Headquarters ordered the 1st BWIR on July 5 to reenter the line at Rafat with the 232nd Brigade.\textsuperscript{218} This was an oft-overlooked order. The 232nd were part of the 75th Division—a critical fighting force inside the EEF that Allenby stationed in the coastal plain for his September offensive and would use to assault the Turkish defenses. Some of its British troops had been dispatched to France, so the unit required additional infantry for combat operations. More importantly, its commander—Sir Edward Bulfin—was the nephew of a WICC member and a strong supporter of the BWIR, having frequently “expressed...his great

\textsuperscript{211} WO 95/4732 2nd BWIR War Diary, December 7, 1917, WO 95/4410, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 25, March 1918
\textsuperscript{212} ICS War Diary, Nov 22, 1917, pg 99
\textsuperscript{213} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “Training,” May 1918
\textsuperscript{214} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “Training,” June 1918
\textsuperscript{215} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, May 27, 1918
\textsuperscript{216} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, May 28, 1918
\textsuperscript{218} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “General,” July 1918
satisfaction at the manner in which the Regiment had performed its work.”

The BWIR were going to play a pivotal combat role in the forthcoming major offensive.

The Spanish Flu, however, had other ideas. An outbreak of influenza had sickened the 5th BWIR for much of June, and when three members of the 1st BWIR returned from a detail inside the 5th to their own unit, they brought the flu with them. The 2nd BWIR reported influenza on July 2nd, with 78 men hospitalized the next day. In the 1st BWIR, roughly a quarter of the battalion sickened, and the active duty orders for both battalions were promptly canceled. The overall health of the BWIR battalions eventually improved, but they had missed an opportunity to play a front-and-center role in the forthcoming offensive. Just like the order to the Senussi campaign in 1916, bad timing substantially altered the wartime narrative the West Indians would be able to produce. They would, however, still see front line combat—and form an important imperial relationship in the process.

Finally, on August 12, the 1st BWIR moved into the front line—not in the coastal plain, but on the far right flank of the British line, located in the western hills of the Jordan River valley. They were greeted inhospitably by the Turkish units—the same battalions, incidentally, that the BWIR had fought against at Dumbbell Hill—who “spasmodically shelled” the West Indian positions and wounded two privates within 48 hours of their arrival. The following day, the 2nd BWIR began to arrive to the same sector, and the West Indians took up positions alongside ANZAC units, the 20th Indian Infantry, and two battalions of the Royal Fusiliers—the combat troops of the “Jewish Legion.” This collection of soldiers—essentially another Composite Force—fell under the command of the popular New Zealander Major-General Edward Chaytor and took his name, becoming “Chaytor’s Force.”

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219 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper report, of meeting May 21, 1919
220 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “General” and “Hospital” July 1918 and 2nd BWIR War Diary, July 3, 1918. Conspiracy theorists might argue that GHQ knew of the influenza when it issued the order, but at least in the case of the 2nd BWIR, the order was issued before any symptoms of influenza inside the unit.
221 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “Operations” and daily entry for August 14, 1918;
222 WO 95/4732, 2nd BWIR War Diary, Vol 29, August 13 1918
Chaytor's Force was responsible for holding probably the most physically uncomfortable part of the EEF line; the Jordan River valley, often referred to by its Turkish name, the Ghor. In the summer months, it could be unbearably hot. Before the West Indian arrival, the war diary of

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223 WO 161/81 p 104. Author’s photograph.
224 WO 161/81 pg 104. Author’s Photograph.
the Auckland Mounted Rifles recorded the daily temperature in the shade; temperatures over 100 degrees were the norm throughout June 1918, with a monthly high of 110 degrees in the shade for June 22. In addition, malarial mosquitoes plagued the valley. Attuned to the misery of the locale, the Turks dropped leaflets over British positions: “Flies die in July, men in August and we will come and bury you in September.”

Allenby himself was well aware of the heat and malaria in the Jordan Valley, and focused on it heavily. In letters throughout the Summer of 1918 to his friend Captain CW Battine, Allenby discussed his anti-malarial operations throughout Palestine, arguing “I do not see any reason why the Jordan Valley, as well as the marshy places near the Mediterranean coast, should not be free of Malaria.” He noted the “considerable” heat of the Jordan Valley that soon “will become pretty bad,” but he felt it was not much worse than Mesopotamia or India. More importantly, the Ghor, despite its deeply uncomfortable climate, was of critical strategic import to the EEF. Allenby continually stressed in his letters that he “must keep” troops in the valley to control the river crossings and the Dead Sea, as well as to offer some protection to Lawrence’s Arabs along the Hedjaz.

In a blunt letter to Sir Henry Wilson, he explained:

My right flank is covered by the Jordan; my left by the Mediterranean Sea. The Jordan Valley must be held by me; it is vital. If the Turks regained control of the Jordan, I should lose control of the Dead Sea. This would cut me off from the Arabs on the Hedjaz railway; with the result that, shortly, the Turks would regain their power in the Hedjaz. The Arabs would make terms with them, and our prestige would be gone.

My right flank would be turned, and my position in Palestine would be untenable. I might hold Rafa or El Arish; but you can imagine what effect such a withdrawal would have on the population of Egypt, and on the watching tribes of the Western Desert. You see, therefore, that I cannot modify my present dispositions. I must give up nothing of what I now hold.

Anyhow, I must hold the Jordan Valley.

The Jordan, therefore, was clearly a critical portion of Allenby’s front line from a strategic perspective. It also, however, represented an opportunity for pulling off an elaborate deception; one which Chaytor’s force would be responsible for.

The strategy behind the forthcoming British offensive hinged on a full attack in the coastal plain, which meant troop strength in the Jordan River Valley was reduced “to a minimum” in order to concentrate five divisions in the plain. However, to keep the Turks from discovering his re-concentration of force, Allenby ordered his forces in the valley to trick the Turks “to believe that an attack east of the Jordan was intended, either in the direction of Madeba or Amman.” The EEF had conducted substantial raids across the Jordan in March and April in the same sector, so Allenby’s ruse was not entirely unbelievable.

In addition to normal front-line duties, Chaytor’s troops erected a series of dummy camps, which covered-up the departure of the Desert Mounted Corps to the coastal plain, and fooled Turkish observers and airplanes into thinking that forces continued to concentrate in the

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225 WO 95/4545. War Diary of NZ Auckland Mounted Rifles, June 19-30, 1918
226 Robert Henry Wilson, Palestine 1917, 108.
227 IWM 90/37/1. Lord Allenby to Capt CW Battine, Letters of June 7 and June 15, 1918.
228 IWM 90/37/1. Lord Allenby to Capt CW Battine. Letters of June 7, June 15, and August 19, 1918.
229 90/37/1. Lord Allenby to Capt CW Battine, Letters of June 7, 1918. See also Allenby to Wilson, June 5, 1918 in Hughes, Allenby in Palestine, 159-160.
230 Allenby to Wilson, June 15, 1918, in Hughes, Allenby in Palestine, 163. Author’s italics.
231 WO 32/5128 “Despatch describing operations of the EEF from 9/19/1918-10/26/1918”, Allenby to War Office, 10/31/1918, pg 3.
valley. Other members of the force used mules pulling sleighs behind the lines to create clouds of dust and simulate troop concentration. Part of the West Indian duties in deception involved marching along the Jerusalem-Jericho road to simulate the arrival of thousands of infantry. While one commentator claimed that the BWIR “enjoyed the gentle stroll downhill and the motor ride back in the evening,” the reality was that these marches occurred in intense heat, and caked the West Indians in chalky dust. The 1st BWIR’s War Diary, in fact, noted that the marches were “arduous and trying in the extreme.”

Simultaneously to these duties, Chaytor’s force sent patrols into no man’s land that were coordinated between the different constituent units. Throughout August, the West Indians combined with Australian soldiers (probably the 3rd Australian Light Horse) to send out joint patrols every night along the Jordan River valley, occasionally even capturing Turkish deserters. While militarily important, the broader significance of these patrols lies in the necessary coordination and cooperation between imperial groups—the very close contact between white Australians and black West Indians. These activities intensified in September, as West Indian ventured into no-man’s land around the clock, sustaining Turkish fire and frequently pushing right up to Turkish lines at night. These were often dangerous missions—on the night of September 18th, the 2nd BWIR moved out of their positions to the left of the 1st BWIR and working their way under heavy fire, both artillery and machine gun, “made a strong demonstration” against Turkish positions, eventually withdrawing after coming within 600 yards. Meanwhile, the 1st BWIR’s A Company was caught in an exposed position by such heavy shell fire that they became effectively cut off from the rest of the force until the shells subsided. These particularly dangerous maneuvers were a necessity; the BWIR needed to be positioned for Allenby’s offensive, which began the next day.

As dawn broke on September 19, the calm of morning was shattered by a cacophony of artillery fire. Along a line that stretched from the Mediterranean coast, across the Judean Hills, and nearly to the northern shores of the Dead Sea, the guns of the British Army thundered into continuous action. Sixty-pounders, eighteen-pounders, siege howitzers, and mountain batteries—several hundred guns—hurled shells thousands of yards into Turkish positions. As the EEF advanced along the plain of Sharon near the Mediterranean Coast, Chaytor’s Force shifted from deception and skirmishing to actively securing the British flank.

In the Jordan Valley, the West Indians and the rest of Chaytor’s force skirmished and exchanged artillery fire. On the 20th, the same company of the 1st BWIR that had been pinned down two days prior was subject to another heavy barrage, which would kill Sgt AV Chan and wound eight others. More West Indians were wounded the next day, when the BWIR received orders to move “with all speed” to the bridge at Jisr-ed-Damieh, one of the major routes across the Jordan River.

232 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918
233 Pugsley, 143.
234 Robert Henry Wilson, Palestine 1917, 122. It’s possible the claim was ironic, but there is no way to discern this.
235 WO 95/4732 1st BWIR War Diary, “General” August 1918
237 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918
238 ICS 96/3/14 1st BWIR War Diary Operations for Sept 1918
239 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918
240 Perrett, 20-22, 31
241 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Sept 20, 1918
242 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Sept 21, 1918
the New Zealand Mounted Brigade at midnight, and broke into a rapid flank march across the Turkish front, covering 15.5 miles in 3.5 hours with no real water supply until reaching the area around the bridge.\(^{243}\)

The bridge was heavily fortified and defended by entrenched Turkish forces, including multiple machine gun sections that had clear lines of fire, enabling them to strafe the bridge at will. The West Indians arrived at 5am on the morning of the 22\(^{nd}\), resting for one hour before moving into positions from which they would assault the Turkish position. When the orders came for the BWIR to fix bayonets and seize the bridge, one New Zealand Trooper recalled that the West Indian mood was jubilant: they “went into the charge laughing running and jumping just like a lot of school boys just let out of school for the mid term vacation.”\(^{244}\) The joy at being ordered into a dangerous assault was unusual, but may have reflected the West Indian belief that they were finally being given an opportunity to demonstrate martial ability in a significant way. Although they had contributed militarily since mid-1917, their role had tended to be reactive. A major assault reflected an opportunity to symbolically conform to dominant standards of martial ability—particularly through the use of the bayonet.\(^{245}\) At 11am, the West Indians broke into a trot and charged in two waves at the Turkish positions some six hundred yards away. Behind them, BWIR machine gun teams provided covering fire across the river.

The Turkish defenders were so surprised and panicked by the charge that their fire became erratic and inaccurate. One West Indian, Private George Dick charged towards a machine gun nest. Bayoneting the two Turkish gunners, he captured the weapon. Elsewhere, another Private, Albert Marquez, flanked an enemy post from which Turkish troops hurled grenades. Marquez quickly killed six soldiers single-handedly, wounded another two, and took two more prisoner. Similar events unfolded around the bridge, as the Turkish defenders collapsed, unsuccessfully attempting to retreat back into the neighboring hills. The charge had been a remarkable success—200 Turkish soldiers had been killed, another 110 were captured, and the West Indians had seized 14 machine and automatic light guns while only suffering one wounded soldier in return.\(^{246}\) The charge had not only been an exhibition of tremendous bravery, but also a victory of significant strategic importance. The Damieh bridge was the main escape route across the Jordan River for the Turkish troops retreating from the British onslaught in the coastal plain.\(^{247}\) By seizing the bridge, the West Indians prevented the Ottoman forces from regrouping or counter-attacking, funneling them further north and away from any potential strategic high-ground. Simultaneously, they opened the path for mounted ANZAC troops to ride to Amman, where they took control of the Hedjaz railway.

After breaking the bridgehead defenses, small groups of BWIR troops cleared remaining pockets of Turkish resistance on the west side of the river by bayoneting Turkish troops, all the while sustaining machine gun fire from across the river. As these actions occurred, the machine gun sections of the BWIR strafed the Damieh bridge, killing any Turks retreating to the East side of the river. The Auckland Mounted Rifles pursued the broken Turks while companies of the 1\(^{st}\)

\(^{243}\) WO 95/4732, 1\(^{st}\) BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918
\(^{244}\) Diary of Harry Judge, Sept 22, 1918. Quoted in Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 311.
\(^{246}\) WO 95/4732, 1\(^{st}\) BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Sept 22, 1918 and Vol 33 “Honours”. Interestingly, there had been some Germans in the bridgehead defenses, thus perhaps complicating the War Office’s insistence that black men not fight Europeans. See Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 312.
\(^{247}\) Bruce, 232. Bruce never mentions who took the bridge.
BWIR consolidated the newly won heights before being relieved. Meanwhile, the 2nd BWIR and the 1st Australian Light Horse dealt with a Turkish counter-attack nearby—its goal was to cut off the West Indians and New Zealanders that had already crossed the river—driving the Turkish troops back across the Jordan by evening.\textsuperscript{248}

The BWIR charge did not go unnoticed. British newspapers featured a story entitled “Capture of Amman: West Indian Troops’ Gallantry” that described “the gallant bayonet charge” of the West Indians across the Jisr ed Damieh bridge, an attack that broke the Turkish defenses and “won the admiration of Colonial veterans.”\textsuperscript{249} This admiration was genuine. Writing after Megiddo, the commander of the Auckland Mounted Rifles took pains to explicitly commend the West Indians, calling their advance “particularly keen and workmanlike,” as well as executed with “great style.”\textsuperscript{250} This praise was no mere platitude—it was recorded inside the Auckland’s War Diary, and no one outside the unit or the EEF command would have read it. Several West Indians were honored for their bravery in the Damieh assault. Privates Marquez and Dick received the Military Medal for their actions on September 22, as did Lance Corporal Collin Leekam, who had commanded four Lewis machine guns at Damieh. Corporal Richard Turpin and Private Hezekiah Scott won Distinguished Conduct Medals for bravery during the artillery barrages of September 20\textsuperscript{th}, as did Sergeant William Julien, who had taken command of a platoon and led the advance over the Damieh bridge after his officer was wounded. Two other sergeants were mentioned in Allenby’s October Dispatches, and two Military Crosses were given to two officers.\textsuperscript{251}

Having opened up huge holes in the Turkish defenses, the mounted elements of Chaytor’s Force poured in towards Es Salt and the railway junction at Amman at a speed that the BWIR, and the rest of the infantry, could not keep up with. The 1st BWIR, however, did push deep into previously Turkish territory on the night of the 23\textsuperscript{rd}, ascending the mountains east of the Jordan River to about 4000 feet and covering fifteen miles at night with only light uniforms, no blankets, light rations, and no reserve water. Unfortunately, this advance would eventually create significant illness inside the BWIR—particularly pneumonia and malarial fever. Other issues than the harsh conditions preoccupied them at the that time; the 1st BWIR had to deal with scattered pockets of Turkish resistance during their ascent, including sniper fire and grenades. A few dozen resistors were taken prisoner, and the 1st BWIR arrived in newly captured Es Salt at 4pm on the 24\textsuperscript{th}, before continuing onwards to Amman, which they helped guard upon arrival on the 26\textsuperscript{th}. By the time the offensive ended for the BWIR on September 26\textsuperscript{th}, they had covered just over fifty-four miles in five days, often under fire and exposed to the freezing mountain air.\textsuperscript{252}

At first glance, the victory over the Ottoman forces in the Jordan River Valley appeared to have come with little casualties. While combat casualties were low, the historian Christopher Pugsley has rightly noted that for the men of the EEF, “the victory over the Turks was followed

\textsuperscript{248} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918
\textsuperscript{251} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, “Honors,” November 1918, Vol 33. The sergeant, William Julien, had taken command of a platoon when an officer was wounded during the attack on the Damieh bridgehead, and had led the advance over the bridge.
\textsuperscript{252} WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Operations for Sept 1918. They marched 15.5 miles over the 21\textsuperscript{st} and 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 15 miles on the night of the 23\textsuperscript{rd}, 4 miles on the 24\textsuperscript{th}, 12.5 miles on the morning of the 25\textsuperscript{th}, and 7.5 miles on the morning of the 26\textsuperscript{th}.
by the swift victory of disease. In September alone, the 1st BWIR evacuated 8 officers and 293 other ranks due to sickness, while only sustaining seventeen total casualties during the actual military offensive. The disparity is striking—one West Indian died during the attacks, but 42 died of disease in October. During the push across the Jordan River, West Indians fell sick from the extreme variation in climate between the valley’s heat and the chillier landscape east of the river; a shift exacerbated by the tremendous physical exertion of the marching soldiers. The exposure to cold during the marches through the mountains sickened so many men that between September 20 and October 10, 77% of the Battalion’s officers and 73% of other ranks were admitted to the hospital—716 men, in total, out of a previous strength of 1187 men. By the end of October, forty-two of these men had died from either dysentery, malaria, or pneumonia. The medical records of the mounted ANZAC forces show a similar phenomenon: during the first twelve days of October, the New Zealand Mounted Brigade sent 700 soldiers to the hospital with malaria. In fact, the majority of Chaytor’s Force, some 6920 men, became sick between September 19 and November 3, most of them with malaria.

A variety of explanations exist for these extremely high illness rates. First, that soldiers were at risk for a number of diseases inside the Jordan River valley, not least of which was malaria. The 1st BWIR in its August War Diary noted that the 3rd Australian Light Horse, who they had relieved, had suffered heavy casualties from malignant malaria. Despite having 149 cases of illness inside the battalion, the diary noted that the use of mosquito curtains, repellent cream, and even mosquito gloves had prevented any West Indian malarial casualties. These items had all been part of Allenby’s plan to reduce his force’s exposure to malaria, but offered little protection once troops began to move. The commanders of the BWIR, in evaluating their troop strength in October, implied that troops had been exposed to malaria while in the valley, and then succumbed to malarial fever once they went on the offensive. The official record of the campaign, however, stated that malaria had been so successfully dealt with, even in the Jordan Valley, that troops were able to stay there “without any alarming amount of sickness.” It then, however, noted that “active operations” into “untreated” areas caused a spike in the number of malignant cases amongst soldiers. Thus, the official argument was that offensives into Turkish positions (which truly were infested with malarial mosquitoes) had caused the spike; at the very least, a plausible explanation given the huge increase in sick EEF troops after the Megiddo operations.

253 Puglsey, *The ANZAC Experience*, 144.
254 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 31, Health for Sept 1918. Interestingly, due to the use of mosquito curtains, mosquito repellent cream, and mosquito gloves, the 1st BWIR suffered no casualties from malaria in August 1918
255 WO 95/4732 1st BWIR War Diary, Health, October 1918. The cause of death was: 24 from malaria, 13 from pneumonia, and 5 from dysentery.
256 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Vol 32, Health for October 1918
258 Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 321. Kinloch argues that the disease was contracted as they moved into Turkish zones.
259 WO 95/4732 1st BWIR War Diary, “Hospital” for August 1918
The response to the BWIR’s role in the September offensive was bifurcated between those inside the EEF and those outside, especially the War Office, which chose to focus on the revolt of other BWIR battalions at Taranto in December 1918 instead of the accomplishments of the battalions in the EEF. For the War Office, this was a matter of supreme convenience; with the war over, racial barriers to black regular service troops, commissioned officers, and direct enlistees into British regiments could be immediately reinstated if their successful military service was ignored. Regardless of the precedents set and hierarchies mitigated, the War Office was desperate to return to pre-war norms, and focusing on black troops rebelling against military authority was preferred to the BWIR in Palestine, who had broken most stereotypes about Afro-Caribbean soldiers. After the war, Wood-Hill accused the War Office of deliberate obstinacy, arguing it refused to reconsider its belief that “the West Indian would never be any use as a soldier, and that his fighting qualities are doubtful, and that in a word, he is ‘gutless’.” This assessment was generally correct; while returning West Indian troops from East Africa to Palestine, the War Office notified Allenby in June 1918 that “as fighting troops they are not of much value,” ignoring the fact that Allenby had already deployed West Indians at Gaza.

Despite an underlying sentiment in the War Office that the BWIR had performed poorly in Palestine, there is evidence that it knew what had occurred in the Jordan River Valley. Chaytor had quite publicly complimented the BWIR, telling them in a November inspection that “all the troops of my division report that they like to fight with you, in fact, could never wish for anybody better.” Such commendation did not go unnoticed at EEF Headquarters. A report from the EEF General Staff on behalf of Allenby was sent to the War Office a week before Christmas 1918, which pointedly discussed the BWIR’s “great initiative,” “great steadiness” under fire, the individual gallantry of eleven men, and the success of their engagements. Most clearly, it stated that “the bearing of these two battalions was excellent…in the trenches their discipline was of a high standard…During the operations they displayed great steadiness under fire, and dash in the attack, and gave proof of marching power of a high order.” This glowing praise was reliable; with the war over on all fronts, and the knowledge that the War Office was decidedly unimpressed with the idea of black troops, there was little to gain with unnecessary praise. More importantly, Allenby had not avoided the BWIR; instead, he visited wounded West Indians in a Jerusalem hospital to personally thank them for their military service. Here, then, was evidence from a victorious commander that attested to the wartime contributions, and future potential, of black West Indian volunteers. The opinions of the BWIR in Palestine could not have contrasted more strongly with the British view of those at Taranto—and either inadvertently, or deliberately, the War Office chose to remember West Indian military service as essentially valueless.

This attitude trickled into various ministries, including the Colonial Office. While debating internally over the civil service application of a 2nd Lieutenant who had served with the 2nd and 5th BWIR, one Colonial Office official opined that “I understand the BWI Regt has not

261 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 8.
262 WO 33/946/9707, WO to CinC, Egypt, June 15, 1918, No 60301. According to the telegram, there were 324 BWIR and 262 of the 2nd WIR.
263 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Copy of Chaytor’s Speech, located in November 1918, Vol 33
264 CO 318/350/7466. Report sent to the War Office of Lt Col J. Spencer of the EEF General Staff for Allenby, Dec 17, 1918.
265 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 32.
distinguished itself much,” to which a different official responded “the battalions of the WI Regt attached to the Egyptian EF fought well in Palestine.” However, this differentiated view deteriorated, and the role played by the BWIR in Palestine was increasingly forgotten. Even well after the war, those who had worked with the BWIR in Palestine expressed outrage at the belief that they had been poor soldiers. In a letter reprinted in a 1927 book by Algernon Aspinall, the WICC secretary, Chaytor himself indignantly rebuked this perception at length:

Statements to the effect that the British West Indies Regiment was useless, that it did not distinguish itself in the advance to Amman, and that the favourable reports about the regiment published in General orders were untrue, and were only prompted for diplomatic reasons, are absolutely false, and I assure you that all I said of the B.W.I’s, either in my reports or when speaking to them at Ram Allah on November 25, 1918, was true, and was prompted by no other motive than my appreciation of their work and of the great assistance they had given to me and my division during a difficult operation.

Previous to the two British West Indies Battalions coming under my command in the Jordan valley, I had not met them, nor have I ever been in the West Indies or had any interest there; consequently I could have had no reason to favour them, and it must be obvious that neither the G.O.C. N.Z.M.R. Brigade nor I was likely to award an undue share of the credit for the success of the operations to an attached unit. Further, no one ever tried to influence me as to what I should say in my reports on the B.W.I.’s or on any other unit. Those for the period when the B.W.I.’s were under my command were rendered direct to G.H.Q., and Lord Allenby is the last man to allow, still less to instruct, a subordinate to give praise which he considered was not deserved.

My knowledge of the work done by B.W.I.’s was derived from reports by the G.O.C. New Zealand Mounted Rifles Brigade, and from officers on my staff, and also from personal observation of their work in the line, of much of their fighting on September 19th, 20th, and 21st, and of the condition of the 1st Battalion when it arrived at Amman, and its work there.

Since my reports were written, I have frequently heard officers and men of the N.Z.M.R. Brigade, who had fought alongside the B.W.I.’s, speak of them, and all, without exception, have expressed appreciation of the ‘Westies’ and of the help they gave to the Brigade.

Chaytor’s vehement defense of the BWIR—nearly ten years on—suggests that the postwar views on West Indians in the war had become dominated by the legacy of War Office opinions. The views of other British men and women who came into contact with the West Indians during the conflict tended to vary widely, often depending on their own personal experiences with the West Indian troops, as well as their own prejudices.

Personal perceptions of the BWIR tended to stem from two discordant areas: entrenched assumptions about inherent racial ability, but also individual experiences with West Indian troops. As Colin Holmes has pointed out, a 1918 survey revealed that while strong “race prejudice” existed in England against colonial groups, it was not as a result of “personal contact.” So while there is no question of casual racism in the broader English population, its general latency ensured that when British soldiers came into contact with West Indians, positive personal contact could overturn race prejudice. This does not mean that white British soldiers elevated West Indians to the status of equals, but rather that they elevated them in their personal imperial hierarchy.

British reactions were also governed by socioeconomic constraints of worth and ability. One rifleman in the Post Office Rifles recalled interacting in Northern France with “some black
West Indians who all seemed to speak English quite well. From what I saw of the West Indian soldiers they could give points to the British in manners, speech and behaviour.” Similarly, a British woman working as a temporary nurse at a British hospital in Basra in 1917 recorded the complicated imperial differentiation she observed at mealtimes, focusing on the both the acculturated nature and self-differentiation of West Indian blacks:

The British Tommies did not want to sit with the “blacks” and the blacks did not want to sit with each other.

The blacks were not Indians; we never saw them. These were negroes. Some, from the West Indies, were cultured, educated men, more fastidious than many a British soldier with their array of toilet articles on their lockers—tooth brushes, sponges, talcum powder, etc.

Some were just wild savages from the Gold Coast or Nigeria, brought to work on the Inland Waterways. Cups and saucers, cutlery, etc, were something they had never seen at that time, and their table manners were simply non-existent (sic).

So the…negroes, who looked exactly alike, had to be found separate tables.

This tripartite categorization—British whites at the top, colonial men acculturated by the British imperial system in the middle, and finally African “savages” at the bottom—reflected precisely the hierarchical articulation of the Colonial Office and WICC during the BWIR’s formation. Identity and imperial worth, then, were wrapped up within participation in this system.

Yet, those who encountered the West Indians had to be willing to acknowledge this hierarchy, because when they did not, perceptions of West Indians were rooted in racist stereotype. One BWIR sergeant in France complained after the war that British soldiers told the French that the West Indians “were monkeys recently caught and tamed and whose tails were cut off.”

Much earlier at Seaford Hospital in England, some British soldiers had mocked newly-arrived West Indians in the “autograph book” of a nurse. One entry by a member of the London Scottish, entitled “A Sister’s Nightmare,” featured minstrel-faced blacks pleading in plantation English—“I’se sure gwine ter die dis time!” and “I be a’goin’ to Die!”

This mockery depicted the West Indians as both cowardly and uncultured—lacking the stoicism and self-discipline to face death—and therefore, subservient.

Other reactions to the BWIR, particularly in Europe, assumed they were incapable soldiers, a sentiment far more difficult for the West Indians in Europe to dispel than those in Palestine. In a backhanded swipe, David Lloyd George noted that Chinese laborers were not badly affected by artillery bombardments, arguing “they were far less nervous under fire” than

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269 IWM 88/57/1 WE Young, pg 52. The evident fixation on manners and correct speech may imply earlier assumptions that black West Indians were uncultured speakers of plantation slang or African savages—precisely the sort of latency cited by Holmes.

270 IWM 85/39/1 Mrs. MAA Thomas, pg 20. Mrs Thomas’ fixation on toiletries may reveal a latent view of West Indians as “dandies.” Much has been written on the subject of men of African descent becoming “dandies,” but for an excellent example of this phenomenon, see John Henderson, The West Indies (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1905). See also Marcus Collins, “Pride and Prejudice: West Indian Men in Mid-Twentieth-Century Britain,” The Journal of British Studies, 40, no 3 (Jul 2001): 391-418 for the ways in which these developed into other stereotypes of West Indian men and masculinity.

271 CO 23/285/6838 The Negro World, November 14, 1919, pg 7. The Sergeant, however, also noted the tremendous aid provided by the WICC, particularly over access to estaminents and resolving pay issues.

272 IWM Misc 200, Item 2928 “Nurse’s Autograph Books Containing Contributions by the West Indian Contingent, First World War”. One illustration appears to depict a West Indian in bed, probably in a hospital.
the British West Indians.”\textsuperscript{273} A British private, John Jackson, recalled being amused by “the squabbles of a section of West Indian n*ggers” in France when a German artillery shell hit and collapsed a nearby building onto them, thus revealing a prejudiced view that West Indians were incapable of putting aside minor arguments to seek cover.\textsuperscript{274} One Lieutenant, who had observed the BWIR at Taranto, wrote:

> I think it was a great mistake to have ever brought them over from the West Indies. The only time they went into action in East Africa they were reported not to have stopped running for two days! And they were not much as for labour battalions and had the vices of the white man and none of his virtues, and were always lazy and grumbling.\textsuperscript{275}

Such a statement revealed most of the racist perceptions that governed many British views of West Indian troops. West Indians were cowardly, poor soldiers—no mention is made of the military role they played in Palestine—with no work ethic and inflated senses of self.

The Colonial Office, in fact, was aware of racist outbursts at West Indians during the war, and blamed postwar discontent in the Caribbean in the Fall of 1919 in part upon “slight and insults received by [coloured] soldiers] mainly from Dominion troops on account of their colour.”\textsuperscript{276} The “Dominion troops” in question were almost certainly South African—the BWIR had become steadfast allies with soldiers from Australia and New Zealand during their time in Palestine, and seem to have had minimal sustained contact with Canadian troops.\textsuperscript{277} BWIR commanding officers discussed how the West Indians “received the utmost consideration and kindness” from ANZAC soldiers, and how “real good fellowship and friendship existed between them.”\textsuperscript{278} In fact, the West Indians so admired the independent spirit and volunteerism of the Australian and New Zealanders that they began referring to themselves as “the Black Anzacs.”\textsuperscript{279} One New Zealand trooper recalled how “impressed” he was by the BWIR, viewing them much more favorably than the well-respected French North African Cavalry.\textsuperscript{280} Even CLR James noted the relationship, writing that the Australians were “always very friendly and sympathetic to the West Indians” during the war.\textsuperscript{281} As later chapters reveal, the close bonds formed between

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{273} Lloyd George in Martin Gilbert, \textit{The First World War}, 311. This assessment was likely based on biased field reports, as there was every indication that many West Indians performed admirably under fire.
\item \textsuperscript{274} John Jackson, \textit{Private 12768: Memoir of a Tommy} (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2005), 183-4. The artillery attack seems to have occurred near Arras in 1917. While in a Calais hospital after the attack, Jackson reflected on the beating of some of the injured West Indians in the hospital who “had become very arrogant” and “cheeky”, a response that he tacitly approved of.
\item \textsuperscript{275} IWM PP/MCR/173 First World War Memoirs of Lt DC Burns Jan 1919, pg 136
\item \textsuperscript{276} CO 318/352/64434. Minute by G. Grindle of Oct 22, 1919.
\item \textsuperscript{277} South African attitudes towards the West Indians had been on display early in 1916. A photo of the BWIR in the \textit{Natal Witness} in January 1916 articulated a variety of racist stereotypes, not least in its title: “Happy Darkies at the Front: No Bad Teeth in that Lot!” Not content with a reference to the checking of African teeth during the slave trade, the photograph, despite pointing out that they were “splendid soldiers,” did not display the BWIR in martial duties. Rather, they were depicted playing cards, a reference to racist beliefs about the propensity of black men towards degeneracy. The caption also relied on stereotypes of educated black men as dandies, arguing that they had entertaining “merry dispositions” and “have taken with them to Europe the manners and customs of the plantations.” See ICS 96/2/3 WICC Scrapbook. \textit{Natal Witness}, Jan 25, 1916, pg 15.
\item \textsuperscript{278} Lt. Col C. Wood-Hill, \textit{A Few Notes on the History of the British West Indies Regiment}, Published in \textit{Sunday Pamphlets}, Vol XIII (Located at the ICS London in F 1601, PAM 13), 10.
\item \textsuperscript{279} Kinloch, \textit{Devils on Horses}, 394 ff6.
\item \textsuperscript{280} Kinloch, \textit{Devils on Horses}, 306.
\item \textsuperscript{281} CLR James, \textit{Captain Cipriani}, 32.
\end{itemize}
the Antipodeans and British West Indians not only altered disciplinary proceedings, but also conceptions of place in the British Empire.

British soldiers in Palestine often expressed a combination of admiration for the West Indians’ fighting ability, but also a latent racism that inherently situated West Indians below whites. The officer in charge of the BWIR machine gun units at Umbrella Hill in July 1917 embodied this duality in a postwar interview, stating “I’d acquired this machine gun section of the West India Regiment, enormous great black n*ggers, one wouldn’t call them n*ggers in these days, but West Indians. And they were very good.”

This casual combination of racist terminology and martial praise reflected the curious position the BWIR occupied in many British minds.

Despite the protective role played by the WICC and their own officers, West Indians could encounter significant abuse inside the Palestine theater. One letter, sent from a sergeant in the 1

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BWIR to a friend in England, revealed how racism had upset his view of the West Indian place in the British Empire:

There is hardly a Christian precept which has not been violated in the treatment meted out to us; our relations with the other troops are just as strained as those between white and black in USA. With this difference that over there wrongs can be redressed while with us there is no redress, for we have no rights or privileges. This is not a dream but a reality. We are treated neither as Christians nor British Citizens, but as West Indian “N*ggers”, without anybody to be interested in or look after us. Instead of being drawn closer to the Church and the Empire we are driven away from it. And I am one of those who suffered a great deal by it for once upon a time I lent my aid to furthering the interest of the Empire among my own kin.

The letter’s claim that no one “look[ed] after us” seems tenuous, considering the actions of the Colonial Office, the WICC, Wood-Hill, and others. While the actual date of the letter is not immediately apparent—it was forwarded to the Colonial Office in October 1918—it appears to have been written right before the BWIR came into sustained contact with the other members of Chaytor’s Force, who for the most part, seem to have had more respect for the West Indians.

The internal response of the Colonial Office to this letter underlines the fragmented and fragile hierarchies of race inside the British Empire. In a handwritten response, the Colonial Office official ER Darnley noted “This is another token of colour trouble, which is I fear not inconsiderable. There seems to be too great a tendency to class the comparatively advanced coloured West Indians with all sorts of primitive “n*ggers”.” Darnley’s statement, intended as a dig at the War Office, in fact helps reveal the gradations of imperial hierarchy.

In fact, during the early discussions of the BWIR’s formation, there was internal dialogue in the Colonial Office about whether the War Office needed to know the racial hierarchy of the British West Indies. An internal memo wondered aloud whether the WO should be told about the “two classes”—one lower class that provided men to the WIR, and the other “superior educated class of coloured population” engaged in commercial and civil service positions that would form


\[\text{283}\] CO 318/347/51686. Letter to Roland Green, October 25, 1918. According to the recipient, Roland Green, who forwarded it anonymously to the Colonial Office, the NCO was a well-educated man from Trinidad, who had studied in the USA as well. The idea that there was redress for American blacks, but not West Indians, is particularly interesting given the immense discrimination that occurred inside the American Army against the African-American 92

\[\text{nd}\] and 93

\[\text{rd}\] Infantry Divisions

\[\text{284}\] Spry Rush notes the date of the letter as July 27, 1918 in a footnote. Spry Rush, Bonds of Empire, 125, 25ff.

the BWIR. The answer, expressed in the sidebar of the memo sheet, would prove key: “Leave this, I think. They must take every fit man who comes.”

This, of course, did not occur initially, as recruiters worked to present a very particular representation of the West Indies. The memorandum represented a missed opportunity for policy clarification—the Colonial Office had failed to elucidate the very racial framework with which it governed, and with which the volunteers to the BWIR would invoke.

The Colonial Office’s advocacy did not stem from a belief in the equality of mixed-race Caribbean men with white, British men. Rather, it was the articulation of a nuanced hierarchy of imperial governance, one in which West Indian volunteers in the BWIR occupied a more privileged position than many other empire soldiers, even if they were from the same islands. One member of the Colonial Office later offered the corresponding anchor to Darnley’s outburst at grouping the BWIR with “primitive” Africans, pointing out that the BWIR’s “claim to general equality of treatment with British troops is untenable”—such a promise only held true inside the Colonies where it was promised, not inside the Empire proper. Yet it was a dispute over their place inside the broader British Empire, brought on by an Army Order at the beginning of 1918, that helps reveal the imperial identities of the BWIR men in Egypt and Palestine.

Army Order No 1 and Imperial Identity

Despite the clarification of the BWIR’s role that took place in 1917, the War Office had persisted in blurring the delicate racial, social, and economic hierarchies that the Colonial Office, and West Indians themselves, used to differentiate the BWIR. The most critical of these was the dispute over Army Order No 1 of 1918, which established a 50% pay raise (from 1 shilling/day to 1 shilling and 6 pennies/day) and a bonus for all British and imperial troops—but specifically excluded the BWIR and many other colonial units. The West Indians in Palestine discovered this in January, shortly after its promulgation. When the BWIR battalions protested through their officers that they were technically British Army units and entitled to the raise, the War Office bluntly replied in June that “native-units were excluded from the benefits…and after very careful consideration…it is regretted that no alteration in the decision conveyed to you…can be made.” Dissatisfaction over pay had occurred before—there had been previous failures to pay out separation allowances to the families of BWIR men (apparently the result of records lost at sea while in transit to Egypt)—but the War Office’s classification of the West Indians as “natives” infuriated the BWIR. This, then, was the context of the letter from the Trinidadian sergeant to his friend in England—the War Office’s shattering of a careful hierarchy of imperial identity, taught in West Indian schools and long-internalized by the men of the BWIR.

The War Office’s confirmation that it considered the BWIR equal to African labor units sparked a significant outcry inside the battalions in Egypt and Palestine. Complaints and

286 CO 318/336/29508 Handwritten Memorandum, signed “OGRW” June 28, 1915. The exact phrase is “R + F of the WIR.”
287 CO 318/336/29508 Grindle Sidebar Notation on Handwritten Memorandum, June 28, 1915
288 CO 318/348/5991. Internal Colonial Office minute of Jan 30, 1919 Signed HR.
289 WO 95/4732 2nd BWIR War Diary, January 31, 1918
290 WO 95/4732 2nd BWIR War Diary, July 24, 1918. Letter of June 18 from GF Waterson, War Office.
291 CO 23/280/38626 Copy of Colonial Secretary to Command Paymaster at Cairo, July 9, 1917. Delays in pay throughout the British Forces occurred often due to what Helen McCartney has termed “poor administration in Britain.” See Helen McCartney, Citizen Soldiers: the Liverpool Territorials in the First World War (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 136.
petitions reached both the Colonial Office and the WICC, and in June 1918, both began in earnest to try and reverse the terms of the order.\textsuperscript{292} Importantly for this project, these petitions remain in the ledgers of the Colonial Office, and provide critical voice to the self-conceptualization of the BWIR men in Palestine.

Protesting the War Office’s stance on Army Order No 1, a number of Barbadian members of the BWIR in Palestine wrote the head of their island’s recruiting committee—a man they would have had personal contact with when enlisting. In the letter, they demanded not only that Order No 1 be extended to them, but that their identity within the Empire be clearly defined, writing:

We had all along imagined ourselves to be Imperial troops…[but]…We are yet to know whether we are Imperial troops or Colonials; as a matter of fact the War Office has referred to us as “natives”.

It must be understood that the men of this regiment are like the men of all the new armies of the Empire—a different type to the old professional soldier—and there could never have been the response to the appeals made by the recruiting committees in the various islands but for the fact that we were made to understand that we would have been on an entirely different footing to the regular West Indian regiment, and that we would have enjoyed every privilege just as any other British soldiers.

We find now that this is not the case. We have been deceived. We like to think that the deception was not intentional.\textsuperscript{293}

This letter articulated a very particular sense of imperial identity, one rooted in a sense of solidarity with other imperial volunteers from the Empire, and a distinct sense of class superiority to the “regular” West India Regiment. In this letter, the BWIR used the WIR as a means of distinguishing themselves from lower-class “colonial” units by citing their inclusion in the British “imperial” forces, a point they emphasized by pointing out that they had left reasonably comfortable employment in order to volunteer to fight. Helen McCartney has argued that for British territorials, volunteering “was an example of consensual democracy” that reinforced their belief that they had “certain rights and privileges” even during their Army service.\textsuperscript{294} Similar sentiments seem to exist inside the BWIR battalions in Palestine. Their middle class status inside the colonies, their push for greater political rights—but within the governing framework of the British Empire—and their consistent references to volunteerist service, entitled them to particular provisions and rights.

A similar line of argumentation was expressed after the Megiddo offensive had concluded, when forty-three non-commissioned officers from the 1\textsuperscript{st} and 2\textsuperscript{nd} BWIR wrote to the Governor of Barbados, arguing for their right to the provisions of the order:

we were led to believe that we would be treated as Imperial Troops and receive any and all benefits accruing to such Troops…We were treated as British soldiers in equipment, training, discipline, and were used as such in the field…

…It thus appears that we soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment are neither Colonial nor Imperial Troops, holding a very unenviable position in as much as we are not in receipt of pay as awarded to soldiers of the various Dominions nor soldiers of His Majesty’s Imperial Forces.

…the majority of the men of the British West Indies Regiment are taxpayers in the various West Indian Colonies and loyal subjects of His Majesty, and we feel that this discrimination is not only an insult to us who have volunteered to fight for the Empire but also an insult to the whole West Indies.

\textsuperscript{292} ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, June 25, 1918. Petitions towards Colonial officials or the Colonial Office reflected an engrained practice—often “the only method to redress grievances” inside the Caribbean was through petition to the Colonial Office. See Wallace, \textit{The British Caribbean}, 23.

\textsuperscript{293} CO 28/294/56561. Letter from twelve members of BWIR in Egypt to Hon. JC Lynch, MLC, August 2, 1918

\textsuperscript{294} McCartney, \textit{Citizen Soldiers}, 122.
We would like it to be understood that the motive of this memorandum is not so much to get the pecuniary benefits from which we have been denied, as to bring before His Excellency that we are alive to the fact that as West Indians we have been unfairly discriminated against.

Although less apparent, this letter also made claims to equal treatment by way of socioeconomic status. Many qualifications for political enfranchisement in the Caribbean stemmed from tax payments; the reference to the BWIR men as “taxpayers” indicated that they were not only of a higher class, but that they were politically capable. Equally critical were the number of signatories—43 NCO’s represented a substantial portion of the non-commissioned officers inside the BWIR. In some ways, therefore, the letter appears to be not just a statement of entitlement, but a veiled threat—the discrimination, not the money, was the more serious issue, and one which would be remembered after the war.

Another letter to the Colonial Office, received right before the Army Order was finally reversed, was from a BWIR soldier named Aloysius Ferreira. Ferreira fumed at the War Office’s decision to identify him, and the rest of the BWIR with African troops instead of other Imperial forces:

It was not until recently that I realised that the British West Indies Regiment was considered by War Office as a Native Regiment, and similarly regarded as the African Rifles, etc. To my knowledge, men of all shades of colour, Englishmen, Scotsmen, Portuguese, Negroes, half-castes, etc., relinquished lucrative appointments, many of them in the Civil Service of the various Colonies and Islands of the West Indies, and enlisted in the Regt.

I have been informed that I am not entitled to a Gratuity for my War Service, and consider it a grave injustice.

I am entitled to wear 4 blue chevrons, have served 2 ½ years with the EEF, for the greater part of this period as a qualified machine-gunner, have never performed labour duties (Labour Corps men are entitled to Gratuity) and am at a loss to understand why there should be any differentiation between me and other men of the Imperial Army, many of them with perhaps less service, and, in many cases, no service with an Expeditionary Force…

Ferreira’s complaint pivoted off the existential anchors that have been traced throughout this chapter. The first was that the men of the BWIR, despite their racial diversity, were of significantly higher socioeconomic and cultural standing than the Africans they had been equated to. This foundation allowed Ferreira to posit his second major claim, which was that there should be no “differentiation” between him and other imperial men, especially because he had “service”—code for having seen combat. Thus, Ferreira clearly articulated a hierarchy of Empire in which acculturated imperial, regardless of their race, deserved to be elevated above a lower tier of subjects, not least because they had fought for the Empire in its hour of need.

In this way, the BWIR volunteers in Palestine represented a continuing tradition of aspirational, imperial politics. Conscious of racial hierarchies inside the Empire, the class of men inside the BWIR sought sanctuary within conceptions of the “imperial,” elevating themselves above the lesser “colonial” (or “native,” in the case of Africans). The consistent

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296 CO 318/352/2011. Letter from Aloysius P. Ferreira to CO, Jan 8, 1919. Ferreira’s racial makeup is unclear; his statement that he wore four blue chevrons probably signifies service chevrons, which were awarded for each year in service. He would have, it appears, to have enlisted before the formation of the BWIR to earn four year’s worth. However, a red chevron was awarded for service before December 31, 1914, indicating that he either enlisted at the start of January 1915, miscounted his entitled stripes, or there was a different arrangement inside the BWIR (In the photo of L/Cpl Leekam being awarded his Military Medal, four service chevrons are also visible). That Ferreira was a machine-gunner would imply he was not an officer, and therefore unlikely to have been of “pure European descent.” My thanks to Professor Peter Doyle for help with chevron identification.
anger over any affiliation with the West India Regiment, the return of East Indians from the initial BWIR contingents, and the warm relationship with Anzacs (self-identifying as “black Anzacs”) were all proof of this consciousness. This self-configuration had a significant tradition inside the West Indies: the “coloured” members of the Jamaican Assembly in the mid-nineteenth century, for example, had “tended to vote with the whites and to dissociate themselves from the black majority of the population,” while in Trinidad, “coloured” legislators considered resigning over the election of a black man. In many ways, “coloured” was coded onto “middle class,” and vice versa inside the Caribbean—Clem Seecharan has referred to it as “a delicately constructed scheme of hierarchy—status conferred on the basis of incremental propinquity to whiteness.” The result was, as Anne Spry Rush has pointed out, that West Indians tended to construct their version “Britishness” through “a middle-class notion of respectability, loyalty to an idealized British empire, and pride in varied racial and geographical heritages.” These were all constituent parts of the BWIR’s projected identity, but the idea of military volunteerism for the sake of the Empire was also grafted on. In fact, when the WICC agitated on behalf of the BWIR’s inclusion in Army Order No 1 of 1918, it used similar language to the BWIR men, arguing that pay inclusion would mitigate “their dissatisfaction at being treated differently from men in Imperial Units, many of whom are not volunteers”.

It was no surprise, then, how the BWIR chose to identify with essentially the white Dominions over any other colonial troops. Dominion men, even if they were white, clearly exhibited the four key tenets of BWIR identity. The ex-Governor of Jamaica, Sir Sydney Olivier, perhaps did not realize the deeper undertones to his message when he mentioned to his WICC peers—“the great dissatisfaction which was felt at the differentiation between other Imperial troops and the British West Indies Regiment in the matter of pay—a differentiation for which no particular reason had been adduced.”

The professed equality with other imperial units had, in fact, featured very early in the BWIR’s service. When a number of BWIR men were invalided back to the Caribbean in 1916, they found themselves placed in third class, while Australians and Canadians traveled in first and second class. The protest of a Trinidadian NCO on board encapsulated the BWIR imperial view—“we are not English Tommies, but Colonials.” The distinction was in the West Indian perspective; to these men, “Colonials” were superior to regular “Tommies.” As the Governor of Barbados informed the somewhat surprised Colonial Office, the BWIR men were angry that “they have been treated as though they were only “English Tommies” instead of being accorded proper treatment as “Colonials.” The West Indians in the BWIR, therefore, made claims on being “British” and part of the Empire, but not on being English.

Ultimately, the WICC and the Colonial Office were able to reverse the War Office’s decision at the start of 1919, but the matter did clear damage inside the BWIR. For those battalions in Europe, their dissatisfaction culminated in mutiny at Taranto, in part because they had no tangible way to challenge the racist discourse that underpinned the War Office decision. In contrast, the BWIR in Palestine could contest the framework through martial success—a

300 CO 318/351/3414. Letter from WICC to Viscount Milner, Colonial Office, Jan 15, 1919.
301 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper report on “West Indian Contingent Committee: The Half-Yearly Meeting,” Dec 18, 1918
302 CO 28/289/50710 Memorandum by Sgt AT Martin to Colonial Secretary, September 21, 1916
possible explanation for the jubilant mood with which the West Indians went into a presumably dangerous assault on the bridge at Jisr ed Damieh. “Natives” would never be given the opportunity in the British Army for a frontal assault on an important Turkish and German position. This was a distinct opportunity—the BWIR in Europe had also been denied the pay order provisions, but had no possible opportunity to refute its deeper undertones. In contrast, not only could the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine protest, but they could rely on a clear foundation of martial ability since July 1917 (one supported by their medals) as well as a more supportive command in the form of Wood-Hill, Wilson, Bulfin, and Chaytor. It seems possible, in fact, that the pressure from the WICC and Colonial Office would not have overturned the War Office’s decision without the military record of the three battalions in Palestine.

In some ways, the Colonial Office’s motivation to push for a reversal stemmed from postwar political considerations. ER Darnley opined that “a fresh outburst of discontent” was simply not worth the minimal financial savings, an attitude that generally dominated earlier Colonial Office memoranda. However, as a different official noted on the pay dispute, “[d]iscrimination in the matter of pay on colour grounds seems unfair.” As with the issue of forming a West Indian contingent to fight, some of the motivation behind Colonial Office advocacy stemmed from local and regional political considerations. Yet, there also were significant articulations of a nuanced hierarchy of imperial governance, in which West Indian volunteers in the BWIR occupied a more privileged position than many other “non-white” soldiers from the Empire.

The role of the BWIR battalions in Egypt and Palestine was fundamentally different than that of their Caribbean peers in Europe. This was especially true from the Summer of 1917 onwards, when the EEF frequently placed them in front-line, combat situations, and took note of their successful military service at Gaza and in the Jordan River Valley. This military use underlined key conceptions of differentiation—many of which were rooted in the application of class structures to hierarchies of race and empire. From the early stages of their recruitment, the battalions of the BWIR that served in Egypt and Palestine were intended to serve as a vanguard of imperial federation inside the Caribbean, and were thus conceptualized by various colonial officials as distinct. The War Office, however, never acceded to this modified hierarchy, and maintained a strict black-white dichotomy of martial worth. This, as this chapter has shown, posed a massive challenge to the self-identification of the BWIR battalions. Subsequent chapters of this work reveal not only the different application of military justice to West Indians in the Palestine theater, but also the ways in which their front-line service and athletic prowess both reinforced and modified their imperial identity. There, in Palestine, the West Indians found themselves included in a diverse community of soldiers reworking their imperial allegiances while simultaneously serving empire. Among these were the battalions of the Jewish Legion, to which the focus now turns.

304 CO 318/348/16801. Minute by ER Darnley of April 14, 1919. See also CO 318/348/5991 Memorandum of January 27, 1919.
Chapter 2:
A “Jewish Legion”?
The Jewish Battalions in Palestine, 1918-1919

In her memoir, My Life, the Israeli stateswoman, Golda Meir, briefly recalled her time in Milwaukee during the First World War. This period of her life was of particular importance to her, for it was when she first met David Ben Gurion and Yitzahk Ben-Zvi, both of whom would also go on to significant Israeli political careers. Expelled from Ottoman Palestine in 1914, they had traveled to the Midwest to promote and find recruits for the embryonic “Jewish Legion,” a military unit comprised solely of Jews that they hoped would be formed to fight for Britain in Palestine. According to Meir, “they spoke about the Jewish Legion with such feeling that I immediately tried to volunteer for it—and was crushed when I learned that girls were not being accepted.” The exact veracity of the incident is murky, but the significance of its retelling is clear. As a leader of Israel, Meir needed to be tied back to the Jewish Legion, which was eventually formed in August 1917 and served in the EEF from February 1918 onwards. Many members of the Jewish battalions later became key political figures in Israel—Ben Gurion, Ben Zvi, Levi Eshkol, Yaacov Dori, Dov Hos, amongst others—and a clear national narrative developed. The leaders of Israel, who consistently fought to protect the Jewish state in the post-WWI period, had also fought to create it during WWI. They thus claimed active agency in all stages of Israel’s national birth. By noting her attempt to volunteer, Meir implicitly linked herself with this early project, claiming her place in the foundational narrative.

This narrative situated the Jewish Legion as the key transitory force between ancient Jewish fighters and Jewish statehood, often articulating its place between Bar Kochba’s revolt against the Romans and the push towards independence in 1948. In this history, the Legion was a force of committed Zionists, bearing arms to liberate Palestine from Ottoman control. As the headline of a retrospective piece written in 1957 by a Legionnaire proclaimed—“Jewish Battalions Paved Way to Statehood.” A few years later, Ben Zvi offered a slightly different, but generally similar trajectory, placing the Jewish Legion between those who had fought for Benjamin of Tiberias in the seventh century and the Haganah. Ben Zvi’s argument was equally foundational, claiming that the Jewish battalions had “instilled a feeling of self-confidence” that allowed the Haganah, a Jewish self-defense force, to develop underground during the British Mandate (1920-1948). These linkages became increasingly codified after the Six Days War in June 1967, perhaps because its outbreak was concurrent to the 50th anniversary of the Legion’s establishment in August 1917. In a written message to the 1968 Golden Jubilee Dinner of the Zionist Organization of America, the IDF Chief of Staff and former Legion corporal, General Yaakov Dori, argued: “I venture to believe that there is a historic link between the volunteering of the Judean Battalions to fight for liberating (sic) Palestine and redemption of a homeland for

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306 Golda Meir, My Life, (London: Cox and Wyman Ltd 1975), 39. Meir mentions that they visited Milwaukee in 1916, which was well before the official formation of the Jewish battalions by Great Britain in August 1917. When exactly she attempted to volunteer is not clear, nor is it certain that the story is true. One Jewish veteran, William Braiterman, claimed that Meir confirmed the story, and told him that she had protested that the recruitment materials only referred to “Jews,” not specifically “Jewish men.” See AJHS I-429 Jewish Legion Veterans Newsletters “The Youngest Soldier,” by Elsa Solender in Baltimore Jewish Times, December 31, 1976.


our people and the Great Six Day’s War in which longstanding wishes and dreams of generations came through (sic).”309 This theme became firmly rooted, and it was not uncommon after 1967 to find less prominent veterans from the Jewish battalions—like one who was wounded in the leg during the war—who professed similar sentiments: “the legion was the kernel that helped bring about the Jewish state.”310

Underpinning this conception of the Jewish Legion as a key link in the path towards Jewish statehood was its relatively homogeneity in terms of broader identity and political ambition. Although its constituents came from England (many by way of Russia), the United States, Canada, Argentina, Egypt, and Ottoman Palestine itself, they were united as Jews in search of a national homeland. The fractures and schisms in the global Jewish community, and particularly in Britain, are obscured, leaving behind a vague and pervading Zionism. The use of the term “Legion” to describe the Jewish units helped connote precisely this fusion. Like many national narratives, however, this one too was something of a myth.

The Jewish Legion was far from a unified Legion—in fact, it was a set of three battalions that reflected the broader fissures in the Jewish community, particularly that of Britain. During WWI, these battalions technically lacked a Jewish identifier, despite being composed almost entirely of Jews—they were simply the 38th, 39th, and 40th battalions of the City of London Royal Fusiliers.311 This chapter demonstrates that the “Legion” was a remarkably heterogeneous group of men, bound together only by the ethno-religious label of being “Jews.” Far from a unified experience, the history of the battalions is marked by a series of divisions and internal conflicts that ran through their formation, military service, and memory. Much of this stemmed from a debate over the nature and purpose of Jewish identity between two broadly outlined groups. The first of these were members of Anglo-Jewry who favored “assimilation” into England, maintaining a Jewish identity only in terms of religious practice or cultural heritage. The other was the Zionists, those who grafted a political (and ultimately national) identity onto Judaism in their quest for a Jewish homeland, ideally in Palestine. Caught between these broad poles—which themselves were not without internal factionalism—were many Russian Jewish immigrants to England, whose lack of wartime service had been the spark for the battalions’ creation.

Despite the growth in histories of Jewish participation in the First World War and the importance of the Legion in foundational narratives, its history remains something of a footnote. Often, the story of the Jewish Legion is integrated into works with broader historical vantage points—principally examinations of Anglo-Jewry in the early twentieth century or the political

309 AJHS I-429, Veterans Judean Battalion, Correspondence. Letter from General Yaacov Dori to Veterans of the Judean Battalions, Sept 1, 1968. Similar arguments developed after the Yom Kippur War in 1973, but the Six-Day War had a larger impact. Perhaps one of the stranger historical trajectories figured in a speech by Dr. Hirsch Gordon in 1940, which eschewed older fighting forces and instead tied the Jewish Legion to Berek Joselowicz’s Jewish cavalry regiment during the 1794 Kościuszko uprising. See British Library, Address of Dr. Hirsch L. Gordon, 25th Anniversary Reunion, March 2, 1940.
310 AJHS I-429 Jewish Legion Veterans Newsletters “Israel’s past matters less than present to World War I Jewish Legion veterans” by Lynda Robinson. The Sun, Feb 29, 1988. The soldier in question was David Todes.
311 A fourth battalion, the 42nd, was formed in 1918, but never left England or played any significant role. Several thousand more volunteers from the United States and Canada were assembling and beginning very initial training in Canada when the war ended.
history of the British Mandate in Palestine. In works focused on the British Jewish community, the creation of the battalions is a narrative accompaniment to the ruptures and compromises inside the Jewish community as Zionists and assimilationists battled for political and communal influence. Some scholars, like David Cesarani, have argued that debates over the necessary wartime role of Jewish immigrants from Russia split the broader Jewish community, and thus, “World War I engendered a social revolution in Anglo-Jewry.” These immigrants, however, were more than a mere backdrop to communal fissures—their presence sparked the creation of the Jewish battalions, and approximately 1500 of them served in the Palestine theater as British Army soldiers. Yet, for most focused studies of early twentieth century Anglo-Jewry, the story of expressly Jewish troops ends once their battalions were sent to Palestine, in part because a different sub-canon takes their story over.

The presence of Jewish troops, especially a significant Zionist contingent, in Palestine at the end of the First World War provides an easy lead-in for many histories of Britain’s Mandate in Palestine. The Mandate officially ran from 1920 to 1948, with British control beginning in 1918 via military administration, and the importance of many former Legionnaires—to say nothing of their tempestuous relationships with the British—has led some historians to briefly consider their wartime service. In general, however, these works focus on the Zionists inside the Jewish battalions, often ignoring the nuances of experience with the unit. Other histories, whether deliberately or inadvertently, have relayed incorrect narratives by reading interwar and post-1948 influence back into the Legion itself. Often, this is due to an over-reliance on the memoirs of certain figures inside the Jewish battalions.

As was common in the postwar period, a number of the principal figures inside the Jewish battalions produced memoirs chronicling their experience at war. Chief among these was With the Judeans in the Palestine Campaign, by Lieutenant Colonel John Henry Patterson, the primary commander of the Jewish battalions, as well as the work of the articulate, persistent, and ever-contentious, Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, who had been one of the driving forces behind the Legion’s creation. Jabotinsky produced his version of events a decade into Britain’s Mandate in Palestine, and more than any other memoirist, he was expressly aware of how to tweak narratives to create contemporary gain, which particularly affects his recollections of

British attitudes and interactions with other competing Zionist figures.\(^{317}\) Two Anglo-Jewish officers, Redcliffe Salaman and Henry Myers, also produced important memoirs, and although Myers’ remained unpublished at the Imperial War Museum, he actively corresponded with various battalion veterans’ societies.\(^{318}\) These works, along with a variety of small pamphlets and other ephemera, served as the core for two books produced in the 1960s by former legionaries.

The first, Roman Freulich’s *Soldiers in Judea*, offered a wide range of vignettes of daily life and incidents, as well as a number of character sketches. The second, Elias Gilner’s *War and Hope* often utilized similar stories and events as Freulich’s book, but developed them into a more linear narrative.\(^{319}\) Freulich and Gilner, both of them American volunteers to the battalions, were heavily focused on pointing out the antisemitism of the EEF command and tracing the success of key Israelis like Ben Gurion, Eshkol, Dov Hos, and others back into their wartime service. Unsurprisingly, both presented these arguments within a narrative arc of Jewish return to biblical Palestine, further underpinning self-conceptualized parallels to mythologized Jewish fighters like Simon bar Kochba (the leader of a revolt against the Roman Empire) and the Maccabees. These varied perspectives and reconfigurations have been examined by Alyson Pendlebury, who provides a critical unpacking of the broader cultural and literary dimensions underpinning Jewish service in the First World War.\(^{320}\)

After many decades, two welcome, scholarly works on the Jewish Legion emerged in recent years. Foremost among these is Martin Watts’ *The Jewish Legion and the First World War*, which is the first synthetic examination of the Jewish battalions.\(^{321}\) Well-researched and fair in its analysis, Watts bridges many of the gaps in historiography, and provides a key foundation for future scholarship with his detailed reconstruction of the Legion’s creation and service. The other recent work, Michael and Shlomit Keren’s, *We are Coming, Unafraid*, eschews a standard structure, and provides chapters in which the writings of a different member of the battalions are reproduced at length, with minimal intrusion. The result is essentially a curated anthology of Jewish experience during the war in Palestine, which coalesces into a broader narrative demonstrating the development of nuanced and unique identities inside the Legion. Keren and Keren suggest that many of these pivoted off what they refer to as “existential Zionism,” an outlook that stemmed not from “an imagined model formulated by

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\(^{317}\) Michael Stanislawski, *Zionism and the Fin de Siecle: Cosmopolitanism and Nationalism from Nordau to Jabotinsky* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 118. Stanislawski writes “Jabotinsky’s various autobiographical writings are hardly accurate and reliable…[and] present a selective and factually distorted portrait.” Jabotinsky’s account of the Jewish Legion did not emerge until *well* after other accounts, first in Yiddish and Hebrew in 1929, and in English in 1945. See Stanislawski 266, ff3.

\(^{318}\) Redcliffe Salaman, *Palestine Reclaimed: Letters from a Jewish Officer in Palestine* (London: George Routledge & Sons, Ltd. 1920). See a discussion of Myer’s memoir in Mark Levene, “Going against the Grain: Two Jewish Memoirs of War and Anti-War, 1914-1918,” *Jewish Culture and History* 2 no. 2 (Winter 1999): 66-95. Both Salaman’s and Myer’s work feature narrative and reproduced correspondence. When I am citing a letter, I include its date and the page number where the letter appears. This method, I feel, helps maintain an awareness of chronology. If the citation does not reflect a reproduced letter, I have merely included the page number from the volume’s text.

\(^{319}\) Roman Freulich, *Soldiers in Judea: Stories and vignettes of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Herzl Press, 1965); Elias Gilner *War and Hope: A History of the Jewish Legion* (New York: Herzl Press, 1969). There are some problems in their construction—Freulich’s work, for example, takes liberties with certain stories to add drama or underscore his broader interpretation. For evidence of this, see the correspondence between Freulich and Joshua Joseph Davidson in YIVO RG 1530 Joshua Joseph Davidson Papers and then *Soldiers in Judea*, pg 174-5. Davidson’s vignettes appear differently in Freulich’s book than in how they are presented to him.


political leaders and intellectuals,” but rather a “Jewish national consciousness that stems from religious roots.” As this chapter reveals, however, this intellectual framework may not have applied to many in the battalions.

Unlike these recent works, this chapter does not fully uncover the complicated ways in which individual Jews understood their service in the First World War nor does it provide a complete narrative. Instead, it focuses on disrupting the homogenous identity of the Jewish Legion. It explores the contradictions in the Jewish battalions’ formation, particularly the oft-overlooked manpower composition of each unit. Situating this within the broader context of the EEF campaigns of 1918, it illustrates that the most enthusiastically Zionist battalion did little militarily, while the battalion composed mostly of “British” Jews and conscripted immigrants fought the most frequently. Finally, it raises issues about allegiances and loyalties inside the battalions, particularly to what extent they might actually be considered “Jewish” and how that affected visualizations of their place in the postwar British Empire.

Prelude

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, a tiny number of Jews served in the British Armed Forces. One well-informed estimate by Rabbi Michael Adler enumerated 50 Jews serving in the Royal Navy, 400 in the Regular Army, and around 600 men in the Special Reserve and Territorial Forces in August 1914. With a total Jewish population in the United Kingdom in 1914 between 275,000 and 300,000, military service prior to the Great War was apparently of low priority to the Jewish community. However, Jewish men in Great Britain responded with great fervor to the call to arms in August 1914; by certain metrics, more so than their non-Jewish peers. Around 41,500 British Jews fought in the First World War, of which roughly 10,000 enlisted as volunteers prior to the institution of conscription in May 1916. This meant that between 14-15% of Britain’s Jewish population enlisted in the army, in contrast to the 11.5% of the general British population that served. An additional 8,500-9,500 Jews from around the Empire pushed the total number of Jews fighting for the British Empire to 50,000. While this was a tiny percentage of the nearly nine million men mobilized by Britain, it was significant for both its proportional weight and deeper, post-emancipatory symbolism.

British Jewry’s strong response to the call for arms, especially during the earlier portion of the war, indicates that they, like their co-religionists in Europe, saw the war as the “perfect opportunity to demonstrate with their blood their utter loyalty to the nation in whose midst they

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322 Michael Keren and Shlomit Keren, We are coming, unafraid: the Jewish legions and the promised land in the First World War (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2010), 14.
323 Michael Adler, The Jews of the Empire and the Great War (London: Richard Clay and Sons, Ltd. 1919), 1. Adler was the Senior Chaplain for Anglo-Jewish forces, and spent most of the war driving along the French front holding prayer services with Jewish soldiers and administering funerary rites to those killed in action. After the war, he was the driving force in the creation of the British Jewry Book of Honour, which contains a chapter about his experiences in France. It is, of course, entirely possible that there were additional Jews in the Armed Services who chose not to note or disguise their faith on the military rolls, as this was not an uncommon occurrence, but they would not push the total numbers out of the minute. See Harold Boas, The Australian YMCA with the Jewish Soldier of the Australian Imperial Force (London: Garden City Press, 1919), 44.
324 V.D. Lipman, A History of the Jews in Britain since 1858 (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), 140
326 The higher number is from Adler, Jews of the Empire, 4, with the lower number from WD Rubenstein, A History of the Jews, 194. There were roughly 145,000 Jews in the British Empire outside of the UK.
lived.”

Across Europe, various decisions throughout the nineteenth century had “emancipated” Jews and conferred upon them civil and legal rights that allowed them to identify primarily as citizens of their nation who simply practiced a minority faith. In Britain, this had occurred several decades before the Great War, in a “piecemeal fashion between 1830 and 1871.”

Still, when war erupted in 1914 a range of British Jewish associations and publications argued that emancipation should be repaid by enlistment; none more so than the Jewish Chronicle newspaper, which argued in August 1914, “England has been all she could to the Jews. The Jews will be all they can to England.” This attitude was especially internalized by educated British Jewry. Of the Jewish volunteers during the first two years of conflict, 18% fought as officers—double the proportion of voluntary recruits to officers in the rest of the British Army. The act of volunteering, in particular, was key. Offering one’s life in defense of the nation was proof to the national community of ultimate loyalty, and British Jews were just as aware of this as the black, British West Indians who volunteered for the BWIR.

The vast majority of British Jews who fought during the war served in the same army units as their British peers, with minimal or no difference in wartime experiences. While practicing Jews had different religious services—noted by the parade command, “Fall out the Roman Catholics and Jews”—there appears to have been little other distinction, and according to WD Rubenstein, “remarkably little evidence of anti-semitism in the trenches.”

This was precisely what much of Anglo-Jewry wanted—to be identified as British citizens who practiced a minority faith. These assimilationist undercurrents ensured that for most British Jews, their Judaism had little discernible influence over their experience during the war.

However, some, like Mark Levene, have argued more negatively that the initial Jewish rush to the colors in 1914 was, in part, motivated by the “knowledge [sic] that Jews were constantly being watched, and one step out of line might spell disaster.” Much of this fear emanated from increasing xenophobia, and despite their strong volunteerism, British Jews became increasingly concerned over the wartime role played by Jewish immigrants to Britain. In particular, those from Russia, who were distinctively visible to popular opinion, but also relatively isolated from the broad British community. The refusal of Russian-born Jews to enlist or perform war service became an increasingly combustible issue, and helped trigger the formation of the Legion.

While many Jews rushed to their national colors as a demonstration of loyalty and patriotism, a few saw a different opportunity. The entry of the Ottoman Empire into the war in November 1914 put the issue of Palestine in play, something that committed Zionists thought

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330 Englander, *Documentary History*, 140. Or perhaps testament to the importance of education in the Jewish community.


332 Rubenstein, 195. There seems to have been some anti-Jewish prejudice during the initial phases of training in England, though. See Joseph Cohen, *Journey to the Trenches: The Life of Isaac Rosenberg, 1890-1918* (London: Robson Books, 1975), 127.

was worth bucking the official Zionist pledge of neutrality. Some, like Ben Gurion and Ben Zvi, had proposed creating a Jewish unit in the Turkish Army, an idea that was scuppered when thousands of Jews in Palestine were expelled to Egypt, but represented one of the early attempts by Zionists to win concessions for a Jewish Palestine by military service. Another notoriously maverick Zionist, Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, thought that fighting for Britain was the more likely scenario for securing a postwar Jewish homeland.

Nearly thirty-four years old when the Great War broke out, Jabotinsky had been born in Odessa into a middle-class, relatively assimilated family. A promising young writer and conversant in several languages, he had spent time in Europe as a reporter before attending the Sixth Zionist Congress in 1903. Despite having grown up in a home “largely devoid of Jewish knowledge, content or ceremony,” he became an increasingly ardent Zionist, one without qualms about going against the political grain, and with a nascent interest in Jewish self-defense. Before war broke out, he made trips to the Ottoman Empire, including Palestine, and eventually made his way to England after 1914. Always unique, Jabotinsky became increasingly polarizing after the war, when he founded the right of center Revisionist Zionist movement and its accompanying youth organization, Betar. However, during the war, Jabotinsky made a key and unlikely ally in his quest for a Jewish home—an Irish-born officer named John Henry Patterson.

Patterson—“one of the most loveable personages that have ever come into Jewish history” according to Israel Zangwill—had lived a fascinating life before the Great War. Born in Ireland, he had attended Sandhurst and fought for three years during the 2nd Anglo-Boer War. During the war, he had skyrocketed up the military hierarchy from Lieutenant to Lieutenant Colonel in a mere eight months and won a Distinguished Service Order (DSO). In the period between the South African conflict and 1914, he had become something of an international celebrity for killing the “man-eating” lions of Tsavo while in charge of the construction of a railway bridge in Kenya. Despite his fame and reputation as an excellent soldier, however, his career stalled, and he never advanced further in rank. One possibility for this was his noted intemperance and sometimes renegade attitude, while another interpretation holds that it was his role in an adulterous scandal while on safari in Africa—one in which Patterson’s affair with the wife of a well-connected man in his regiment led to the latter’s suicide—that effectively ended Patterson’s career. Whatever the reason, the damage was significant enough that despite the need for experienced officers, Patterson only commanded the two different Jewish units conceived by Jabotinsky, and ended the war with the same rank that he began it with. But while


335 Stanislawski, 118-9, 121-159; On 159, Stanislawski points out that the Kishinev Pogrom of 1903 has been read back into Jabotinsky’s life history as an explanation for his interest in Jewish defense, but that this is misleading. The two most prominent biographies of Jabotinsky are both two volume works by Revisionist Zionists: Joseph Schechtman, Rebel and statesman: the Vladimir Jabotinsky Story (New York: T. Yoseloff, 1956) and Shmuel Katz Lone Wolf: a biography of Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky (New York: Barricade Books, 1996).

336 JH Patterson, The man-eaters of Tsavo and other East African adventures (London: MacMillan and Co, 1907). Two interesting biographical points of note—Patterson was the godfather to Yoni Netanyahu, and his exploits in Africa were the basis for the major Hollywood film, The Ghost and the Darkness, where he was portrayed by Val Kilmer.

the Jabotinsky-Patterson alliance would be critical in the formation of the Jewish Legion, it was less important for the creation of the first distinctly Jewish unit to serve in the British Army: the Zion Mule Corps.

**The Zion Mule Corps**

The first uniquely Jewish entity inside the British Army did not consist of Jews from within Britain, but of refugees from the Ottoman Empire. In December 1914, the Ottoman Empire expelled those who it considered to be a potential fifth column, forcing roughly 11,000 Russian Jews to flee to Alexandria. The legal obstacles in recruiting Russian Jews to the army, not to mention the protests of Anglo-Jewry, made these refugees an attractive target for those hoping to produce a Zionist-tinged military unit. After traveling to Egypt, Jabotinsky met Yosef Trumpeldor, a Jewish veteran of the Russian Army who had been expelled from Palestine with the other refugees. The two bonded over the idea of a Jewish military unit to fight the Turks, and began to pursue making this a reality.

In March 1915, they succeeded in convincing British military officials in Egypt to enlist the refugees as a “Colonial Corps” with the name, the “Zion Mule Corps” (ZMC). Patterson happened to be in Cairo at the right time (why is unclear), and ended up being appointed the Commanding Officer in place of an initially requested officer from the Indian Army. This was the period when Patterson began to form relationships with Jabotinsky and other key Zionist figures, thus also beginning his lifelong entanglement with Zionism (in a rather haphazard way). Having enlisted over seven hundred men from the refugees—including Trumpeldor, but not Jabotinsky—and trained briefly in Egypt, the ZMC was sent to Gallipoli in April 1915 to serve as a transport unit until the end of the year.

The Zion Mule Corps, despite being a transport and supply unit, often had to operate in exposed positions while under heavy shellfire. On the one significant occasion when they were called into active service, they had helped defend the British line against a Turkish sneak attack, ultimately repelling the attack in a nighttime firefight. On other occasions, their distinct ethnicity and language caused them problems—some Australians mistook them for Germans in disguise on one occasion, and French soldiers nearly executed a ZMC member (thinking he was a Turkish spy) in a different incident. With the Dardanelles campaign coming to an end, the ZMC was ordered to disband in December 1915, and decommissioned officially in May 1916 after several months in Egypt.

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339 Mary McClune, *The whole wide world, without limits: International Relief, Gender Politics, and American Jewish Women, 1893-1930* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2005) pg 46. Sugarman claims that 75% of these 11,000 were Russian speaking and the rest were Sephardim. See Martin Sugarman, “The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli: March 1915-May 1916” (September 2000) Online: [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/gallipoli.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/gallipoli.html) [Accessed March 30, 2013].


342 Sugarman claims 737 enlisted. Jabotinsky’s reasons for not enlisting are unclear, although probably stemmed from his desire to create a combat unit. Sugarman, “Zion Muleteers.”


344 Sugarman “Zion Muleteers”; Aubrey Herbert, *Mons, Anzac & Kut* (London: Edward Arnold, 1919), 86. This edition was simply authored by “An M.P.” A later edition from 1930 identified Herbert as the author.
Overall, the Zion Mule Corps had been well-regarded during its tenure, a sentiment shared by the Commander of the Gallipoli campaign, General Ian Hamilton. In a letter to Jabotinsky, Hamilton wrote that he had been particularly interested in the unit and “liked the look the men and have always taken special trouble to keep the unit on its legs.” More importantly, he found that they had “done extremely well” and demonstrated “a more difficult type of bravery than the men in the front,” as they had to endure enemy fire without the opportunity to return it. Unfortunately for Jabotinsky, the ignominy that followed Hamilton after the failure at Gallipoli ensured that this letter did little to strengthen the case for creating a Jewish combat unit. However, it did demonstrate that the ZMC had not performed poorly, which became increasingly important as Britain’s manpower crisis heightened in 1916 and 1917.

Throughout its service at Gallipoli, Jabotinsky had continually sought to use the ZMC as the core of a broader force. In October 1915 he had proposed developing a combatant “Zion Corps” from the muleteers and several thousand Russian Jews in England, France, Switzerland, and the Scandinavian countries, which would likely have been modeled on the French Foreign Legion. After the ZMC’s disbandment, Jabotinsky continued to lobby for a Jewish unit, sending letters to prominent British Cabinet officials, meeting with like-minded individuals, and attempting to generate popular support (usually unsuccessfully) in Jewish communities across England. For Jabotinsky, the unassailable goal was a combat unit of Jews fighting on the Palestine front: the ultimate manifestation of his vision of Zionism.

There appears to have been little concern amongst Anglo-Jewry over the Muleteers’ existence—they were refugees from the Ottoman Empire, did not reside in Britain, and were not combatants. Thus, they would do little to diminish the overall picture of British Jews enlisting and fighting as British citizens. However, the ZMC’s existence not only emboldened figures like Jabotinsky, Trumpeldor, and Patterson to pursue a Jewish combat unit, it set a critical precedent that just as there could be “Pals Battalions,” there could be Jewish ones as well. Although the situation would have been difficult to predict during the ZMC’s initial formation, by the time of its demobilization in the Spring of 1916, Britain was facing a serious crisis of military manpower, and just as various obstacles to enlisting West Indians had diminished, now those concerning Russian immigrants were slowly eroding.

Manpower and the Russian Jew in England

After one year of war, it became clear that the scale of the carnage would require Britain’s armies to enlist men at a far greater rate than were volunteering. The only belligerent who did not make use of conscription in 1914, Britain attempted a voluntary recruiting scheme in the Fall of 1915 that Arthur Marwick called “one of those shot-gun weddings between the fair maid of Liberal idealism and the ogre of Tory militarism...a gigantic engine of fraud and moral blackmail,” or more commonly, the Derby Scheme. Named for the then Director of Recruiting, Lord Derby, the scheme failed to yield the necessary results, and conscription was legalized with the Military Services Act in 1916.

As the war progressed, a significant portion of the British public became obsessed with finding members of British society who did not contribute their “fair share” to the war effort. For

345 JI 6-1K. Ian Hamilton to Ze-ev Jabotinsky, November 17, 1915.
346 WO 158/966 Jabotinsky to Patterson, October 5, 1915.
men of military age, this could only be achieved by military service. Female militants patrolled the streets, bestowing white feathers of cowardice to men in civilian clothes, while the rest of the public, stirred up, in part, by the press, disparaged the “conchies” and hunted for shirkers. The British government was no better; it had acquiesced to conscription in 1916 in the belief that it would turn up 650,000 shirkers. Russian Jews, who had thus far made minimal contributions to the war effort and were visually distinctive, became an easy target for condemnation.

Eastern European Jewry, many of them from Tsarist Russia, had immigrated to Britain in growing numbers throughout the late nineteenth century. According to Todd Endelman, roughly 120,000-150,000 of these Jewish immigrants arrived in England between 1881 and 1914, with the majority of them taking up residence in the East End of London. The result had been public xenophobia and the 1905 Aliens Act, which slowed immigration and helped temper the issue, but did not fully resolve it. Once war broke out in 1914, old debates put on new clothes. These immigrants tended to reflect the “dominant Ashkenazi religious and cultural perspective of Eastern Europe, the army was a decidedly un-Jewish vocation.”

While the foundation for this stemmed from religious teachings prohibiting murder, it had been continuously reinforced at a secular level by the Russian Army’s ill-treatment of Jewish conscripts. The case of Isaac Rosenberg’s family was a common one throughout the Russian Jewish community. Both of his Russian-born parents maintained a deep hatred of the Russian army, and thus all soldiering, and “the most unspeakable crime as far as the Rosenberg household was concerned was to join the army.” Rosenberg joined the army anyways, but some did not, in part because they were legally protected.

As Russian nationals, they were prohibited from fighting in the British Army until May 1916, when the War Office decided to allow “friendly-alien volunteers” to fight in the British Army. Until this change, however, any proposals for enlisting Jewish foreign-nationals had to conceive them as a non-combatant unit, or as an entity distinct from the British Army—generally a “Foreign Legion” modeled on the French concept. One “energetic and eclectic British Jew” named Captain Webber had attempted to create a Foreign Legion of East Enders in 1914, much to the dismay of Anglo-Jewry. Eventually communal pressure forced him to abandon the idea, but it set an early precedent in both scheme and terminology for the later battalions. The creation of a “Legion” of foreign-born Jews would have a related antecedent in the war—several thousand Jewish immigrants from Russia in France had enlisted in the French Foreign Legion. They had done well until nine had been court-martialed and executed for refusing to reenter the front line after suffering 75% casualties at Carency in 1915—an incident which dramatically

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348 “Conchies” was the shorthand slang for conscientious objectors. As for the white feathers, the most famous case occurred when a woman gave a feather to a man in civilian dress outside Buckingham Palace. The man, as it turned out, had stepped outside for a quick cigarette after receiving the Victoria Cross from the King. See Marwick, *The Deluge*, for what is still one of the better overviews of recruiting in WWI Britain.


350 For the specific numbers, see Endelman, *Jews of Britain*, 127, and for a good overview of this period, continue to 180.


352 Cohen, *Journey to the Trenches*, 124


354 Cesarani, “An Embattled Minority,” 70. The goal was to enlist 2,000 Russian Jews. Of note is that Redcliffe Salaman, a member of the Jewish battalions, was notably against the formation of this unit.
reduced Jewish volunteers, and consequently, badly enflamed anti-Russian and antisemitic prejudice. By 1917, Russian immigrants in France were threatened with deportation back to Russia if they refused to enlist in circumstances not dissimilar from the situation that would unfold in England. Eventually, the French decided to enlist immigrants directly into the army (after securing a convention with Russia), and on August 10, 1917—a few days before the Jewish Legion’s formal creation—“Russians living in France could be drafted into the French army.”

But the British government had been more reluctant to bother with enlisting Russian immigrants early in the war. A variety of Victorian tropes decried Jews as naturally pacifistic, weak, and unsuitable for combat, and the war was still young enough that manpower concerns were not paramount. The only potential agitators for increased Jewish enlistment, the Zionists, preferred a Jewish combat unit, essentially building from the precedent of the Zion Mule Corps instead of a Foreign Legion.

Once Britain had been forced to adopt conscription to meet its manpower requirements, it began to look more closely at the nearly 30,000 Russian Jewish men of military age. However, neither un-naturalized Russian immigrants nor their sons were available for military conscription, even if the latter had been born in Britain. A convenient subject for the xenophobic press since their immigration, the highly charged atmosphere of wartime England led to an increasingly rancorous public anger. The British government, including some Jews, shared this sentiment, albeit more calmly. In September 1916, the Home Secretary Herbert Samuel, himself a Jew, wrote to the Reverend John Clifford that “it was not right that men of an allied nationality, resident in this country, should avoid taking their part in the present struggle.”

The problem was that the Russians were not British nationals, and could not be compelled to enlist; the only way Britain could take them into the army was if they volunteered. Despite various assurances to the contrary (usually by Zionists who saw the Russians as potential manpower for a military unit), the War Office felt there was no way these men would volunteer. As Sir Auckland Campbell-Geddes, the Director of Recruiting for the War Office, put it, “these Jews have not the remotest intention of going out to fight.” These beliefs had prompted Britain to enter into negotiations with the Alexander Kerensky’s new government in Russia about a legal agreement that allowed Britain to compel Russian nationals to fight on the side of the Entente.

In the meantime, the lack of resolution over the Russian issue well over a year after conscription had been introduced for the rest of Britain fueled public (and generally xenophobic or antisemitic) outrage. An internal War Office memorandum argued that “the British people are indignant that [the Russian Jews] are being allowed to shirk their responsibility, and much friction has arisen in consequence; which may eventually lead to trouble unless something is

356 Szajkowski, French Foreign Legion, 43.
359 Englander, Documentary History, 315-6.
360 WO 32/11353, Minute #11, Campbell-Geddes, DR, 4/30/1917.
done." Public sentiment over the role of Russian Jews reached a crescendo shortly after this memo when a riot targeting Jews erupted in Leeds on June 3, 1917. A crowd of over a thousand—mostly youths—attacked the homes and shops of Russian Jews, assaulted men and women, and screamed “Kill the Jews.” While tensions flared three months later in September, when “two to three thousand Jews and Gentiles, welding wood logs, iron bars, and flat irons, fought a pitched battle in Bethnal Green”, the riots in Leeds were essentially the high-water point for anti-Russian Jewish outburst in England. However, allegations of shirking Jewry continued even after the Legion’s formation; in one instance, the Chief Commissioner of Medical Services for the Ministry of National Service was notified that a “Dr Saul” was deliberately grading down the physique of Russian Jews called before the recruitment boards in Manchester, possibly due to “racial sympathy with the Jewish recruits.”

It is possible that the Leeds riot helped push through a military service convention with Russia, which finally emerged on July 10, 1917. Six days later, an Anglo-Russian Military Service Agreement was announced. While the latter specifically “bid their subjects” to return home for military service, the terms of the agreement also provided the legal mechanisms for the British government to compulsorily force Russian Jews to serve on the pain of deportation. The War Office could now force Russian Jews to enlist; Jabotinsky and his allies were poised to reap this sudden development.

The proponents of the Jewish Legion, particularly Jabotinsky, had sensed since 1916 that the discord over the Russian service issue might spark their idea into life. Their plans had consistently detailed how the bulk of the Legion’s core would be Russian Jewish immigrants from London’s East End, Leeds, and Manchester. In addition, Jabotinsky and Trumpledor specifically advocated enlisting Russian Jews from France into their Legion—playing off the hostility there, while also providing another source of manpower not from the still-neutral United States. In the memorandum sent in January and February 1917 by Jabotinsky and Trumpledor to a slew of British government officials—including David Lloyd George, Mark Sykes, and Leo Amery—they detailed the recruitment of Russian Jews from Egypt and France, but made the “military utilization” of the 30,000 Russian immigrants of military age in England the primary focus. As the war dragged on and casualties mounted, and as public ire over the Russian Jews

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361 WO 32/11353, Memo entitled “Palestine and the Zionists” to General Geddes, WO, Prepared by David Davies, April 23, 1917. This situation was remarkably similar to the United States, where the American public decried the Jewish immigrants from Russia as “miserable specimens of humanity” that collected on the sacrifices of American youth. See David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 157.
363 Endelman, *The Jews of Britain* 186. The Bethnal Green incident occurred two months after Britain had announced its convention with Russia over military service and a few weeks after the War Office had announced the Jewish Legion.
364 NATS 1/178 “Jews, Medical Examination of at Hume Town Hall.” Letter from JJ Cox to James Galloway Esq, MD, November 14, 1917.
367 JI 6-1K. Enclosed Memorandum, Trumpeldor to Sir Mark Sykes, Feb 25, 1917, pg 14. This memorandum also was sent to Leo Amery and David Lloyd George.
368 JI 6-1K. Enclosed Memorandum, Yosef Trumpeldor to Sir Mark Sykes, Feb 25, 1917, pg 16. Ever the shrewd operator, Jabotinsky specifically tried to tie the formation of a Jewish Legion to American support for the Entente—
intensified, Jabotinsky’s “Legion” became an increasingly attractive solution to both issues. As a convention with Russia over conscripting its nationals in England grew closer, the War Office noted in internal discussions in June 1917 that “as soon as we have the legal power to take these men compulsorily, if we form some convention with the Russian Government, which will give us that power, we should proceed on the lines that [Jabotinsky] suggests.”369 This was not a closed decision; Amery relayed these conclusions to Jabotinsky a few days later, reassuring him that as soon as the legal mechanisms of the convention were ironed out, “the Legion scheme” would be finalized.370 A few weeks after the agreements with Russia were announced, Patterson received a telegram from the War Office ordering him to begin preparations for the Legion.371 On August 23, 1917, the formal creation of a regiment of Russian Jews was announced in the London Gazette—but what to call these new units plunged the Jewish community into fierce disagreement.

The creation of a Jewish Legion fulfilled a variety of the British government’s needs. It provided a source of manpower to the increasingly desperate Army, it diminished the ranks and countered the influence of working-class trade unions and associations inside the immigrant community, and it helped quell popular dissatisfaction and xenophobic violence. Fused with the precedent of an earlier expressly Jewish unit—the Zion Mule Corps—the creation of the Jewish battalions is hardly surprising.

Assimilated Anglo-Jewry, on the other hand, was caught up in a set of serious contradictions. Russian Jews needed to serve in order to check the perception that all Jews were shirkers and profiteers, but if the schneiderim were unlikely to acquit themselves well on the battlefield, their service would also bring British Jewry into disrepute. At the same time, the distinctly Zionist overtones of the battalions raised the possibility that, if successful in Palestine, British Jews could be accused of “dual” loyalties should a Jewish national home develop.372 The solution for the assimilationists was to minimize the Jewish identity of the battalions.

What’s in a name?

Once the War Office had decided to move forward with Jabotinsky’s scheme, a simmering debate finally erupted over the public Jewish identity of the battalions. The Zionists wanted the new units to be explicitly Jewish in name, whether “The Jewish Legion,” the “Jewish Brigade,” or the “Jewish Battalion.” In its announcement, the London Gazette had referred to the raising of a “Jewish Regiment.”373 The assimilated Jews, on the other hand, were not enamored of the idea of referencing Judaism in the formal title of the units. Sir Marcus Samuels remarked that calling the units a Jewish Regiment “savour[ed] too much of the Ghetto to [his] mind”, and possibly playing off the prejudiced belief of Jewish influence in the United States when he subtly noted that Jews there had “prominent and honourable roles in all branches of life.”

369 JI 6-1K. Typed War Office Minute Sheet, signed Auckland Campbell Geddes, June 12, 1917, pg 38.
370 JI 6-1K. JS Amery, War Cabinet to Jabotinsky, June 15, 1917, pg 61. Amery also noted that Jabotinsky should feel “reassured” that Patterson would be in command, illuminating some worry that he might not have been.
371 Patterson, With the Judeans, 6.
372 Morton Narrowe, “Jabotinsky and the Zionists in Stockholm (1915)” 10-11. Canadian Jews rejected an expressly Zionist unit, and although there was a unit of Canadian Jews organized in 1916, its primary identity was Canadian, therefore reducing Judaism to a similar style unifier as the “pals” battalions of sportsmen, schoolmates, and professionals. See Zachariah Kay, “A Note on Canada and the Formation of the Jewish Legion,” in Jewish Social Studies, 29 no 3 (July 1967), 172.
373 Patterson, With the Judeans, 11.
Lionel de Rothschild echoed his sentiment, mentioning to Lord Derby that “a change of name would go far towards removing the objections felt along all sections of the Jewish Community” to a specifically Jewish Battalion. Less affluent portions of the Anglo-Jewish community, such as the Tailors’ Trade Union of Birmingham and various Jewish societies in Manchester, also expressed dismay over references to Judaism in the title. The Zionists, however, argued that removing any references to Judaism from the units’ names would “militate against the success of the battalions in which naturally all Jews should be intensely interested.” Israel Zangwill represented this perspective when he argued that an expressly Jewish unit would focus public attention on the loyalty of Jews, whereas those who simply enlisted in the Army did nothing to bolster their cause.

The assimilationists’ protestations over the Jewish units’ name were, in reality, a reflection of a far deeper concern with the military adequacy of the potential Jewish units. In a letter from the Jewish War Services Committee to the War Office, the assimilationist Jews noted that they

had no hesitation in expressing the opinion that the very large majority of His Majesty’s British and Colonial born subjects of the Jewish faith were much alarmed at the possibility of having their good name and reputation entrusted to battalions of aliens who, up to the present, have not shown the same desire as they have to do service, either for their own country or that of their Allies.

The assimilated portions of Anglo-Jewry, therefore, were not only concerned with the military abilities of the East Enders, but also with how all of Anglo-Jewry would be perceived by the British public. If, as feared, the Jewish conscripts performed inadequately in a unit that was specifically referenced as Jewish, the public would further stereotype Jews as inadequate citizens. In Anglo-Jewry’s minds, such a result would have been disastrous to any prewar gains they had made in fighting popular stereotypes of Jews, and would probably prompt fresh outbreaks of antisemitic violence.

The War Office, headed by Lord Derby, cared about this squabble only in that it affected its acquisition of military manpower. In a letter to Philip Kerr, Lloyd George’s personal secretary and confidant, Derby provided the War Office’s perspective, noting that the assimilationists

argue that these Battalions, composed as they are mostly of Russian Jews, are not likely to be of very great military value and will bring no credit to the Jewish Race, many of whom have enlisted voluntarily and done well in all Branches of the Service. It really does not matter in the least to me what they are called…Personally, I am ready to call them the Joppa Rifles or the Jerusalem Highlanders, or anything else as long as I get the men. These men are being, of course, enlisted for General Service, and not especially for Palestine…Of course we shall employ them in Palestine, but I don’t think they ought to be specially told that is what they are going to be employed for.

Derby’s latter point is of particular note, for it implies that by enlisting the men for “general service,” they could be transferred to other theaters if necessary. While the War Office felt that

374 WO 32/11353, Sir Marcus Samuels’s and Lionel de Rothschild’s Speeches, Transcript of August 30th, 1917. Deputation to Lord Derby.
375 WO 32/11353. BA Fersht’s Speech, Transcript of August 30th, 1917 Deputation to Lord Derby.
376 WO 32/11353, Editor, Jewish Chronicle to Earl of Derby, October 10, 1917. Note the proximity of date between the Zionist and Assimilationist letters. The War Office was, quite literally, inundated with correspondence from both factions, especially in 1917.
377 JF 6-1K. Israel Zangwill to EM Adler and MJ Landa, August 27, 1917., pg 144.
378 WO 32/11353, Secretary, Jewish War Services Committee to War Office, October 18, 1917.
placing the Jewish battalions in Palestine logically freed up more seasoned British troops for service in France, should the Ottomans bow out of the war before Germany, the Jewish troops could be transferred to another front regardless of their desires. Whether Jabotinsky and others sensed this attitude (or knew it and gambled anyway) is not clear, but what is clear is that the War Office would make use of whatever political motivations were necessary to attract recruits, and held no qualms about distributing its manpower where it saw fit once enlisted.

The combination of manpower needs and a deputation of established and well-connected figures was overwhelming, and the Jewish units came into existence without any reference to Judaism in their title, emerging as the 38th (and later 39th and 40th) Battalion of the City of London Royal Fusiliers. The eruption from Patterson, Jabotinsky, and others was monumental. Derby was forced into meeting with another deputation in early September, this time demanding the Jewish identity be maintained. A furious Patterson argued that without a Jewish identifier there would be no esprit de corps and that it would thus be “a most disastrous failure and be utterly worthless from a military point of view.” Implicitly equating the War Office’s reversal with the German invasion of Belgium (by referencing the famed “Scrap of Paper”), he demanded to be relieved of his command. While the issue was pending, Derby entertained yet another deputation at the end of September, this one “hotly opposed to the formation of any distinctly Jewish Regiment.” The schism inside the Jewish community—and the constant deputations and counter-deputations—deeply frustrated Derby. In a note to Chaim Weizmann, the editor of the Manchester Guardian, CP Scott, noted that Derby “had practically decided to abandon the idea of a Jewish unit” and instead to put the Russians into a “Foreign Legion.”

The name of the battalions was not the only marker of identity; the pro-Legion advocates also wanted the Jewish troops to have cap and uniform insignia that marked them, specifically, as members of Jewish battalions. However, in its creation of the units the War Office decided that the battalions would have to earn “the right to the distinction of a special badge”, which seems yet another indicator that the assimilationists were worried about how the new units would perform militarily. After all, if the units fought well enough to earn a distinctive Jewish badge, it was unlikely that the British public would publicly menace the Anglo-Jewish community. While the battalions did not earn the right to wear a Jewish cap badge (a menorah) until well into the Armistice period, they do seem to have earned the right to fight with Magen David, Stars of David, on their upper sleeves. However, as later photographs in this chapter show, plenty of battalion members seem to have chosen not to wear them, possibly due to self-identifying as British, or possibly out of fear of anti-Jewish prejudice.

Interestingly, while the Jewish units were referenced as the Royal Fusiliers in all official documentation, they acquired other nicknames. Some British military personnel called them the “Jewsiliers,” the ANZAC’s referred to them jokingly as the “Jordan Highlanders,” and others simply referred to them as the Jewish battalions or Jewish Regiment. There are indications

380 JI 6-1K. JH Patterson to the Brigade Major, Reserve Brigade, September 5, 1917, pg 161-2.
381 JI 6-1K. CP Scott to Chaim Weizmann, September 31, 1917, pg 173.
382 WO 32/11353. Press Clipping entitled “The Badgeless Maccabees,” Sept. 13, 1917. Presumably from The Jewish Chronicle, although there is no reference in the file. It is, of course, relatively common that units in the British army had to earn visible regimental distinctions. The Royal Welch Fusiliers, for example, kept their “black flash” in World War I because they were considered one of the best units in the British Army. On the other hand, it could be argued that the Magen David badge was not a distinction of valor, but simply a piece of regimental identification.
383 Each battalion wore a different color—red for the 38th, blue for the 39th, and purple for the 40th.
384 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, July 3, 1918, pg 106; Kinloch, Devils on Horses, 394 ff6.
that the Jewish troops fondly appropriated both nicknames (Jewsiliers and Jordan Highlanders), as they appear in a positive tone in an array of reminiscences. Despite the efforts of Anglo-Jewry to avoid Jewish identity being attached to the battalions, it appears that despite their official title, the entire EEF knew precisely who they were. Ultimately, the fight over the name of the Jewish battalions illustrates one of the principal fissures in Britain’s Jewish community during the First World War. Just as there was no unified Anglo-Jewish community, there was also no unified “Jewish Legion.” Instead, there were three separate battalions of Royal Fusiliers, each of which had a very different composition, and a very different combat experience.

Interestingly, once the Jewish battalions’ existence seemed likely, prominent figures in England’s Jewish community organized the “Jewish Regiment Committee” (JRC) eleven days before the official battalion formation. Given the animosity inside the Jewish community that had accompanied the debate over the battalions, the composition of the JRC suggested a slight papering-over of cracks. Chaired by Lord Rothschild, it featured a mix of upper-class Anglo Jewry, prominent community figures, early advocates for the Legion, and the wives of figures like Chaim Weizmann—who were “on scene” in Egypt and Palestine. While this reflected the broader contours of British Jewry, the JRC was significantly different from BWIR’s supporting committee, the WICC, in both composition and function. As the previous chapter noted, the WICC was heavily dominated by former Colonial officials—not their wives—and played an active role in policy issues. In contrast, the JRC mostly concerned itself with community support and played little role in broader policy discussions, thus paralleling a host of similar wartime organizations inside Britain that offered minor “care and comforts,” social opportunities, and engaged with the public on behalf of the units they supported. With the addition of volunteers from American and Palestine, parallel “Red Magen David” societies sprung up in the US, as well as several local support committees in Palestine. However, none of these ever became actively involved in setting British policy from an organizational level, but the JRC can be thought of not just as a support mechanism for the battalions, but as an internal means for the community to resolve differences of opinion.

Recruitment

Since the formation of the Zion Mule Corps, Jabotinsky had maintained numerous recruiting efforts inside London’s East End, especially after the ZMC’s dissolution. Much of this involved walking a particular tightrope—he was recruiting for a Jewish force that did not exist, but one that might not come into existence unless he could demonstrate the availability of willing participants. Participants, particularly in the East End, however, were not exactly receptive to Jabotinsky’s exhortations.

A Yiddish-speaking sergeant from Special Branch had kept Jabotinsky under surveillance, lest he prove a political provocateur or enemy agent. His reports on Jabotinsky’s recruiting efforts in October 1916 indicated a strongly “antagonistic” reaction from the Russian

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386 Notable figures included: Baron Adolph Tuck, Henry Drummond-Wolff’s son, Joseph Cowen (the MP for Whitechapel), the writer Myer Jack Landa, the wife of England’s Chief Rabbi (Joseph Hertz), and the editor of the Jewish Chronicle (LJ Greenberg). The prominent officers from the Jewish battalions were “honorary members.” JI 21-1K, Report of the Jewish Regiment Committee, August 1919, pg 3
387 JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 126-128. Agronsky later shortened his last name to Agron and became the mayor of Jerusalem (as well as founding today’s Jerusalem Post).
Jewish community—at one meeting Jabotinsky was drowned out by booing, and the next day audience members “several times rushed the platform.” At other events, Jabotinsky and others were greeted with volleys of rotten tomatoes and eggs during recruitment speeches.

A patchwork group of organizations attempted to counter Jabotinsky’s efforts with a wide array of arguments. At one end were many British Zionists, who were against Jabotinsky’s scheme, and did nothing to help promote it in the East End. The basis for this critique emanated from the meeting of the Zionist Council in June 1915 at Copenhagen, which had condemned Jabotinsky’s fusion of Zionism with British war aims as “an unforgivable breach of neutrality” and “as a stab in the back” of Zionist leadership. At the other were a large number of working-class associations—from trade unions to socialist organizations—who allied with anti-Compulsion organizations to protest the Legion scheme. The Home Office monitored many of these organizations, particularly what it referred to as the “Russian Anti-Conscription League” and an umbrella organization called the “The Foreign Jews Protection Committee against Deportation to Russia and Compulsion” that represented 120 groups and unions. The Home Office believed that these organizations had links to Russian anarchists and revolutionaries, which actually may have ended up increasing the Cabinet’s decision to proceed with Jabotinsky’s scheme as a way of diminishing or diffusing their influence.

After the official announcement of the Jewish battalions, strong protests continued from Jewish working class groups in several English cities. A large meeting of Jewish workers met at Mile End in London on August 26th and adopted an unanimous resolution that “emphatically” decried the battalions as detrimental to “the interests of the Jewish masses in England.” The resolution, however, struck a somewhat unwise political tone by articulating its defense of Jews in England through essentially an iteration of Russian socialism—arguing that the workers had “no special Jewish interests in the present war” and that they were “citizens of Free Russia” now that the Tsar had been deposed. This manner of protest had essentially prohibited any possibility of a political alliance against the Legion with the middle and upper classes of Anglo-Jewry. It is also possible that it played some underlying role in sparking the conflict at Bethnal Green in September, perhaps by its tone, although that is entirely speculatory.

The future disjuncture between Jews inside the Legion was foreshadowed by recruiting materials, which emphasized different messages to different groups. A Yiddish appeal to Jewish youth in England argued that military service “is a question of the Jewish future in England,” claiming that failure to answer England’s call to Jewish immigrants for military help would “be a deadly blow” to Jewish rights and immigration throughout the world. This type of document embodied the way in which Jewish immigrants were recruited for military service—veiled

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388 Englander, *Documentary History*, 323-4. These meetings took place in mid-October 1916.
392 JI 17-1K. *The Times*, August 27, 1917, pg 29.
393 JI 29-1K. This was authored by Jabotinsky and for the Committee “For Jewish Future”, 1916. Also available in Englander, *Documentary History*, 326.
threats of damage to the entire Jewish community if this potion did not “do their duty,” so to speak.

Another recruitment strategy for Russian Jews, likely led by Jabotinsky, was to produce a lengthy Yiddish pamphlet entitled “The Right Way (Foreign Jews and Military Service” that attempted to force the issue of military service through fear-mongering. At its start, it declared that there were only two options—“to serve in Russia or to serve here,” and that contrary to rumor, there were enough ships to return Jews back to Russia promptly.\(^394\) Having frightened the reader with stories of “iron discipline” and miserable treatment in the Russian army, as well as the dangers of submarines during the journey back, the pamphlet argued that “the best choice” was to enlist in the Jewish Legion. Having outlined the various benefits of service in the Legion, the pamphlet also took a swipe at assimilationists (referring to them implicitly as “cowards”) and worked to build the Zionist underpinnings of the unit—referencing the Maccabees and the creation of a Jewish nation.

In contrast, recruiting materials in North America did not threaten Jews, but offered the reward of a Jewish national home. A recruiting pamphlet to the young Jews of Montreal expressed this clearly, referring not to a duty to any particular belligerent country, but a “duty to your people.” This, of course, was to realize “twenty centuries” of Jewish aspirations and create a national home in Palestine via “the sword in the hands of our young men.”\(^395\) The idea of the sword was a particularly relevant one—a number of materials related to the Jewish battalions featured an image of a Maccabee handing a sword to a Jewish Legion soldier.\(^396\) The distinction then, was clear. Jews in North America were recruited to the Legion through the expression of Zionist promises, while Jews in Britain were essentially threatened into enlistment, with no discourse on a national homeland. This dichotomy existed well before the pronouncement of the Balfour Declaration, but was codified by it—providing Zionist Jews with “proof” of the reward, and further underlining the responsibility of Jews in Britain towards the country that would commit itself so.

Other recruiting efforts offered more contradictory messaging, as was the case with a 1918 recruitment poster from Montreal, Canada.

\(^{394}\) The pamphlet was produced by the Committee “For Jewish Future”, and translated from Yiddish by the Conjoint Foreign Committee. Reprinted in Szajkowski, French Foreign Legion, 245-7.

\(^{395}\) JI 17-1K, 1918 Montreal Recruiting Pamphlet, pg 16.

\(^{396}\) See AJHS I-429 Jewish Legion Veterans Newsletters May 1976 Reunion Flier for a well-preserved example.
Under the tagline “Britain Expects Every Son of Israel To Do His Duty,” this Yiddish-language poster pivoted off of notions of Empire, Zionism, and Jewish community. Underneath Union Jack banners and three men’s watchful eye, a Jewish man is set free by a soldier, and states “You have cut my bonds and set me free—now let me help you set others free.” This was not a reference to peer-recruiting, but rather towards the liberation of Palestine from Turks. This Zionist undertone offered an interesting contrast to the Anglo-Jewish luminaries depicted at the poster’s top. Of the three men depicted—Viscount Reading (originally Rufus Isaacs), Herbert Samuel, and Edwin Montagu—only Samuel had any Zionist leanings during the war, and Montagu was a fierce opponent of Zionism.

Notices of the battalions’ formation also went out to France to Jewish officers and warrant officers, which led to a number of transfer requests. This process was how Myer and a number of other veteran officers and NCO’s ended up in the battalions. However, these

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397 LOC Pos CAN A01, no 100. Online: http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003675503/ [Accessed March 30, 2013]
398 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, pg 58, 79, 98. One of the NCO’s who transferred in this way was CSM “Chick” Bitton, a Military Medal winner and a Regimental boxing champion. Some, like Israel Zangwill, hoped that Jews who had enlisted as Anglicans “for fear of ‘ragging’” would now transfer to the Jewish units,
requests could be delayed or stymied for a variety of reasons—the noted poet Isaac Rosenberg’s attempts to gain a transfer from his unit in France to the Jewish battalions dragged, and he died before obtaining it.  

Other British Jews enlisted in the Jewish Legion almost accidentally. One Liverpool Jew, Jacob Plotzker, reacted with near incredulity when learning about the Legion. Born in 1900, Plotzker had been serving on a ship due to his age, and when he was finally called up for the army, the review board:

"said to me, what about the Jewish Regiment? I said, what Jewish Regiment?? He says, the Royal Fusiliers. I said, the Royal Fusiliers? I says, that’s, what do you call it, there’s no Jewish Regiment. Yes there is—there’s the 38th and there’s the 40th Battalion at the Royal Fusiliers if you want to join that. So I said, yes, all right, I’ll join that. And they gave me the pass and I…had to go to…Plymouth."

Plotzker’s disbelief at the existence of a Jewish unit shows that even despite the efforts of Jabotinsky and others to promote the idea of a Legion, there were still plenty of Jews who were unaware of its formation.

Composition Part I: The Battalions

Despite the common bond of a Jewish faith, the “Jewish Legion” was a quite heterogeneous collection in both identity and motivation. As one officer noted, the battalions were a “weird mixture of mankind,” a more localized microcosm of the similarly diverse EEF. Officers from the Anglo-Jewish elite commanded Palestinian colonists and Ottoman POW’s, Irish sergeants (some Catholic) drilled immigrants from the Russian Empire, and American Jewish mobsters gambled with everyone. These groups were also in conflict with each other, usually as a result of their individual ethnic identities and motivations for serving. Yiddish-speaking, Russian Jews unwillingly dragooned into the battalions had little in common with Hebrew and English-speaking Americans who had enthusiastically volunteered to fight for the Zionist cause. Many accounts of the battalions, however, have papered over these distinctions in order to focus on, and overstress, the shared Jewish baseline.

The composition of the Jewish Legion changed frequently throughout its existence, but it most primarily consisted of three battalions of the Royal Fusiliers—the 38th, the 39th, and the 40th battalion. At various points, units might be temporarily combined (the 38th and 39th briefly became “Patterson’s Column” during the September offensive), renamed (a detachment of “Palestinians” existed separately before becoming part of the 40th), or permanently merged—in 1920, the remaining Jewish troops fused to become the “Judeans.” These shifts, accentuated by the movement of personnel between battalions—especially during the Armistice period—have obscured much of the battalion uniqueness that existed during their 1918 war service.

During 1918, both the 38th and 39th maintained a relatively constant strength of 1000 men, while the 40th Battalion, given its use as a training and reserve unit, had closer to 1400 men although there does not seem to be much record of this exact scenario occurring.  

399 Cohen, Journey to the Trenches, 173.

400 IWM 12506 Interview with Jacob Plotzker. Plymouth was the location of Crown Hill Barracks, where the Jewish battalions preliminarily assembled before departing for Egypt.

401 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, October 21, 1918, 132.

402 A fourth battalion, the 42nd, appears to have technically formed as a reserve unit from those left behind by the 40th, but it did not travel to Palestine and played no role of significance in the broader history of the Legion.
soldiers. These numbers increased as more volunteers arrived from the United States, but during the war itself, the Jewish Legion mirrored the three battalions of the British West Indies Regiment in Palestine from a technical perspective. The BWIR also was intended to reflect a supposedly unified “Caribbean” identity, but as the previous chapter has pointed out, the West Indians were bound together by class, language, and education. In contrast, the internal composition of the Jewish battalions shifted throughout the war in ways that had more significant ramifications for unit and individual identity, war experience, and the memory of the Legion itself.

The most important of the battalions in 1918 was the 38th; its status as first to form meant it had the most significant role while Palestine was an active theater of operations. Unlike its sister battalions, the 38th was dominated by British subjects or immigrants from Russia, some of whom had been naturalized by the British Home Office. Martin Watts’ examination of battalion testimonies revealed that approximately 66% of those surveyed were born in England, and that the majority of the remainder was born in Russia, but lived in England. The composition of the 38th is encapsulated by two members of the battalion’s signaling section—Nathan Dansky and Robert Block.

Dansky was from the East End of London and a tailor—a stereotypical shnyder, with the exception that he had enlisted before the 1917 convention with Russia. In contrast, Block was from London’s West End and appeared substantially more assimilated within British culture: writing poetry to his “dearest girl Millie” in the classic, Edwardian romantic manner, ruminating on Napoleon’s campaigns in Egypt, and collecting and pressing many different kinds of plants in his prayer books. Despite their clear differences, the fact that they were both signalers demonstrated a major distinction from the third group inside the 38th—Russian Jews enlisted on the pain of deportation—whose discomfort with English would have likely precluded them from such positions.

However, the political undertones attached to the Legion seem to play little role in Dansky and Block’s wartime service. In fact, Watts has revealed that of the examined testimonies from the 38th, almost none reveal any Zionist activity or interest. Keren and Keren suggest that some may have developed an “existential Zionism”—a consciousness that stemmed from shared religious roots. While possible, especially for certain English Jews not swept up

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403 Watts, *The Jewish Legion*, 244-5. The 39th Battalion actually set sail from Plymouth with only 600 or so soldiers, but filled up to battalion strength of 1000 shortly after arriving in Egypt. The 42nd contained roughly 2000 soldiers. These numbers fall far short of what the Zionists expected. Jabotinsky argued on several occasions that he could raise a huge mass of manpower (even claiming at one point that a full division of 10,000-15,000 men was likely). Patterson believed that a landing of Jewish forces in Palestine would lead to an insurrection of at least 40,000 Jews against the Turks, and Leopold Amery was confident that 20,000-30,000 Russian Jews would enlist in a separate regiment to reclaim “their ancient heritage”. The Jewish Battalions never began to approach Division strength, and there was no mass insurrection in Palestine, despite the arrival of the Jewish units.

404 Watts, *The Jewish Legion*, 130-1. Only around one-fourth of the testimonies revealed that they had been conscripted.

405 IWM P346, *Nathan Dansky Papers*, “Certificate of Employment During War”. IWM 02/12/1, *Robert Block Papers*, Letter of March 6, 1919. Block’s “Millie” appears to have lived near Fitzroy Square Garden on Cleveland Street in London—a relatively well-off neighborhood. Dansky, born in 1896, had attested in October 1916. It’s unclear whether he was a volunteer or conscripted, but likely the latter.


407 Keren and Keren, *We are Coming*, 72-3. They do so by looking at the memoir of an English Jew in the 38th named Abraham Jacob Robinson. However, while the selections of his memoir presented in the text do show Robinson’s sense of duty and pride in his faith, there is little connection between the two.
in political Zionism, the sharp fractures inside the 38th between Anglo-Jewry and Russian immigrants meant that a cohesive counter-ideology was unlikely to have existed.

The prominent Anglo-Jewish element inside the 38th had another tangible influence outside of mere identity—many of these men were Army veterans. Of the biographical testimonies analyzed by Watt, no less than 40% had served in other army units before transferring to the Legion. In addition, several dozen of the Zion Mule Corps veterans, who were then serving in the 20th Battalion of the London Regiment, also transferred into the 38th.408 There also appear to have been men like Dansky—conscripted before the Legion formation and awaiting assignment to a unit—who ended up in the 38th after its creation. These men came from non-specific, “recruit battalions,” and thus received some training before arriving at their assigned barracks.409 In addition, the Russian Jews, while perhaps not having seen or wanting to see service in the British army, were not necessarily unable to fight proficiently. Many male immigrants from Russia would have been part of either the First or Second Reserves for the Russian army, so some of the recruits would have had at least some military training to put to use in the field.410 While it is difficult to draw exact conclusions about the number of Jewish veterans in the battalion, a variety of circumstantial evidence hints that the 38th contained the most experienced troops.

Figure 2.2 Members of the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers from Liverpool, Date and Location Unknown. 411

408 Watts, The Jewish Legion, 130-1.
409 Watts, The Jewish Legion, 128.
410 WO 32/11353, Untitled Report on Russian Jews by Waclaw De Czerniewski. Viewed at the Foreign Office sometime in late May 1917. Depending on their age and the unit in which they served, some even had several years’ worth of training.
During the early stages of formation, it appears that the most capable of new recruits and conscripts were assigned to the 38th, with the rest being left behind either for other battalions, for the reserves, or to be discharged. As Major H.D. Myer claimed, “the 38th Battalion had already taken the cream off the rather poor milk that the British Isles had yielded from the residue of the Jewish Community.” Being the first battalion to form, the 38th was able to not only take on transfers from other parts of the British Army, but it could be more selective with the initial pools of recruits. In fact, when the 38th sailed from England, it left behind 400 “derelicts” that Patterson and his staff did not consider suitable for serious military service. This process continued even after the battalions arrived in Palestine; in October 1918, 41 soldiers from the 40th Battalion who had all previously served in the Russian or American Armies were ordered to join the 38th at Kantara. The most military capable Jews went to the 38th battalion throughout 1918.

The 39th battalion also had a significant Anglo-Jewish population, but also included the first wave of American volunteers. The first two groups of American recruits—roughly 350 men—reached the 39th in time to actively participate during the advances in Palestine, the only Americans to see front-line service with the Legion. However, it seems that this first wave of American recruits were really recent Eastern European immigrants, most of whom only had brief residencies in North, Central, and South America. They were the product of an aggressive recruiting campaign in the United States, and their early enlistment into a British, not American unit, tended to be proof of significant Zionist leanings. But despite their postwar prominence, these men only compiled around one-third of the battalion’s manpower. The rest appear to be drawn from very young English Jews (“A-4 men” who could not be dispatched overseas until turning nineteen), British Jews who transferred in after the 38th had reached strength, and conscripted Russian Jews who had not joined the 38th.

The 40th Battalion—the least important from a military perspective—was also the least British in composition. It had begun as a unit of mostly American recruits, but underwent a critical restructuring upon arrival in Egypt. At the time, the 40th consisted almost entirely of American and Canadian volunteers, with some British volunteers and conscripts. The Americans had come from Windsor in Canada, where they began very preliminary training, and were sent off from Halifax in waves (some after two weeks, others after two months) for the trip to Plymouth.

Upon arrival in Egypt in late August 1918, a radical reorientation of the 40th’s composition occurred, as it became the training unit for the new Palestinian recruits. The British

412 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 98. Myer reveals, unwittingly, a classic Anglo-Jewish position as to the fighting viability of the battalions.
413 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 98.
414 WO 95/4470, 40th Bn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 1-4 October 24, 1918.
416 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 100.
419 It was officially mobilized from the reserve battalion for the Jewish regiments, the 42nd Battalion Royal Fusiliers, at Plymouth on July 16, 1918. WO 95/4470, 40th Bn Royal FusiliersWar Diary 1-4, July 16, 1918; August 28 1918.
420 JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 100. See Ben Gurion Letters to Paula for an account of their time in Canada, including Ben Gurion’s request for copies of the New York Times and other periodicals.
had begun recruiting Palestinian Jews in June 1918, picking up 457 recruits from Jaffa and 350 from Jerusalem in under a month.\(^{421}\) Originally tacked on to the 39\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion as the “Palestinian Detachment”, another 200 Egyptian recruits joined before it was integrated with the 40\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion when the 39\(^{\text{th}}\) finished their training.\(^{422}\) The 40\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion, a unit full of Zionists, proudly adopted the identity of these men and pushed it to the fore of their own unit.

“The Palestinians,” as they were known by the other Jewish units, were not all Palestinians. Some were Zionist settlers from various parts of Europe, others were Yemenite Jews, and others were prisoners of war from the Ottoman army. The differences in background are visible through physical appearance and dress in the below photo, which shows a collection of “Palestinian” recruits to the 40\(^{\text{th}}\) battalion:

![Recruits to the 40\(^{\text{th}}\) Battalion Royal Fusiliers in Kantara, Egypt are pictured in the top photo. The bottom picture shows the recruits one month later, training at Jaffa.](image)

These locally-recruited members of the Jewish units were afforded the same pay and proficiency bonuses as other members of the British infantry, although there were occasionally the same


delays and complications in processing that plagued the rest of the British military.\textsuperscript{424} This, however, does not mean that all Palestinian or Egyptian recruits were treated the same by the British, particularly officers. The inclusion of Yemenites inside the British forces was a particular thorny issue; a Jewish battalion quartermaster complained that “these natives” were allowed the same access inside camp as British soldiers.\textsuperscript{425} Captain Salaman despised the Yemenite Jews, even going so far as to say that they “are not racially Jews”, but rather, “black, long-headed, hybrid Arabs”.\textsuperscript{426} Agronsky also complained about the “thoroughly Egyptianized, Arab-ized Jews of Sephardic stock” that were in the 40\textsuperscript{th}.\textsuperscript{427} Thus, while the Zionists in the Legion wrote frequently about the “Palestinian” recruits, what they really meant were Jewish colonists from Eastern Europe inside Palestine before the war erupted. As Salaman himself finally admitted, “the real Jew is the European Ashkenazi”; it was these that he thought should populate a Jewish homeland.\textsuperscript{428}

Opinions about Yemenite Jews inside the battalions accompanied debates about who were the most promising “material” for both fighting and settling Palestine. Patterson wished that the Americans and Zionists had arrived in time to fight, for he felt they “were miles ahead, physically, of the men who joined the Battalion in England.”\textsuperscript{429} But others with less political interest in the American volunteers remembered them differently, as a queer, odd combination of every possible human type. There were writers, gangsters, clerks, wealthy businessmen, lawyers, poor shopworkers, physicians, artists, musicians, actors, prize fighters, teachers, farmers and even a well known trapeze artist…They were not exactly an impressive lot, as physical standards go. There was among them many a pale Poale Zionist whom the medical board accepted only after he had tearfully pleaded that he would make the grade even though he was too short or too light to meet military requirements.\textsuperscript{430}

While there were disagreements over the Americans, there was less over the Palestinian Jews. The general Zionist opinion was that the Palestinian colonists in the 40\textsuperscript{th} represented the future, although this broader term contained several sub-groups that each had their proponents. Agronsky, for example, argued that the Palestinian contingent “made up admittedly the finest and smartest Battalion in the Jewish Regiment, and among the best in the Egyptian Expeditionary Force.”\textsuperscript{431} Neither claim was true, but this hyperbole reflected the mindset that the Palestinian Jews should be the nucleus of the new Jewish state (and thus were propped up as superior to their Jewish peers). In contrast, he discussed the Jewish recruits from the upper Galilee, who he noted were “fearless” but had “partly emaciated” bodies; as a later chapter

\textsuperscript{424}WO 32/11353, War Office to GHQ Egypt, April 16, 1918, 110A, 114. For an in depth look at the delays in issuing war bonuses, see WO 33/960 and WO 33/981.


\textsuperscript{426} Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, July 28, 1918, pg 28. His italics. As with Major Myer’s memoir, Salaman’s work features reproduced correspondence, so I have cited both the date of the letter and the page number where the letter appears. This method, I feel, helps maintain an awareness of chronology. If the citation does not reflect a reproduced letter, I have merely included the page number from the memoir’s text.

\textsuperscript{427} JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 121.

\textsuperscript{428} Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, July 28, 1918, pg 28. The Russian East Enders, being “ghettoized,” did not count in this assessment. The assumption was that working the land of Palestine itself provided a transformative quality.

\textsuperscript{429} Patterson, With the Judeans, 166-7.


\textsuperscript{431} JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 106.
details, the natural solution to this would be the restorative properties of athletics—an application of Nordau’s *Muskeljudentum*. Occasional disconnects between portions of the Palestinians in the 40th and their American Zionist peers also affected the opinions offered on the former. Many of the Palestinian colonists lionized an ideology that focused on “settling the land…and speaking Hebrew” that could conflict with other brands of Zionism. Conflicts over language, in particular, created tension with the Americans, as well as disagreements in Zionist political philosophy (which was often wrapped up in debates over socialism).

The distinctions between battalions are well-illustrated in the following juxtaposition of photographs. On the left, an NCO from the 39th RF and his friend post for a common portrait. Wearing the cap badge of the Royal Fusiliers, there is no visual evidence that they might be part of the Jewish battalions (note the lack of Magen David on their sleeves). In contrast, the Zionist identity of those depicted on the right is clear; not only posed in front of a Jewish flag, a portrait of Theodore Herzl—arms crossed as usual—hangs behind them:

![Figure 2.4 Two members of the 39th RF pose on the left, while a group from the 40th pose on the right](image)

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432 JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 109
433 Keren and Keren, *We are Coming*, 142.
434 JML/1984.125 p 74 Online: [www.movinghere.co.uk](http://www.movinghere.co.uk). [Accessed January 30, 2006]. One of the 39th is a CSM.
The most important changes in terms of battalion composition took place inside the two service battalions, both of whose compositions diverged between wartime service in 1918 and the Armistice occupational activities of 1919. These formerly distinct units were finally compromised by a last wave of American volunteers that arrived in December 1918—1500 men who were promptly split between the 38th and 39th battalions.\(^{435}\) Patterson himself recalled the disconnect between what he termed the “old boys” of the 38th and the new recruits from North America, noting that the former had fought during the September campaigns and “were apt to rub this fact in pretty freely on every possible occasion.”\(^{436}\) Patterson claimed it was a “friendly rivalry,” but the ways in which the earlier troops divested the new recruits of the battalion’s combat legacy suggests a certain territoriality of identity, regardless of a shared religion. Most of the final wave of American recruits were Zionists, while the older members of the 38th wanted to return to their families across England. Gershon Agronsky noted that the mixing produced “a considerable amount of irritation…English youth could not understand the strange love for Palestine which was on the lips of very American” and Americans “could not sympathize with the cold indifference of the English boy” toward their aspirations.\(^{437}\) These ruptures were implicitly verified by a report of the Jewish Regiment Committee, which noted that one of its goals had been “knitting together the English and American Jews”—a quiet confirmation that the two groups were disconnected.\(^{438}\) Part of this may have taken place on the homefront; some American enlistees to the Legion who visited Whitechapel found themselves in brawls with English Jewish soldiers (and possibly with residents of Whitechapel still upset over the Legion conscription).\(^{439}\)

Perhaps the most striking element of the Jewish Legion’s formation was that despite the fierce debate over the service of and military ability of Russian Jewish immigrants in Britain, only approximately 1500 served in the Jewish battalions. Some of these also never appear to have embarked for Palestine; Myer recalled several hundred left behind by the 38th and 39th.\(^{440}\) While this number was a significant constituency inside the battalions, they were miniscule from the perspective of broader British war service. And as a percentage of serving men, they were less than half the level of Anglo-Jewry (there were between 25,000 to 30,000 Russian immigrants in England).\(^{441}\) More critically, over 6000 Russian Jews chose to return to Russia under the terms of the 1917 Convention, and 2000 of those actually sailed.\(^{442}\) Thus, the legal mechanisms designed to force enlistment into the Legion actually caused more Russian Jews to leave England than it sparked into joining the British Army.

\(^{435}\) JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 110-1. Agronsky noted that these men pushed the total who had served in Palestine to near 6000, with a further 2000 technically part of the unit.

\(^{436}\) JI 27-1K. “The Zionist Volunteers from America,” by Lt Col JH Patterson, pg 84. Undated.

\(^{437}\) JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 102. Agronsky noted on pg 124 that this trickled into other areas—notably Anglo-Jewish NCO’s who did not get along with American volunteers.


\(^{439}\) Keren and Keren, We are Coming, 138.

\(^{440}\) IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, pg 98. Myer claimed there were 400, and it was unclear whether they were integrated into the 40th. It seems that they were not considered capable (due to infirmity, mindset, discipline, or other reasons) of soldiering, so it was unlikely they sailed with the 40th in August 1918.

\(^{441}\) Englander, Documentary History, 314.

\(^{442}\) Englander, Documentary History, 314. Those that departed were denied readmission to England after the war. See Cesarani, “The Transformation of Communal Authority in Anglo-Jewry, 1914-1940,” 124.
Composition Part II: The Officers

Yet another set of disjunctures are present in the officering of the three battalions in Palestine. Patterson was the figurative (and occasionally literal) commander of the Jewish Legion, although he usually was simply the Commanding Officer (C.O.) of the 38th. Although Irish, Patterson was an increasingly active proponent of Zionism—and an officer who men like Jabotinsky had the ear of—but he commanded the 38th, perhaps the least Zionist in composition of the three battalions. Although he was respected as a talented soldier, Patterson also had the peculiar distinction of not having served on the Western Front, a theater of war that many of the British Jews in the 38th had already fought in. Whether this created any conflict over his command is not clear (his tactical abilities from the Boer War sufficed for the Palestine theater), and his command at Gallipoli provided him with the necessary credibility with the nearby ANZAC forces.

The 39th battalion, with its more diffuse mix of manpower, was probably the only battalion whose general composition matched its C.O., Lieutenant Colonel Eliazar Margolin. A Russian-born Jew, Margolin had attempted to settle in Ottoman Palestine when he was 17, before eventually moving on to Australia, where he became in officer in the army in 1911. He had fought with distinction in the Australian Imperial Force at Gallipoli and on the Western Front earlier in the war, and had been recuperating from a knee injury when he decided to take command of the 39th.443 Margolin was perhaps the ideal commander for the Jews—he could converse with the Russian immigrants, bridge any gaps with other imperial units (particularly ANZACs), had an impressive and respected military pedigree, and was a committed Zionist.

The 40th battalion, however, epitomized the schisms inside the Jewish battalions. Despite its overwhelming core of American and Palestinian Zionists, the unit was commanded by Lt-Colonel Fred Samuel, a staunch member of assimilationist Anglo-Jewry. Samuel was not overly committed to Zionism or any orthodoxy of faith, and his second-in-command, Major Henry Myer, was cut from similar cloth.444 The lack of pro-Zionist leadership in the 40th did not go unnoticed; Captain Salaman, an ardent Zionist, yet clear product of liberal Anglo-Jewish society, found it ridiculous (although ironic might be a better term) that several Anglo-Jewish officers in the 40th battalion were, in his view, anti-Zionist.445 These types of officers, however, appear to have been reasonably prevalent across all three battalions.

In the journal produced by Bet Hagdudim for the 50th anniversary of the Legion’s founding, Myer claimed that few Anglo-Jewish officers were Zionists. In his view, only around 15% of the total battalion officer was Zionist, and the rest “were concerned to see that the British Battalions called “Jewish” were worthy of British Jewry. The reputations of Jewry, particularly Anglo-Jewry, and of the British Army were at stake.”446 A similar description of the battalion officers was attached to a short, unsigned biography of FD Samuel in language that clarified that while some were Zionists, the “remainder…were concerned” about the battalion

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444 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 95.
445 Salaman, *Palestine Reclaimed*, November 22, 1918, pg 121.
446 YIVO 85740, HD Myer “Notes and Reminiscences” *Bet Hagdudim, Jubilee Souvenir Journal*, 1967, pg 141. This was a remarkably unfiltered claim given the celebratory context of the publication and general postwar view of the battalions.
reputation—implying that the two goals were incompatible. In fact, an October 1917 letter from several prominent Anglo-Jewish officers used a similar concern to push for additional British officers, even, apparently, if they did not share Zionist politics. The three officers—Captain Redcliffe Salaman, 2nd Lt Horace Samuel, and 2nd Lt Harold de Vahl Rubin—argued that the Jewish battalions required more British Jewish officers, for “the good name of Jews the world over is bound up with the fortune of this fighting Jewish unit” and if it failed, the ignominy “would fall on the whole of Jewry.” While couched in slightly more conciliatory terms than Myer’s claim, the point was remarkably similar, despite the political leanings of men like Salaman.

The motivation to serve as an officer out of concern over the reputation of British Jewry may have been a reflexive action for most commissioned British Jews, regardless of their disposition towards Zionism. The majority of the Jewish officers in the Jewish battalions were born into the upper, more acculturated classes of British society, while others were products of the Jewish Lads Brigade, which worked to anglicize Jewish immigrants to Britain. As Patterson remarked about the battalions officers—they were all “105% British.” Their heavy presence in the battalions was of particular significance given Jabotinsky’s correspondence with the War Office on how to officer the then embryonic battalions. In June 1917, he had told Auckland Campbell-Geddes that “alien” Jews deeply resented British Jews who had “forgotten their Jewishness in an attempt to become British” and would prefer to serve under regular “undiluted” British officers than British Jewish officers as a result. Further complicating the dynamic, there were some Christian officers and NCOs in the Jewish units, who though a significant minority, tended to put “British” and “military” concerns far before Jewish or Zionist ones. Ultimately, with the exception of Jabotinsky (given an honorary commission as a lieutenant in the 38th) Margolin, and to an extent, Patterson and a few others like Salaman, the officer corps of the Jewish units represented the acculturated elements of Anglo-Jewry. Battalions conceived and birthed by militant Zionists were run, in large part, by assimilationists.

The result was conflicts between officers and the Jewish political and community leaders that tended to serve as “other ranks” over who was actually in charge. Politically active Zionists inside the battalions were referred to as “extremists” who made demands that were “utterly unreasonable” given the context of the war and their enlistment. One American volunteer remembered this very issue:

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447 JI 13-1K. Handwritten Note, December 14, 1965, pg 2. The signature is illegible, but this very likely was authored by Myer, for it contains references only known to British officers, and Myer was Samuel’s second-in-command.
449 Kadish, “A Good Jew,” 56. At least ten former “lads” died in combat, albeit not all of them officers or NCOs.
450 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 95.
451 JI 6-1K. Typed War Office Minute Sheet, Signed Auckland Campbell Geddes, June 12, 1917, pg 37. Geddes wrote “He told me further that if we want to succeed in raising Jews we must make it quite plain to them that we are not going to put those who join under the control of British Jews.” Part of this may have been Jabotinsky jockeying for control of the recruiting process with more established Anglo-Jewish recruiting committees.
452 Patterson, With the Judeans, 23. This could create larger issues, for poor disciplinary decisions from non-Jewish officers were considered by many to reflect engrained antisemitism.
453 JI 13-1K, Biography of Colonel FD Samuel, pg 6-7. Some of the more notable demands were the right to hold political meetings during times designated for parade and the use of the Zionist flag as the regimental colors. This biography appears to have been sent to Bet Hagudim in 1965 (there is a handwritten note to Leon Cheifetz
The really good officers didn’t want assignments with us because we were a very difficult bunch of people to deal with. We wouldn’t necessarily listen to officers. We would have our meeting and we would make a motion and we would decide what we would do. This didn’t go big with our British officers. They weren’t used to it. They were used to giving a command and being obeyed. They weren’t used to having soldiers listen first to Ben Gurion and Ben Zvi and then debate how the plan would affect the Zionist movement.

Although this account is couched in wry humor, it reveals some of the deeper disconnects between Zionists at the subaltern level inside the battalions, officers with Zionist tendencies (who naturally straddled the line with assimilation due to their social class and upbringing), and the rest of Anglo-Jewry. The military structure and composition of the battalions were certain to generate conflict, a problem that was exacerbated by the physical context of Palestine and the decisions of the EEF Command.

![Figure 2.5 The NCO’s of the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers](image)

Despite these deep social and political disconnects, it is worth noting that the Jewish battalions had officers who reflected the distinct identity of the unit. Unlike the BWIR, which only had white officers for units expressly designed for “non-white” West Indians, the Jewish battalions had Jewish officers. And, even if they were a minority, the Jewish battalions had several Zionist officers, some of whom appear to have been able to promote a particular vision of the battalions’ role via the battalion newspaper, The Judean. In an article focused on tracing Jewish history via scientific race theories, Salaman argued that “the Jew of Europe is racially the same as his forefather when he left Palestine” and, in a more important put-down of

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assimilationist argument, claimed that the “Jew may were a kilt, dance the horn pipe, play the bag pipes, even take of Burns and bonnie bairnes but he remains a Jew by reason of the blood that flows in his veins though he camouflage it never so skillfully.” Accompanying this article was one by Jabotinsky that laid out an array of arguments why the Jew was “a separate nationality,” providing a one-two punch of Zionist political thought. Importantly, Jabotinksy was careful to focus his argument on the Russian Empire, while Salaman never specifically mentioned Anglo-Jewry despite the marginally veiled Scottish references. Still, the prominence afforded to these two articles was testament to the presence of another political bloc of officers within the battalions.

**Departure, Training, and Deployment**

Almost six months since their initial formation, the first of the Jewish battalions departed England for the Palestine theater. The individual battalion departures were spaced out—the result of bringing each unit up to strength and completing initial training—and saw the final battalion to be dispatched, the 40th, arriving in Palestine only a few weeks before the final EEF offensive. The 38th battalion, being the first to form, was also the first to leave England.

Despite the forcible way in which the first battalion had been assembled, the 38th was given the opportunity to march through London in a highly celebratory fashion the day before departing. That this was not entirely practical—the battalions had been preliminarily assembling near Plymouth, which is where they would depart from—underscores the importance attached to publicly demonstrating the transformation of former “shirkers” into soldiers. Maurice Tal, the son of a battalion member, recalled the parade of “Colonel Patterson’s mob” several decades later:

I remember as they came by the old Aldgate Pump where I stood waving madly among the crowds, column after column, led by the Band of the Coldstream Guards and preceded by the blue and white banners with the Star of David and the Union Jack.

In that cold, bright morning, I saw my father march by and company after company of Jewry’s finest—Shlomka the cokeman, Yosel the beigel-maker, Mendel the shicker, Hymie Big Nose the local bookie, just a few among the many tailors and pressers who, for the first time in their poverty-stricken lives, were set out on an enterprise in which they could take pride.

The youthful pride in his father was likely an authentic emotion for Tal, and while there was some pride amongst the 38th as they marched out, there is no question that many were still poor immigrants who had essentially been dragooned into military service. Perhaps revealing the broader atmosphere, rumors spread that many had used the parade “as an opportunity to desert.” More importantly, contemporary sources indicated that the Russian East Enders had “required sympathetic treatment...to smooth over initial difficulties.” The solution, to provide Russian comfort foods—sausages, herring, chopped liver, cucumber, brown bread, and Russian tea—was an indication that the mood of many of these men was significantly more sour than exuberant.


After the parade, the 38th embarked at Plymouth on February 5, 1918 for the port of Cherbourg opposite the Channel, and then entrained to Taranto, Italy. From there, the Jewish troops boarded another ship for the journey across the Mediterranean. Over three weeks after their initial departure, they arrived at Alexandria in the afternoon of February 28, disembarking the next day.\textsuperscript{460} Two months later in April, the 39th would a similar route, traveling from Plymouth to Le Havre, and then via train to Marseilles where they boarded their ship to Alexandria.\textsuperscript{461}

After their arrival, the Jewish battalions were sent to Helmieh, outside Cairo, where they remained for several months in training and preparation for military service. The 38th, weeks after its procession through Whitechapel, encountered a similar phenomenon as it passed through Egypt. Local Jews in Egypt gathered to cheer its arrival, first as it traveled through Alexandria, and again as it passed through Cairo one month later.\textsuperscript{462} In some ways, these battalions were what many of the earlier refugees from Ottoman Palestine had envisioned the Zion Mule Corps to be, and the arrival of Jewish soldiers to help expel the Turks was certainly a symbolically significant contribution.

The exact substance of the battalion training during the Spring of 1918 is not clear—no record remains—but it would likely have begun a program designed to develop it into a combat force. This would have included rifle and bayonet courses, as well as tactically-focused training like reconnaissance or artillery spotting.

It is worth noting that the Jewish troops, just like the West Indians, also went through a period of “hands-on” training when they were attached to another unit. Unlike the BWIR battalions—

\textsuperscript{460} WO 95/4456 38th RF War Diary, February 5-March 1, 1918.
\textsuperscript{461} WO 95/4456 38th RF War Diary, April 13-27, 1918. This trip was over a week faster, probably due to embarkation in Southern France rather than Italy.
\textsuperscript{462} Gudrun Krämer, \textit{The Jews in Modern Egypt 1914-1952} (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989), pg 184. The citation to this is \textit{La Revue Sioniste} form March 15 and April 5, which was before the 39th had arrived.
which trained in a wide variety of military techniques with several different units—the Jewish troops seem to have been routinely attached to the 101st Grenadiers stationed at Umm Suffah for instruction “in the line.”

Each company of the 38th rotated in for two days of training near the Turkish lines, with Patterson recalling that the purpose was “to gain some knowledge of the country, and to learn the nature of duties to be carried out in the fighting zone.”

Abraham Robinson, a Private in the 38th, remembered being attached to the Tenth Division and “coming under heavy shellfire…experiencing an air raid, building gun emplacements, and going out on night patrols” to test Turkish positions. These duties were extremely similar to those the Jewish troops would perform in the front lines, so this type of training was of significant value in preparing them. There is no notation whether the 39th were attached to a British unit in a similar fashion, although they were “training under company arrangements” in various weapons and tactics the last half of August, which probably involved interaction or “hands-on” attachment with a veteran unit.

The larger question, of course, was what role the Jewish troops would play militarily. Other minority units, like the West Indians, had been in the theater longer, and thus had opportunities to demonstrate their readiness for front-line combat. The Jewish troops, on the other hand, were a new unit, and although the 38th had a significant number of veterans, there were strong prejudices throughout the British Army as to the martial worth of battalions that feature Russian Jewish immigrants.

Allenby’s opinions on the Jewish troops varied throughout their service—often due to the Zionist component of the battalions and Allenby’s desire to maintain peace in his newly occupied territories. Much ink has been spilled alleging Allenby’s pro-Arab, anti-Jewish agenda, but regardless of their veracity, they hold no traction while Palestine was an active theater of operations. During the campaign, Allenby attempted to maximize the utility of the Jewish troops, just as he did his Indian, West Indian, African, and other minority units. The basic truth was that Allenby lacked the manpower to be prejudiced; he had to make use of what he was sent, even if he maintained preconceptions as to the inherent military value of different ethnicities and races. In July 1918, he attempted to combine the BWIR with the Jewish battalions for simple logistical reasons—“to concentrate sufficient troops”—in order to replace an ANZAC mounted division in the Jordan. However, the order was halt after an intense and immediate backlash from the Jewish units, who saw this as an attempt to strip the units of their Jewish identity (there are also casual hints of anti-black prejudice in the units as well, specifically amongst some of the Americans).

Allenby was, in fact, not as opposed to a larger Jewish fighting force as some might suppose. He informed the War Office in early August 1918 that the creation of a Jewish brigade was “desirable politically” and soon “feasible.” But it was the War Office that shut this plan down, advising Allenby that unless he was certain of a local source of viable recruits, a complete Jewish Brigade was impossible from a reinforcements perspective.

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made use of a full Jewish brigade is unclear, as he does seem to have maintained some doubts as to their fighting efficacy. As if perhaps reassuring himself before placing them in the front line, Allenby inspected the 38th on June 7—only several weeks after inspecting the Jewish battalions on May 15.\textsuperscript{471} According to Patterson, he swung through the Jordan positions right before the September offensive and asked him if he “could trust the men to fight.”\textsuperscript{472} Allenby’s concerns were reasonable from a military point of view; the battalions were new and contained relatively raw Russian and American recruits.

Skeptics might argue that Allenby willingly used raw Indian recruits after the Spring of 1918, and his concerns over Jewish troops reflected latent anti-Jewish tendencies. While possible, Allenby had also expressed doubts over new Indian troops, and had put them through the same training processes as the new Jewish battalions.\textsuperscript{473} Unlike the recently enlisted Indian recruits in Palestine, there were no veteran British battalions attached to the Jewish troops—which the British felt bolstered both fighting efficacy and the nerves of the Indians—and this was probably of concern to Allenby and his staff. In fact, when EEF units were consolidating into an Army of Occupation, he kept the Jewish troops on the Lines of Communication instead of integrating it with Indian infantry, arguing:

\begin{quote}
In my opinion, 38\textsuperscript{th} Bn. Royal Fusiliers is not suited to represent British troops in an Indian brigade as it is not sufficiently smart or efficient to uphold in the eyes of Indian battalions the credit of the British infantry.\textsuperscript{474}
\end{quote}

This, however, turned out to be less proof of engrained anti-Jewish prejudice, but rather of Allenby’s flexible assessments. Roughly one year later, he had changed his attitude, noting that the 38\textsuperscript{th} “is now composed of promising material and is likely to become an efficient unit with further training from a military point of view.”\textsuperscript{475} Allenby’s issues with the Jewish troops during the Megiddo campaign stemmed not from their Jewish identity, but from their general rawness and his desire to have as many veteran, British units as possible.

Jews at War

Of the three Jewish battalions, the 38\textsuperscript{th} and 39\textsuperscript{th} saw front-line combat, but it was only the former who spent a significant portion of time in the lines. Some of this was due to the timing of the battalions’ arrival—the 38\textsuperscript{th} had arrived in Egypt on March 1, while the 39\textsuperscript{th} had arrived at the end of April. The result was that the 38\textsuperscript{th} entered the front-lines at the end of June 1918, while the 39\textsuperscript{th} did not join them until September 15—just a few days before the start of the British offensive. Since the 40\textsuperscript{th} battalion did not arrive in Egypt until near the end of August, it saw no front line service. In fact, its only major pre-Armistice contribution was when it guarded

\begin{footnotes}
\item[471] WO 95/4456 38\textsuperscript{th} RF War Diary, May 15 and June 7, 1918
\item[472] Patterson, \textit{With the Judeans}, 117.
\item[473] Hughes, \textit{Allenby in Palestine}, 127, 159.
\item[474] WO 33/960 GHQ Egypt to War Office, No EA 2185, Feb 4, 1919. For the integration of British troops into larger Indian units post-Armistice, see in the same file Telegram No EA 2261 of Feb 28, 1919.
\item[475] WO 33/981 GHQ Egypt to War Office, MFA 516, Feb 16, 1920. However, Allenby felt that Jewish troops represented a serious political timebomb if used at all in Palestine or Egypt, and given their reluctance to serve elsewhere, they would need to be demobilized.
\end{footnotes}
some of the vast quantities of Turkish prisoners of war in early October 1918.\textsuperscript{476} In view of these individual battalion experiences, it seems inappropriate to reference the contributions of a “Jewish Legion” when more than a third of its supposed constituents never saw combat, and another third only fought for an extremely short period of time. While it is difficult to question the willingness of those who did not serve, the historical reality was that it was primarily the unit composed of Anglo-Jewry and unwilling immigrants—\textit{not} the volunteer Zionists—who provided the Jewish contribution to Britain’s victory. As Gershon Agronsky noted in 1919, the Zionists in the 40\textsuperscript{th} could only read about the efforts of the English Jews—“a vicarious way of fighting for one’s country.”\textsuperscript{477}

The 38\textsuperscript{th} entered the front-lines on June 27\textsuperscript{th} to support the 31\textsuperscript{st} Infantry Brigade, taking over a nearly four mile stretch of front opposite the Turkish positions. Their position was roughly twenty miles north of Jerusalem along the Jerusalem-Nablus road (near the villages of Jiljilia and Abwein), essentially right in the center of the EEF’s lines.\textsuperscript{478} There were few active operations during this period, and the Jewish role mostly revolved around the frequent use of patrols to press against Turkish positions and sometimes engage them. The standard for patrols seems to have been the departure of two units, each from a separate company, following dinner (between 7:45-9pm) for 5.5 hours worth of reconnoitering of predetermined sectors.\textsuperscript{479} As a general rule, patrols usually contained one officer and seven other soldiers, but during periods of anticipated resistance, patrols would double in size and take along a Lewis Gun as added firepower.\textsuperscript{480} These patrols often drew fire from Turkish positions, and on several occasions there were significant firefights.

After this assignment, the Jewish battalions, like the West Indians, were sent to the Jordan River Valley to be part of Chaytor’s Force, holding the farthest eastern position of the EEF line. The reason for this is unclear, but it was probably a rebalancing of forces—Allenby was pulling veteran mounted troops out of the Jordan into the coastal areas to the west, where they could play a more prominent role in the attack. Much anger was vented, primarily after the war, over the Jew’s stationing in the Jordan River Valley. Some felt that they had “occupied the most dangerous sector” in the Jordan Valley in order “to be annihilated by the Turkish attack in the East, and thus permit the British advance.”\textsuperscript{481} While the discomfort of the Jordan Valley was undeniable, the strategic assumptions of deliberate Jewish decimation were far from true; Allenby would never risk his flank, no matter how much he might dislike a particular unit. Others alleged that no other “European troops” ever went to the Jordan Valley—a rather convenient oversight of the role played by London Territorials and others during the Spring raids across the Jordan, to say nothing of the large contingent of ANZACs in Chaytor’s Force, who

\textsuperscript{476} WO 95/4470, 40\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 1-4, October 2, 1918. Some American volunteers did not even land in England until after the Megiddo offensive was well under way. See YIVO Joshua Joseph Davidson Papers, RG 1530, Davidson Diary Sept 17-26, 1918.

\textsuperscript{477} JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 107. Agronsky’s tone is embittered here, for he notes that the English Jews did not want to participate, but did, while the American and Palestinian Jews who wanted to fight, did not. This, of course, is because the latter were simply not trained enough—a product of their later enlistment.

\textsuperscript{478} Patterson, \textit{With the Judeans}, 62-3. See also WO 161/81 for maps notating these villages and position.

\textsuperscript{479} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 5, July 3-4, 1918. IWM P346, Papers of Nathan Dansky, Order of June 20 1918

\textsuperscript{480} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 5, July 3-4, 1918.

\textsuperscript{481} British Library, Address of Dr. Hirsch L. Gordon, 25\textsuperscript{th} Anniversary Reunion, March 2, 1940. Gordon served in the 39\textsuperscript{th}.
were considered “European” by the various racial standards of the British. While there was no question that the Jordan Valley could be an extremely uncomfortable locale, it was at its worst in July (before the Jewish troops arrived), and varied in climate and comfort rather substantially. Salaman wrote home that while “the heat is very great…there is a bit of fresh breeze [and at the Wadi Aujah] the mosquito has been overcome.” Several days later, he unwittingly illustrated the climactic diversity of the valley when he detailed the position of each company of the 39th. One company was along the river bank encamped in dense foliage; two other companies were at the Wadi Aujah “tucked away in great gaps” along the canyon wall with access to a “delightful fresh stream”; the final company, located nearest the 38th battalion, had a miserable position amidst “complete and ghastly desolation…there is no shade and the heat is intense.” The differences illustrate that some experiences in the Ghor were substantially more tolerable, and also that not all Jews (as is sometimes depicted) were dispatched into the intolerable wasteland portion of the valley.

![Figure 2.7 The positioning of Chaytor’s Force as of Sept 18, 1918. The battalions are labeled as “Jewish Troops.”](image)

The temptation for many historians—especially when discussing secondary theaters—has been to overlook the dangers of day-to-day duty at the front lines. Like the rest of Chaytor’s Force, the 38th’s primary role before September 1918 was to take part in the detailed ruse

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482 Interestingly, given his earlier letters, Salaman himself claimed “we were the only white infantry” in the Valley. See his letter of October 28, 1918 in Palestine Reclaimed, 99. The reality was that there was very little “white infantry” left in Allenby’s forces by September 1918.

483 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, September 17, 1918, pg 69. A letter five days later again called attention to the heat, but noted that at night “it is really very beautiful.”

484 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, September 22, 1918, pg 71-2.

485 WO 161/81 pg 104. Author’s Photograph.
designed to trick the Ottoman forces into thinking that a major British attack would come in the Jordan Valley. However, as the record of the Jewish battalions show, these periods between offensives were still extremely dangerous. Throughout their three months in the line, the 38th was shelled relatively frequently, although casualties were slight.\textsuperscript{486} During August and September, the Turks frequently fired both 75mm and 77mm shells, both high explosive and shrapnel, one night dropping 150 shells on the 38th's position.\textsuperscript{487} One particularly disliked piece of enemy artillery was a massive naval cannon, nicknamed “Jericho Jane” because it had enough range to consistently hit Jericho, and manned by an Austrian gun crew.\textsuperscript{488} Similarly light casualties from shelling in the rest of Chaytor’s force imply that either Turkish and German artillery was badly inaccurate (a possibility), or that the troops were in defensive positions that offered strong cover. Another regular danger for the 38th was Turkish sniper fire, which the 38th made a concerted effort to halt by killing the Turkish snipers. Patterson used patrols to discover the location of Turkish snipers, and then placed his own snipers in a position to respond, or as he called it, “counter-snipe.”\textsuperscript{489} These operations killed several Turkish snipers, but were dangerous, and at least one Jew died during a counter-sniping operation (on Yom Kippur, no less).\textsuperscript{490}

One significant encounter took place on August 28\textsuperscript{th}, when a seven man patrol encountered a fifty man Turkish outpost (presumably in a Turkish salient). Some of the Jewish troops (particularly those of the Zion Mule Corp) spoke some Turkish, and on this occasion, one from the Caucasus used his linguistic abilities to trick the sentry under the cover of night.\textsuperscript{491} The soldier, Private R Sepiashvili, approached the sentry while uttering a bit of Turkish, and then quickly disarmed and captured him. The commotion alerted the nearby Ottoman troops, who opened fire on the patrol and hit two members. One of the wounded was dragged back to British lines by Private SC Gordon along with the captured Turkish sergeant, but the Jews could not recover the other. After returning to the lines, seven additional men volunteered to recover the wounded soldier and returned to the outpost, where they killed six Turks during another heavy firefight. However, they were unable to recover the wounded soldier, who presumably had been taken prisoner by the Turks, and ultimately withdrew. In response to the second attack, Turkish artillery shelled the 38th's positions throughout the night.\textsuperscript{492} While small in scope, incidents like these demonstrate that “war” did not only occur during major offensives. This particular incident was a reminder to the Jewish troops of the seriousness of war—not only had one of the 38th's men been captured, but the wounded soldier carried back to the lines—Private Mark—died of his injuries. The presence of Mark, who had fought in France, and Sepiashvili, a Jew from the Caucasus, in the same patrol revealed the uniqueness of the Jewish battalions’ composition (while also demonstrating the presence of veterans inside the 38th). Importantly, the action revealed to the British command that the Jewish troops were capable of extreme bravery—Sepiashvili’s bold approach to the sentry, as well as the willingness of the second group to retrieve their comrade. Such courage could go a long way in refuting stereotypes

\textsuperscript{486} WO 95/4456 38th RF War Diary July 13, 14, 23 and August 1918.
\textsuperscript{487} WO 95/4456, 38th Bn Royal Fusiliers War Diary 7, September 1, 1918.
\textsuperscript{488} Hamilton, Guns, God, 179; Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed. October 21, 1918, pg 81-2. The Ottoman forces maintained another piece of heavy artillery nearby, nicknamed “Nimrin Nelly” by the EEF troops.
\textsuperscript{489} WO 95/4456m 38th Bn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 6, August 24-25, 1918.
\textsuperscript{490} Patterson, With the Judeans, 109-110.
\textsuperscript{491} Patterson, With the Judeans, 108-9. Watts, The Jewish Legion, 189. The action took place at 10:15pm. The soldier who died in this encounter, Private Mark, had fought in France. Thus the encounter reveals the very distinct composition of the 38th.
\textsuperscript{492} WO 95/4456, 38th Bn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 6, August 28, 1918.
about Jewish men, and it is worth nothing that both Sepia shvili and Gordon were awarded the military medal by the British command.\textsuperscript{493} Jewish bravery was not ignored.

When Allenby’s offensive began in the coastal plain, the Jewish troops mostly held their positions along with the rest of Chaytor’s force. Patterson had sent out a steady stream of stronger patrols (at least twice as large and equipped with heavier weaponry, presumably Lewis Guns), which fought a series of actions with the Turkish rearguard, but for the most part the Jewish troops simply held their line.\textsuperscript{494} After three days of British success in the west, Chaytor employed his force of mounted ANZACs and Indian, West Indian, and Jewish infantry to help block an organized Turkish retreat. This strategy involved seizing the bridges across the Jordan at Jisr ed Damieh (the task completed by the BWIR and described in the previous chapter), as well as the centuries-old crossing at Umm Esh Shert. Located about fourteen miles north of the Dead Sea and eight miles northwest of Jericho, Umm Esh Shert was the only path across the Jordan in the sector, and securing it would secure Chaytor’s ability to push towards Amman and the Hejaz Railway.\textsuperscript{495} Although it seemed an accomplishable task, veteran EEF forces had failed to take the crossing on their last attempt in April 1918.\textsuperscript{496} The 38\textsuperscript{th} were ordered to seize the crossing, with the 39\textsuperscript{th} taking over the 38\textsuperscript{th}’s former positions during the attack.

At 5am on the morning of September 22, the 38\textsuperscript{th} attacked the Turkish defensive outposts on the Western bank of the ford. By 8:30 that morning, a company led in part by Jabotinsky had seized the crossing and dug in, consolidating the position.\textsuperscript{497} Hours later, the West Indians successfully charged across the bridge at Jisr ed Damieh, and Chaytor’s forces had now secured the two primary crossings across the Jordan in their area. In both cases, infantry from minority units had been the primary actors, and their success had sprung mounted ANZAC’s across the Jordan and deep into Ottoman territory.

ANZAC mounted troops moved quickly across the bridge—one regiment crossed right after the ford’s seizure, and an entire brigade crossed four hours later—while the 38\textsuperscript{th} regrouped.\textsuperscript{498} Pausing for one day to consolidate with the 39\textsuperscript{th}, both battalions set out for Es Salt, although the 38\textsuperscript{th} stopped en route to consolidate and garrison a different position. As was the case with the West Indian infantry, the mounted element of Chaytor’s force had moved so quickly and effectively that the infantry could not keep pace, nor was there any serious fighting left to do after crossing the Jordan.\textsuperscript{499} Right after the initial capture of the ford, however, a rather remarkable encounter unfolded. Lieutenant HB Cross—a Jewish officer inside the 38\textsuperscript{th} had gone “missing believed killed” after being ordered to cross the Jordan and occupy abandoned Turkish trenches.\textsuperscript{500} According to Cross, he and another soldier (Private S. Mildemer) had gone ahead to scout the area, when they unintentionally walked into a Turkish ambush—probably a rear-guard

\textsuperscript{493} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 7, September 2, 1918
\textsuperscript{494} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 7, September 21, 1918.
\textsuperscript{495} Hamilton, \textit{Guns, God}, 177. Hughes, \textit{Allenby and British Strategy}, 72. The map on page 72 of Hughes provided the basis for this geographic situating.
\textsuperscript{496} Watts, \textit{The Jewish Legion}, 188.
\textsuperscript{497} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 7, September 22, 1918; WO 32/5128 “Despatch describing operations of the EEF from 9/19/1918-10/26/1918”, Allenby to War Office, 10/31/1918; Hamilton, \textit{Guns, God}, 178.
\textsuperscript{498} WO 95/4456, 38\textsuperscript{th} Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 7, September 22, 1918
\textsuperscript{499} Part of the problem appears to have been the accidental disappearance of some of the 38\textsuperscript{th}’s transport wagons, which prevented them from keeping pace with the mounted divisions.
\textsuperscript{500} WO 95/4456 38\textsuperscript{th} RF War Diary, September 22, 1918.
formation. Machine-gun fire wounded Cross in the arm and killed his companion, and he was taken prisoner. Moved frequently by his captors, Cross eventually ended up in Damascus, where he was finally rescued by the Australian Light Horse.

The 39th were the most junior component of Chaytor’s force, and thus performed a far less adventurous set of duties. As the offensive accelerated, they trailed behind the 38th—taking over the latter’s defensive positions on September 22, and then heading for Es Salt on the 25th to act as a rearguard for the mounted ANZACs. There they took over positions held by Indian infantry and helped secure the general area, bury the dead, and collect the thousands of Ottoman prisoners that the various parts of Chaytor’s force had disarmed over the previous few days. The 39th left Es Salt at the start of October, and spent the rest of the month grappling with the effects of malaria, but also escorting and guarding thousands of Ottoman POW’s across (now) British Palestine. As William Braiterman recalled years later, “What we did was mop up. The Cavalry group from New Zealand and Australia had gone two days ahead of us. When we got to the enemy, they were so glad to be captured that they helped us gather up the guns and game them to us. There was no actual fighting.” This may have been beneficial from the perspective of Anglo-Jewry, as the relatively raw 39th appear to have been quite edgy during the offensive. A New Zealand trooper recalled that companies of the Jewish troops had taken parallel tracks while marching into Ottoman territory, and had mistakenly opened fire on each other before retreating into “a disorganised rabble back in the valley.”

There has been some historiographical debate over the role played by Jewish troops during the final offensive. One older camp—generally Zionist—has argued that the Jewish troops were primary actors in Allenby’s campaign. Ismar Elbogen, for example, has written that the “Jewish Legion” suffered in a “sizzling inferno…under the constant fire of Turkish snipers” before triumphantly fording the Jordan and defeating the Turkish army of Transjordania. These attitudes helped reinforce perceived biblical parallels with Jewish actions, like those of Rufus Learsi, who argued that Umm Esh Shert “was the very spot on the Jordan” where Joshua crossed. In contrast have been more recent historians, who have argued, as Naomi Shepherd has, that Jewish units merely “played a symbolic role,” or who have simply ignored the presence and role played by minority infantry, as in the case of Anthony Bruce. The truth lies between

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501 YIVO 85740, Reprinted Letter of Captain HB Cross, October 9, 1918, Bet Hagdudim, Jubilee Souvenir Journal, 1967, pg 133. In his letter, Cross quite readily admitted that he had seen the Turkish forces, but had mistaken them for EEF troops. According to Patterson, the other soldier was Private Mildener. See pg 122.

502 YIVO 85740, Reprinted Letter of Captain HB Cross, October 9, 1918, Bet Hagdudim, Jubilee Souvenir Journal, 1967, pg 132-4. Cross, at one point, notes that he encountered “several other prisoners including 6 from my battalion” who had been captured during September. However, he split from these men in order to get himself transferred to a better car during the train ride to Damascus—hardly a reflection of unit solidarity.

503 WO 95/4456 39th RF War Diary, September & October, 1918. The remaining healthy Jewish troops from the 38th performed similar duties, escorting Turkish POW’s to Ludd. See WO 95/4456 38th RF War Diary, Oct 1-11, 1918


505 Kinloch, Devils on Horses, 395 ff36. The trooper did not clarify the battalion, but it was almost certainly the 39th.

506 Elbogen, A Century of Jewish Life, 481.

507 Rufus Learsi, The Jew in Battle (New York: The American Zionist Youth Commission, 1944), 30. Given that the Biblical passage states that Joshua crossed opposite Jericho, it seems more likely that the ford at Ghoranijeh was the point of crossing. Regardless, it is extremely difficult to pinpoint such a biblical crossing with the certainty of accuracy that Learsi’s statement implies.

these versions—one of the Jewish battalions played a small, but significant role in the last months of the war.

Of the two Jewish battalions at the front, the 38th was likely the superior unit for several reasons. It had been in the Jordan Valley for nearly two months longer than the 39th, and was thus more familiar with the environment and opposition. More crucially, it had the largest veteran presence inside the Jewish battalions—many of its members had seen combat at either Gallipoli or on the Western Front, and this surely must have translated into a more effective military performance. Finally, because of these two factors, it was entrusted with a more substantial role during the offensive, which yielded greater opportunities for bravery and thus reinforced prior opinions.

For their service during the offensive, the 38th received one Distinguished Service Order, five Military Crosses, one Distinguished Conduct Medal and four Military Medals, as well as 8 mentions in dispatches, indicating that they played much more than a “symbolic” role, and also that, from a military perspective, they performed it well. Other decorations had been awarded to members of the 38th before the offensive, bringing their total medal count to thirteen, and eight dispatch mentions. Importantly, these awards had not simply gone to British officers, but been relatively evenly split across the commission line (nine awards to officers, and twelve to subalterns—six of whom were privates). Given the short amount of time the 38th spent in the front lines, its medal count does not seem to support the idea that the Jewish troops were unappreciated for their service. However, there is no record of the 39th winning medals during the September offensive, which may have been the result of their minimal role.

There are indications that the Jewish troops fondly appropriated both nicknames (Jewsiliers and Jordan Highlanders), as they were referenced positively in reminiscing messages. Part of this may have developed as a result of the affection between the Jewish troops and ANZACs. While on duties during the Armistice period, Patterson remembered the “joyful feelings” when the Jewish battalions were reunited with their “old friends” in the ANZACs, spending much time in various sporting competitions with them. Earlier, he had discussed the “feeling of real comradeship for every officer and man” between the Jews and Anzac mounted troops. Things, of course, did not always go smoothly with their neighbors in the Jordan Valley. Some Australians became angry when they felt that the Jewish troops were polluting their drinking water, presumably dumping waste into streams that moved through Australian encampments.

Jewish Identity

One of the more striking aspects of the Jewish participation in the EEF Megiddo Offensive was its timing—the Jewish High Holidays fell shortly before it began, and two of the Jewish battalions were engaged in military activities during this period. The other, the 40th, was

509 WO 95/4456, 38th Btn. Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 8, October 8 and 19, 1918; Watts, The Jewish Legion, 198. Military Medals went to Lance Corporal M. Elfman, Lance Corporal M. Bloom, and Private Angel. The Military Cross winners were officers.
511 Patterson, With the Judeans, 171.
512 Patterson, With the Judeans, 157.
far from the front lines, and enjoyed a deeply significant celebration that, for many, took place more closely to their Jewish ancestral home than ever before.

Safely away from the combat of active service, the 40th Battalion celebrated Yom Kippur in 1918 “under the stars on the sands of the Desert” in a solemn and quiet ceremony. This spiritually contemplative peace could not be more different than the Yom Kippur of the 39th Battalion, which was ordered to the front on Yom Kippur eve. Under constant Turkish fire, the unit marched towards the front all night, with the occasional utterance of individual prayer. Upon its arrival, the 39th was shelled by the Turks for the next 24 hours, creating an all too discomforting atmosphere in which to consider the Book of Life. Incidentally, the 39th often celebrated Jewish holidays in distinct circumstances; it celebrated Passover in 1919 next to Indian infantry from the 3rd Lahore Division.

However, the 39th’s late entry to the front lines meant that it had been able to celebrate Rosh Hashanah on September 7 and 8. These days were marked as “Battalion Holidays,” and maneuvers and training ceased. In contrast, the 38th was in the line, and one soldier was missing, presumed killed, on September 7, and another soldier was killed on September 8. In addition, the usual detail of patrols from the battalion went out at night on both the 6th, 7th, and 8th, and although they both reported “no unusual enemy activity,” the continued upkeep of standard, military practice indicates that if there were High Holiday Services, they were held within the confines of military service at the Front lines. Nothing changed on Yom Kippur for the 38th; it had its regular details of soldiers in the front lines, and after one soldier died in a counter-sniping operation, his wife believed that the War Office telegram was a clerical error, arguing that “no Jew could possibly be fighting” on the Day of Atonement.

Additionally, the 38th was frequently involved in combat operations on the Sabbath when the British Command would have had a hard time arguing “military exigency,” whereas the 39th only seems to have fought on the Sabbath in times of true military necessity, namely Allenby’s September offensive. The Jews of the 38th battalion, in essence, fought every day that they were ordered to, regardless of religious beliefs. However, while differences abound between the 38th and 39th, they still had more common ground in religious experience then did they did with the 40th, which celebrated Succoth with fun and games while the holiday “[passed] unnoticed” in the 38th and 39th, both of which were in the front line. Once combat ended, the 38th and 39th were able to actually celebrate important holy days, including the Sabbath. The provision of Saturday as a day of rest for soldiers in the Jewish units was easily obtained, since it was a simple matter

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514 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 15, 1918, pg 120.
515 WO 95/4456 39th RF War Diary, September 17, 1918, pg 67.
516 WO 95/4456 39th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 6, September 7-8, 1918.
517 WO 95/4456, 39th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 6, September 7-8, 1918. The notation of Sept 7-8 as the Jewish New Year in the 39th War Diary is odd, as it appears that Sept 6th was Rosh Hashanah eve.
518 WO 95/4456, 38th Btn Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 7, September 7-8, 1918.
519 Patterson, With the Judeans, 109-110.
520 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, September 22, 1918, pg 72. An odd confluence of British tradition and Jewish religion existed in the British Prayer Book for Jewish Soldiers and Sailors, compiled by the famed Rev. Michael Adler, and carried by the majority of Jewish soldiers. The book seems a standard Jewish prayer book, reading from right to left, back to front, with Hebrew script on the right page and the English translation on the left page. The prayers are also relatively standard—Sabbath prayers, the mourner’s Kaddish, prayers for meals, prayers for the sick and wounded—with the exception of the inclusion of the British national anthem! While military action often precluded the ability of the 38th (and 39th, at times) to hold organized services, the possession of the prayer book allowed them to worship individually or in small groups.
of substitution; when no military exigencies existed, British soldiers normally received Sunday as a day of rest.  

In addition to the practical exigencies of military service, the varied ethnic and national composition of the Jewish battalions ensured that while they maintained a common religious faith, the members of the Legion differed in how they practiced that faith, and consequently, to what extent it defined their identity. These distinctions became readily apparent in the divergences between the theoretical “Jewish Legion” and the actual Jewish battalions—especially in matters of language and food.

In Palestine and Egypt, the Jewish units rarely kept kosher, but did attempt to observe certain culinary restrictions on holy days like Passover. In the front lines, the Jewish units lacked the ability to maintain kosher, and instead consumed the same “bully-beef” and same emergency biscuit rations as every other British unit. One soldier recalled that their dominant meals were “oatmeal porridge and strong tea,” with a weekly half-pint of rum—although there are indications that many of the Jews drank alcohol sparingly. There were some outliers to this, mainly a few Yemenites in the 40th who “steadfastly adhered” to Jewish dietary laws, and thus received double rations of bread and cheese. The posting of the 40th in the reserve lines, however, made it logistically much simpler for them to observe dietary laws—whereas transport and supply issues made it exceedingly difficult for the Jewish units in forward positions.

In general, there seems to have been little outcry over the issue—substantially less, at any rate, than the issue of languages of command. This may, in part, be the result of many members of the Legion either not keeping kosher normally, or shelving these beliefs for the duration of the conflict. As one British Jew ruminated—albeit many decades after the war’s conclusion—“you can’t afford to be so strict when there’s a war on.” This seems to have been a widely-accepted attitude amongst the soldiers who would normally have kept kosher. The dietary divergence from Jewish law, however, did anger many of the Rabbis attached to the Jewish battalions. The senior Jewish Chaplain for the 40th Battalion, Simon Grajevsky, threw a minor fit that the soldiers ate meat not “killed in the method laid down by Mosaic law.” Citing the ability of Indian units to observe dietary restrictions, they made the unintentionally humorous mistake of demanding “live cattle…as is done in the Indian army.” The major difference, however, was that the supply chain for the Indian army was broad and relatively well-constructed, while the Jewish battalions by virtue of being British Army units, were simply part of the preexisting logistical chains of the rest of the EEF. Grajevsky and other rabbis were rebuffed due to a stated lack of available slaughterhouses and appropriate animals, and the Jewish troops continued to eat as British troops.

The one noticeable distinction was on Jewish holy days, when members of the battalion attempted to eat within religious boundaries if time and appropriate supplies were available.

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522 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, October 21, 1918, pg 83.
525 IWM 12506 Interview with Jacob Plotzer.
526 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 25, 1918, pg 125.
527 YIVO 85740 Republished Letter, Executive Committee of Rabbis to EEF GHQ, Bet Hagdudim, Jubilee Souvenir Journal, 1967, pg 17. They also wanted kosher kitchens in Jewish camps. Part of their request stemmed from the precedent created when the North American recruits gathered in Canada, where they received meat from a shochet.
Major Myer, in a letter to his wife, discussed in detail the process by which his men prepared for Passover in 1919 and how special exceptions existed when feasible. The Town Commandment issued the unit a detached baking oven, the supply officer substituted unmilled corn for the unit’s normal bread ration, and then the Yemenite Jews in the battalion made the matzah, and also kept it separated from any leavened bread. 528 Other, less Talmudic, holidays were also celebrated with distinct food. In a supreme irony—for it was only a few months after the Rabbi’s outburst over kashruth—the 39th battalion enjoyed an immense Christmas dinner complete with turkeys, pudding, and a large amount of wine. 529

Outside of food, the other significant reflection of Jewish identity in the battalions was that of language. English, unsurprisingly, was the language of command, reflecting the battalions’ official status as British Army troops. However, both Hebrew and Yiddish had significant presences across the Legion, but their specific use reflected the divided identity of the broader Jewish force. In the 38th and 39th, the large number of British Jews and Anglo-Jewish officers ensured that English was the official and unofficial language of command. It was also the general language of battalion discourse—for example, the battalion newspaper of the 39th, The Judean, was printed in English. Beneath the surface, however, Yiddish was used, especially amongst the Russian Jews and other non-native English speakers. Some NCO’s that transferred from France into the Jewish units were considered especially useful because they could speak or, at least, understand Yiddish, and thus improve communication between the ranks and officers. 530

The use of Yiddish could, unintentionally, create problems. One British recruit was ordered to “cease fire,” but he continued shooting—“cease” was phonetically close to oyshishn (pronounced with a “sheesh”), which meant “fire” or “shoot” in Yiddish. 531 Whereas Yiddish appeared to be the language of communication at lower levels in the 38th, it had a higher profile in the 39th Battalion. This was, in part, due to the marginal English spoken by its commander, Margolin, who preferred to converse with other officers (like Salaman) in Yiddish when possible. 532 Interestingly, it is worth noting that men like Margolin, Salaman, and even Patterson, who supported the broader political aims of the battalions, could not communicate in its supposedly desired language—Hebrew.

Only in the 40th, with its large proportions of active Zionists and Palestinian Jews, did Hebrew play much role in day-to-day life. British officers joked that “the real site of the Tower of Babel was Tel-el-Kebir,” the encampment site for the 40th Battalion and its ever-changing roster of Russian, American, Palestinian, Egyptian, and British soldiers. 533 Here, the issue of Hebrew as an official language of command fluctuated frequently inside the unit, and caused some unit disharmony. The Palestinian contingent demanded to be commanded in Hebrew, and

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528 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, March 17, 1919, pg 178.
529 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, December 26, 1918, pg 146.
530 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 98. There were certainly many Yiddish-speaking recruits to the 38th battalions. Significant language problems during the recruitment phase persisted in cities outside London, mostly due to a lack of Yiddish and Russian translators to assist in questioning and medical evaluation. Complaints were noted in September 1917 from Liverpool and Leeds, and there appear to have also been issues in Glasgow and Manchester. See NATS 1/917 “Jewish War Services Comm”
532 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, November 3, 1918, pg 104.
533 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 18, 1918, pg 121. At one point, the EEF forcibly discharged 250 men originally recruited for the 40th Battalion into labor battalions because they spoke too many different languages for any type of clear command structure to be imposed. See WO 33/960. General Officer, C.inC, Egypt to War Office, No. EA 1917, 11/20/1918.
also produced some Hebrew-only social events, which caused tension with other non-Hebrew-speaking subalterns who felt deliberately excluded. Major Myer, as assimilated a British Jew as possible, wrote to his wife that he wanted to learn Hebrew because he was “curious to know what is taking place” among the men, and without relying on a translator. Myer’s attempt was emulated throughout the 40th after the fighting was over; those who did not speak Hebrew took Hebrew lessons, while the Palestinian contingent learned English. However, this was still a British unit, and battalion orders were given in English, with some official Hebrew use on the Sabbath. By March 1919, however, it appears that there was an attempt to provide battalion orders in both English and Hebrew. This may have been an issue of utility; lower ranking officers in the 40th, when relaying messages to their units, had already been translating orders to make sure they were understood correctly by their men. However, a booklet of “Hebrew Words of Command” for officers in the battalions provided English commands, the transliterated Hebrew version, and the regular Hebrew script, but focused entirely on ceremonial and parade ground orders. Thus, Hebrew was never a true language of command inside the Jewish units. However, the debate in the 40th over its use further reflected that the Palestinian contingent represented the symbolic goals of the Zionist movement.

An Imperial Identity?

The broader context of these issues, however, was a British takeover of Ottoman Palestine, and the establishment of an imperial mandate. How then, did members of the Jewish battalions visualize their place in the postwar landscape—would they be a loyal British dominion, or in a holding pattern awaiting an independent Jewish homeland? Much of this is complicated by the events of the Mandate, which changed Zionist perceptions of British intentions and significantly altered the wartime narrative. However, the scant remaining material from closer to the war that addresses this issue reveals that for Anglo-Jewry inside the unit, the answer was relatively clear; a Jewish Palestine would exist under the aegis of the British Empire. With the formation of the Zion Mule Corps earlier, the Jewish Chronicle asserted that all Jews fought for “love of Britain” and that the Corps’ creation demonstrated England’s “superiority” over other nations. This was clearly debatable—the Chronicle clearly sought to promote a particularly positive view, and it seems more likely that muleteers fought for England as revenge for their expulsion from Ottoman Palestine rather than due to any loyalty to England. After the war, the JRC made a point in its second report in referencing the pride of “Jews of the British

534 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, October 21, 1918, pg 132.
535 JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 116. Myer also noted that, “the only difficulty in training them is that of language. However, most of their officers have quite a fair knowledge of Hebrew and the men are beginning to learn English.” IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 21, 1918, pg 122.
536 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, November 22, 1918, pg 120-1.
537 IWM P346, Nathan Dansky Papers, Signal of 6/20/1918; British Jewry Book of Honor, 103. WO 95/4470, Unnumbered War Diary, 40th Bn Royal Fusiliers, March 11, 1919.
538 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, December 28, 1918, pg 150. JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, p 96
539 JI 18-1K, “Hebrew Words of Command,” pg 161. Two examples were: “Present Arms”—Lekavôd-hen and “Eyes Front”—Yashar-hen.
Empire”—a clear reminder of the battalions’ place within the British Army, and Palestine’s place inside the Empire itself.541

Amongst British Zionists in the battalions—especially amongst officers—the tendency was to articulate a Jewish homeland within the confines of the empire. Captain LA Falk, a battalion chaplain and later a prominent Rabbi in Sydney, was a strong Zionist, but envisioned the Jewish homeland in Palestine developing as a dominion of Empire.542 For some, this made strategic and political sense. Ever the professional soldier, Patterson argued that a Jewish Palestine would form a critical strategic bulwark in the region, claiming that “British and Jewish interests are so similar and so interwoven that they fit into each other as the hand does the glove.”543 Salaman, using an unsuspectingly similar analogy, also argued that “the young Russian Jew, who is going to make this land, needs a guiding hand, an iron fist in a silken glove.”544 This guide, of course, would be the British Empire, to whom Salaman felt “the Jew is ready to be intensely loyal.”545

The viewpoints of the broader mass of Jewish soldiers is hard to discern, but it is possible to speculate on the views of British Jews and the Zionist volunteers from North America. It is likely that the British Jews inside the 38th, given the way they configured their identity as British men of Jewish faith, would have been pro-Empire. Those that had developed Zionist tendencies would probably have articulated a similar view as the officers had—Britain would play a caretaker role (this was, of course, the actual stated point of the Mandate). American Zionists, however, would have had little interest in any broader British allegiance. Ben Gurion and others, after all, had initially “opposed” fighting for Britain due to its alliance with Tsarist Russia, and had preferred, at least initially, to fight for the Central Powers.546 Their allegiance to the British Empire was probably in their view nothing more than a contract—they would help Britain win the war, provided Britain helped build a Jewish homeland. Britain’s imperial ambition was not in their interest.

On the heels of the Jaffa Riots in May 1921, Patterson wrote an open letter to his former charges that embodied the dualities of their allegiance, reminding them that they had fought for “the British and Jewish Cause”—but then went further, arguing that they were “sent to serve…to assist in the realisation of a National home for the Jewish people.”547 The statement reflected Patterson’s increasing evolution as a Zionist, as well as the increasing ease with which service for the British Empire could combine with the stated aims of the Balfour Declaration to coalesce into a “National” argument. As the Mandate progressed, this was the view that became increasingly dominant.

By the Summer of 1919, the individual identities of the battalions had diminished greatly. Many veteran British officers, as well as some veteran other ranks, had been demobilized back to

543 Patterson, With the Judeans, 147.
544 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, January 16, 1919, pg 166.
545 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, January 20, 1919, pg 171.
547 JI, 10-1K, Letter from Patterson to men of the Judeans, May 30, 1921, pg 3.
Britain, and raw American Zionists now served in the 38th, English in the 39th, and both in the 40th. It was this cross-pollination that allowed the myth of active Zionist participation to germinate later—Ben Gurion, for example, had been transferred to the 39th from the 40th, which might lead some to assume that he had been part of the September offensives. The demobilization of British veterans had left the battalions with a relatively inexperienced core, and a much larger proportion of Zionists than it had throughout 1918. It was also at this point that the Jewish troops were finally granted the privilege of a Menorah cap badge, which replaced the regimental Royal Fusiliers cap badge they had worn previously. As Allenby consolidated and demobilized his troops, the battalions took on the official title of “the Judeans.” Their wartime distinction and individuality was finally gone; they were now finally the Jewish Legion.

Part II

Assessing the “experience” of soldiers is a common trope in the history of war, and has been a focal point in the history of the First World War in Palestine, albeit one less prominent than the countless works devoted to men on the Western Front. Coupled to this general concept in the history of minority soldiers are evaluations of prejudice and discrimination—scholarly understandings of institutionalized obstacles that both governed and affected the general experience of these troops. Yet for the minority battalions in Egypt and Palestine, discussions of institutional prejudice have been either more anecdotal than empirical, or less contextualized than necessary.

Outside of expressly military issues like battalion training and tactical use, two subjects are common evaluators of prejudice—health and discipline. The first of these—which includes topics like disease, medical care, treatment in hospitals, etc—appears often in discussions of non-British soldiers inside Palestine for the simple reason that much of the territory occupied from Ottoman Palestine was unsparingly malarial. Thus, one of the only comparative discussions of West Indians and Jewish troops inside the EEF pivots off medical casualties, specifically issues of malarial exposure and sickness, as well as pneumonia.\(^{549}\) While discrepancies in actual medical care is an empirically sustainable point of inquiry, most discussions of disease in Palestine gloss over the EEF’s efforts to rid their positions of malaria, as well as the fact that during the rapid advances into captured Ottoman territory, disease ravaged Allenby’s forces regardless of their ethno-racial background.\(^{550}\) Thus, health is perhaps a less effective means of discussing engrained prejudice than the one system that remained consistent regardless of environmental issues—military justice.

Part II of this dissertation offers the first, in-depth discussion of military justice as it was applied to British West Indians and the Jewish battalions. Not content to discuss capital courts-martial or mutiny cases—as is almost always the case in discussions of discipline—Chapters 3 and 4 use regular field courts-martial as the basis of inquiry, demonstrating the intricate complexities of how military justice was applied to men who could be considered distinct. The last chapter of this project, 5, wraps up this discussion by evaluating the use of sports and education as a disciplinary medium—one designed to subtly condition soldiers for a world where military justice would no longer apply. Threaded through all of this is the discontent that brewed inside Allenby’s EEF after fighting cease in 1918, and broader British fears of postwar instability and the potential onset of Bolshevism and other imperially-destabilizing politics.

\(^{549}\) Watts, The Jewish Legion, 186-188.

\(^{550}\) At least in the case of Chaytor’s force, disease developed often after crossing the Jordan River. For the best study of EEF and anti-malarial efforts, see Eran Dolev, Allenby’s Military Medicine: Life and Death in World War I Palestine (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).
Chapter 3
“‘The Full and Just Penalty’? Military Justice and the British West Indies Regiment

On a hot July night in 1917, a fight broke out at a British Army compound near the banks of the Suez Canal in Egypt. While the First World War raged across the globe, on that night at a military punishment facility near the Egyptian Expeditionary Force’s base at Kantara, the conflict was not between the British and the Germans, Austrians or Turks, but inside the British Army itself. Responding to a Captain’s order to quell a loud, but non-violent, commotion, several military policemen found themselves fighting three soldiers from the British West Indies Regiment (BWIR), each of them sentenced to year-long prison sentences the day before. Suddenly, one of the West Indians struck a policeman—hitting him with a plank of wood before producing a razor and seriously wounding another in the stomach.\(^{551}\)

Eventually, the fight was quelled and its apparent instigators court-martialed several days later. The knife-wielding soldier, a Jamaican private named Hubert Clarke, had no representation and declined to defend himself, and was ultimately found guilty of striking a superior officer. Fifteen days after the fracas, he was taken to an abandoned rifle range and positioned against a mud wall. Stripped to his shorts and blindfolded, he was then shot by several nervous British soldiers, aiming for the star of plaster-tape marking his heart. He was the first member of the British Army to be executed during the campaign for Palestine.\(^{552}\)

Clarke was one of the 346 British soldiers executed by their own army, the unlucky fraction of the more than 3000 men sentenced to death by military courts-martial during the First World War.\(^{553}\) Those who were executed, particularly the 278 British Army soldiers shot on the Western Front, have attracted a great deal of historical attention in recent decades. Many of those brought before firing squads on charges of desertion or cowardice suffered from deep psychological wounds, particularly shell-shock, and were probably medically unfit to stand trial. Long hidden from historical conversation, initial work by William Moore led to the first archivally-based examination of the topic by Judge Anthony Babington in 1983, as well as subsequent works by Julian Putkowski, Julian Sykes and, later, Gerard Oram, all of which opened an important window into the murky history of Britain’s military-justice system during

\(^{551}\) WO 71/595. Another account is in J. Johnston Abraham, Surgeo’s Journey: The Autobiography of J. Johnston Abraham (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1957), 185–8. Abraham claimed that when the wounded military policeman, Lance-Corporal G. King arrived at the field hospital, his bowels were held up by a bloody towel. This particular detail is important, as there is some question about the seriousness of Clarke’s attack. Abraham recalls the belly wound as ten inches, while the trial testimony indicates six inches. Richard Smith has written about Clarke’s execution as well, although his examination focuses on the intersections of race and gender in the BWIR battalions. See Smith, Jamaican Volunteers, 128. The Captain in question was GE Sebag-Montefiore, and a likely relation to the historian Simon Sebag-Montefiore.\(^{552}\) Many historians cite Clarke’s date of execution as 11 August 1917, but his file shows that the sentence was “promulgated” on 10 August. A South African private named N. Matthews, en route to France, was court-martialed for murder and hanged in 1916 in Egypt. However, he was part of the 3rd South African Infantry Regiment and not technically a member of the British Army. See Julian Putkowski & Julian Sykes, Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act (England: Pen & Sword, 1996), 59, 298.\(^{553}\) Ferguson, The Pity of War, 346-7. Depending on who is included, and when one “ends” the war, the British shot between 346 and 361 soldiers during the war (346 is the “official” number), but only 291 were officially part of the British Army. According to Putkowski and Sykes, 20, the French Army shot around 700 of its own men, while the German Army shot 48.
the First World War. Their efforts helped provoke a national debate in Britain over the legacy of capital trials, resulting in a 2006 blanket pardon by the Ministry of Defence for all those executed for military offences during the Great War. Decades after his burial at the Kantara War Memorial Cemetery, Private Clarke was pardoned, a public recognition that the system that had administered his execution was deeply flawed.

Despite renewed focus on British capital trials during the First World War, only a small amount of scholarship exists on the system of military justice responsible – a variety of courts-martial that resulted in slightly over 300,000 trials from 1914 to 1920, nearly half of which took place outside the British Isles. Recently, several broader studies of military discipline have

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555 Putkowski and Sykes, *Shot at Dawn*, 282. Soldiers executed for non-military offences, such as murder, were not pardoned.

556 WO 71/595. Author’s photo.

emerged, but all have been heavily focused on the Western Front, and mostly on British soldiers. In comparison, historians know little about military justice in other theatres—particularly the Middle East, which was full of colonial and Dominion soldiers subject to the Army Act of 1914 and the same justice processes as British servicemen. The inclusion of the members of the BWIR battalions in Egypt and Palestine inside the same system of military justice as the rest of the EEF was of particular importance, for these men were easily marked for prejudice and discrimination on account of their racial backgrounds.

Understanding military justice in the Middle East, particularly during the campaign for Ottoman Palestine, provides a fuller picture of Britain’s empire at war, and provides added contextualisation for understanding the various political, social, economic and cultural hierarchies that were so critical in governing the lives of thousands of imperial and colonial soldiers during and after the conflict. This chapter uses a broad examination of the courts-martial of the BWIR in the EEF, balanced against other imperial and colonial stories, to expose the contradictory nature of the military justice system as it applied to “non-white” British West Indians. Due to the fact that much of the documentation about military justice in Egypt and Palestine that remains comes from Australian archives, the Australian story is also prominent throughout.

This chapter argues that many soldiers from the British Empire, but particularly ones of color, acquired reputations for insubordination that were partially the result of perception and not necessarily rooted in any real propensity to indiscipline. Second, it demonstrates how, just as on the Western Front, courts-martial in Egypt and Palestine were overtly punitive and exemplary, often reflecting nineteenth-century norms of military discipline despite the abolition of flogging and public execution. Yet it also takes care to illuminate the checks on the punitive nature of the system, whether informal or formal. In some imperial or colonial units, commanding officers subverted the disciplinary system by exercising powers of summary punishment (comparatively milder than a court-martial sentence) for offenses that could require a court-martial. More importantly, a prescribed system of legal review existed inside the justice system throughout the war, and frequently corrected procedural abuses or overly harsh sentences, even for “non-European” soldiers. By examining the BWIR experience with military justice, this chapter is able to reveal new ways in which the British Empire’s various racial hierarchies functioned,

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559 Determining the full extent of the British military justice system in Palestine is difficult to do with total precision—there are simply too many lost or incorrectly transcribed records. Many were lost during the war and others, including the individual conduct sheets of many EEF soldiers, burned during Luftwaffe raids in 1940. Other records, such as those of executed Indian Army soldiers, are missing, and the only full case files for court-martialed British Army soldiers are for those who had a death sentence confirmed. The majority of the quantitative figures in this chapter, therefore, are culled from several dozen of the registers of the British Army’s Judge Advocate Generals located in WO 71, which recorded each court-martial. For each trial, these ledgers include the following information: name of the accused, rank, charges brought, date of the trial (sometimes inaccurate), trial location, verdict, punishment, notations of commutation or remittance, and whether the trial was the result of an appeal against summary punishment. These sparse, un-indexed records are supplemented by figures established by other historians, as well as the surviving case files of West Indian and Australian soldiers, in order to offer a fuller comparative picture.
Military Justice: The Process

During the First World War, the British Army officially maintained four types of courts-martial, but most soldiers outside of England faced a Field General Court Martial (FGCM), the least formal or substantial of any trial. Authorized by the Army Act of 1914 to expedite legal proceedings while “in the field,” the field court martial could still impose a full range of penalties, including execution, and dominated legal proceedings in Egypt and Palestine. It consisted usually of three officers, one of whom chaired the proceedings as president and held the rank of Captain or higher (although the Army preferred the chair to be at least a Major). The adjutant or another officer from the accused’s battalion acted as prosecutor and charged soldiers could request the aid of a “prisoner’s friend” for their defense—generally a junior officer from within the battalion. At least one BWIR officer, Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani, routinely served as a “prisoner’s friend” and became particularly well-versed in the mitigating intricacies of Army Regulations. Overall though, field trials were often uneven affairs—the majority of involved officers lacked legal training, and there were occasions in Egypt and Palestine when the defending officer outranked the prosecutor, sometimes heavily. The field trials of Australian soldiers required three Australian officers, unlike those of other EEF soldiers, who might have judges drawn from several different units. It was, however, not uncommon in Palestine for one of the three presiding officers, although usually not the president, to come from either the accused’s battalion or a sister unit. While this was usually the result of necessity and limited forces in a given area, the level of familiarity between judge, prosecution, and defense could be of particular importance for soldiers from minority and colonial units, which often maintained a cohesive, self-contained identity that depended on paternalistic, officer-soldier relationships.

A field court martial could award any sentence within the Military Manual of Law, but it could only issue a death sentence if the decision was unanimous. After sentencing, the district’s commanding officer had to endorse the punishment, and the Commander in Chief had to confirm death sentences. In addition, a Deputy Judge Advocate General (DJAG), who had the power to lessen, commute, or quash a conviction, reviewed the proceedings for any legal irregularities. Australians, although they could receive a death sentence, could not actually be executed unless convicted of mutiny, desertion to the enemy, or treason due to the terms of the Commonwealth Defence Act of 1903. Even then, the death sentence required the confirmation of the Governor-General, a near impossibility given previous public outcry over the British execution of the Australian, Harry “Breaker” Morant, during the Second Boer War. As a result, no Australians

560 Putkowski & Sykes, Shot at Dawn, 14; Babington, For the Sake of Example, 12.
561 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 30-31, 35.
562 Putkowski & Sykes, Shot at Dawn, 14-15. Since these “friends” had little legal training, they often offered nothing in the way of a defense, and instead focused on lessening the sentence. Some soldiers declined the services of a “friend,” and there is some evidence to suggest that some soldiers, particularly in France, were not offered one. For examples of outranking, see NAA A471/3382, Gunston, J, and NAA A471/4629, Poulett-Harris, HV. Gunston was defended by a Captain, Poulet-Harris by a Major, and both men were prosecuted by a Lieutenant. For more background, see GR Rubin, “The Legal Education of British Army Officers, 1860-1923,” The Journal of Legal History 15, no 3, 1994: 223-251.
563 In each of the surviving transcript of BWIR courts-martial, a BWIR officer sat on the court.
564 Babington, For the Sake of Example, 12, 14-15.
were executed during the war, despite the issuance of 121 death sentences and various attempts by senior British generals to overturn or amend the Act. Australians were alone in this exception—all other dominion and colonial forces under the British command lacked this layer of legal protection.

The actual court-martial occurred in two distinct phases—the first to determine the soldier’s guilt or innocence, and then if guilty, a period to hear evidence related to the soldier’s character before sentencing. During the trial, both prosecution and defense could call and cross-examine witnesses or enter earlier depositions into the official record, and a medical officer attested, often via a paper form, that the accused was medically fit to undergo imprisonment with hard labor. Afterwards, the presiding officers deliberated and reached a verdict. Bizarrely, only a not-guilty verdict could be disclosed at the conclusion of this first phase; guilty verdicts were not actually announced aloud. If the court found the soldier guilty, the trial simply reconvened and the judges asked for character evidence, a process that surely confused many accused soldiers. After hearing character testimony, the court issued a sentence, which was subject to review and confirmation. Since the review process took time and often modified soldiers” sentences, it could be days before a convicted soldier knew his final punishment. Private Clarke, for example, had been court-martialed on 7 August, but did not know his sentence was confirmed until 9 August, at the earliest. Many delays were longer—one private waited eight days for confirmation of his death sentence—and must have been traumatic for soldiers who knew of their conviction, but were unsure of their sentence.

The BWIR Encounter: Charges

According to the remaining archival records, members of the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine faced field general courts-martial over two hundred times during the course of their service. West Indians could face court-martial for a wide variety of infractions, many of which overlapped in scope. A soldier who had physically threatened an officer might not only be charged with insubordination, but also disobedience or violence towards a superior. Other charges, like drunkenness, frequently appear alongside charges of illegal absence, disobedience, or violence. Charges of violating Section 40, a clause allowing prosecution for “conduct prejudicial to good order and discipline,” could be added to most formal charges, and was often employed if the soldier’s actions had not merited a “real” charge. As the following table of charges and courts-martial brought against soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment demonstrates, a substantial number of trials featured multiple charges (see Table A on pg 122).

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565 Oram, *Military Executions During World War I*, 9, 17. Pugsley, *On the Fringes of Hell*, 131-3. 97 percent of these sentences occurred in France, and 104 of them stemmed from desertion charges. See Pugsley, 133 for a full breakdown. Cornes and Hughes-Wilson give a figure of 129 Australians sentenced to death on page 391. This often took the form of a certificate entered into the evidence. Being medically unfit for imprisonment did not exempt a soldier from a sentence of field punishment. See the file of NAA 471/3282. Franks, Leslie for an example of this.

566 While there appear to be 226 total FGCM’s for the 1st, 2nd, and 5th BWIR from 1916-1919, the possibility of record duplication suggests that the number could be as low as 216. However, this is not conclusive, and 226 is the baseline in this chapter. Possible duplicate entries are: Private E Henderson of the 2nd BWIR; Private J Hylton of the 2nd BWIR; Private G. Brown of the 2nd BWIR; Sgt PJ Cassidy of 5th BWIR; Private C Campbell of 1st BWIR; Corporal JM Willacy of the 5th BWIR.

568 See NAA A471/3342. Glass, W. for a good example of this.
### Table A:
**Charges brought against BWIR soldiers in Egypt and Palestine, 1916–19**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>Occurrences 1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt; BWIR</th>
<th>Occurrences 2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt; BWIR</th>
<th>Occurrences 5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; BWIR</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence or Breaking Out of Camp (AWOL)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping Confinement</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination and Threatening</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>36*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing Property</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutiny</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 6(d)&lt;sup&gt;569&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 9.1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 15.3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 18</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 18.5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 25</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>55*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc. 41&lt;sup&gt;571&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offence against Inhabitant</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting or Escaping Escort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping on Post</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence or Striking Senior Officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Charges</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>73</strong></td>
<td><strong>184</strong></td>
<td><strong>301</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Courts-Martial</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td><strong>57</strong></td>
<td><strong>131</strong></td>
<td><strong>226</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>569</sup> When a soldier from a battalion was court-martialled while attached to a different battalion, I have included him in the statistics for the battalion he was serving in when the court-martial took place. Asterixed totals indicate the inclusion of men not explicitly noted as belonging to the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Battalions, but clearly members of the BWIR serving in Palestine. In this case, these eight soldiers account for one offence of Absence, one of Disobedience, one of Drunkenness, one of Escaping Confinement, one of Escaping Escort, one of Insubordination, two of Misc. 29 and two of Misc. 40.

<sup>570</sup> 6(d) Physically Attacking a Sentinel; 9.1 Disobeying a Superior Officer’s Orders; 11 Disobeying a General Order; 15.3 Absent without Leave; 18 Deliberate Injury or Faking Illness to Escape Duty; 18.5 An unspecified Fraudulent Act or Any Other Disgraceful Conduct; 25 Deliberately Making False Statements on Official Forms and Documents or Altering or Stealing them; 29 Providing False Evidence in a Military Court. *Manual of Military Law*, 6th edn. (London: HMSO, 1914), pp. 381-405.

<sup>571</sup> A catch-all clause for trying Army soldiers for a variety of civil offences punishable by ordinary law, such as murder, in an Army court. *Manual of Military Law*, 413.
The most striking theme in the table, however, is the number of cases brought on charges of contravening authority. BWIR soldiers were charged with disobedience, insubordination, violence to a superior officer, or a related “Misc” charge, one-hundred and nineteen times—almost 40 percent of the total charges brought. If the catch-all charge of Section 40, which was often applied to cases related to military authority, is included, the percentage increases to nearly 60 percent. These percentages are significantly higher than in the other units for which comparative information exists. Charges brought against New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEF) soldiers in Egypt and Palestine generally consisted of charges of drunkenness or minor AWOL violations, with some serious charges like rape (three cases), and “a number for theft and violence against civilians.” Although the NZEF had five times more men in Palestine than the West Indian battalions, there was nowhere near the number of authority-related charges brought against its soldiers. Even when expanded to include the NZEF in France, just under 17 percent of the charges were authority-related. For further contrast, over a similar timeframe (and in the wake of the Easter rebellion), Irish soldiers in France only faced court martial for disobedience 6 percent of the time, insubordination 2.6 percent, or violence to a superior officer .04 percent of the time. The BWIR battalions, it seems, far outstripped another units in terms of authority-related courts-martial.

The frequency of authority-related charges could mean that the West Indian volunteers had difficulty adapting to life in the army, but it more likely indicates that British officers were quicker to perceive indiscipline or a challenge to their authority, and court-martialed soldiers accordingly. The BWIR’s status as a regular, volunteer unit of the British Army, not a colonial unit, meant that when faced with prejudice or abuse from officers outside their regiment, West Indian soldiers may have responded by invoking their rights as British soldiers, which a prejudiced officer would immediately view as insubordinate behavior. Despite the fact that the charges could be interpreted to reveal a broad pattern of insubordination, no member of the BWIR faced charges of mutiny in Egypt and Palestine. While prejudice over orders or pay did generate unrest, it is surprising that a minority unit with supposed discipline issues never faced a mutiny charge, especially within the context of the following chapter, which reveals how quickly they could be applied to Jewish soldiers. Critically, the army did court-martial other West Indian soldiers in Europe for mutiny—many of them after a rebellion against discriminatory practices while stationed in Italy.

Of course, West Indians were not the only soldiers in the EEF perceived to be inherently problematic. Australian troops, once the subject of British fascination for their rugged, outback charm, became less appealing to the British when subject to strict discipline. By 1918, nine

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572 In fact, all but three of the seventeen courts-martial in the BWIR’s first six months of service were for charges of disobedience, insubordination, or violence to officers. See WO 213/8 through 213/10.
573 In fact, the NZEF only had 93 courts martial cases in Egypt and Palestine from 1917 to 1919, less than half the total of the BWIR. Pugsley, On the Fringes of Hell, 56, 347.
574 Bowman, The Irish Regiments, 157t. Bowman’s timeframe for measuring these offenses is October 1916 through the end of February 1918.
575 A comment in CO 318/348/5991 noted that “the West Indian negro is in general proud of his British nationality (even to the point of being obnoxious about it abroad).” Although subsumed within its own problematic racial hierarchy, this comment does lend credence to the idea of West Indian soldiers reminding prejudiced English officers of their rights.
576 The circumstances that had led to Clarke’s attack in the compound, for example, could be considered collective disobedience. The imprisoned West Indians had questioned the authority of a passing white officer when they inverted the chain of command by shouting orders at him, and further subverted the system of military discipline by threatening him with bodily harm if he entered the compound. See WO 71/595.
Australians per thousand were in military prison, compared to 1.6 per thousand for New Zealanders, South Africans, and Canadians combined. One British soldier in Palestine recalled the Australians as “rather grim looking fellows” who did not ‘seem to pay much attention to discipline, at anyrate(sic) by ‘Imperial’ standards.” Another summed up their detached attitude, writing in his diary that

> The national sport of Australia must surely be lamp-post leaning. Wherever a lamp-post or pillar can be found in this country an Australian can be found attached, legs crossed, smoking, gazing amusedly at the world from beneath his broad-brimmed hat. They say that an Anzac got leave from the Jordan Valley after eleven months, and that he never passed Kantara Station on his journey down to Cairo. He found the station lamp-post, and was still there when the train left for up the line next week.

Australian indifference to British conceptions of proper bearing during the Palestine campaign was, in part, motivated by the social environment they encountered upon their arrival in Egypt. Not unlike “coloured” West Indians, who despite being educated and often of middle-class standing in their home colonies, found themselves ignored (or ridiculed) in white, British society, non-commissioned Australians were often left outside of “European” society while in the Middle East. Many of these circles were upper class and scornful of the ordinary “digger,” leaving many Australians deeply frustrated by their inability to “establish friendships with…their co-subjects in the British Empire.”

Resentment often boiled over into conflict, especially after the bungled British operations at Gallipoli. Several Australian troopers, for example, woke one morning to find themselves facing court-martial for drunkenly assaulting several British non-commissioned officers—an incident in which they had attempted to throw the British off a moving train.

Many Australian officers were aware of their men’s frequent conflicts with British soldiers, and on occasion, altered disciplinary proceedings to compensate for this relationship. In particular, many assumed British provocation of the ir troopers, regardless of what military policemen might testify to in court. This, of course, was only possible because of the “all-Australian” makeup of each court-martial, as it is unlikely British officers would have allowed this. In one instance, the presiding Australian officer in one court-martial, a Major Brooks, even took it upon himself to write a letter to senior officers explaining that he “is of the opinion that the accused acted under considerable provocation, and has therefore awarded a very light sentence considering the gravity of the charge”—in this case, the striking of a senior officer. In another instance, an Australian officer refused to try West Indians on charges that a previous British officer had been more than happy to convict them on.

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577 Corns and Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone*, 391.
581 NAA A471/3342. Glass, W. The instigator, Trooper W. Glass, was found guilty at Moascar in September 1917 of drunkenness and violence against a superior officer, charges for which he was sentenced to nine months of imprisonment with hard labor. Glass, importantly, has been wounded at Gallipoli.
582 See NAA 471/4337 McConnachy, Clifford Peter and NAA 471/9721, Murray, A.J. for cases in which Australian officers explicitly assumed provocation by British soldiers in order to lessen punishment on Australian troopers.
583 NAA A471/3382, Gunston, J. Letter from Major JJ Brooks to Convening Authority of FGCM of Trooper Gunson, 6 June 1918.
584 CLR James, *Captain Cipriani*, 31.
British command, not least because they subverted the entire nature of the court-martial system, which relied on harshly punitive sentences, balanced with later review, to maintain discipline.

In the British Army, the general tendency for officers serving on a field court martial was to issue severe sentences to all non-commissioned soldiers found guilty. The majority of officers lacked legal training, many were influenced by classist beliefs to see common soldiers as inherently guilty of crime, and there was a general desire to maintain discipline by convicting, particularly in colonial units. One historian has persuasively argued that most officers viewed field courts-martial simply as “components of the penal process,” merely a means by which to make examples. The statements of a brigadier-general in Palestine bear this out: in a furious letter, he accused an Australian major of “mental peculiarities” because “he is unable to conceive that an accused person can be satisfactorily convicted of an offence unless the evidence given for the prosecution and the defence tallies in every respect.”

The system of military justice, therefore, was not designed to establish the guilt or innocence of a soldier, but rather to remind all soldiers of the power of military authority. These attitudes were magnified in the trials of black and “coloured” soldiers, and West Indians received particularly harsh sentences, an additional reminder that many officers felt the need to discipline “non-European” colonials particularly severely and remind them of their place in the imperial hierarchy.

In the vast majority of cases, BWIR soldiers were sentenced to some form of detention—either in the field or behind the lines. The most common sentences handed down were imprisonment with hard labor or a form of field punishment—the former occurring in ninety-seven cases (43 percent of total sentences), and the latter in seventy-nine (35 percent). The worst form of imprisonment, but also the least commonly prescribed, was a sentence of penal servitude, which occurred in fourteen cases (6 percent of total sentences). Unfortunately, due to the small sample size and the fact that soldiers could face multiple charges, it is impossible to develop an accurate correlation between charge and sentence. However, comparison with the sentencing of court-martialed New Zealanders in Egypt reveals that they also were more likely to receive a sentence of imprisonment or penal servitude (36 sentences) than field punishment (19 sentences), but that as a percentage of total sentences, New Zealanders faced lighter punishment. A similar comparison with the sentences handed to Irish soldiers in France reveals sharp disparities—courts-martial sentenced only 10 percent of Irish soldiers to imprisonment with hard labor, and less than 2 percent to penal servitude. FGCMs in the Sinai and Palestine sentenced West Indians with a very heavy hand.

A careful examination of the frequency of acquittals in the courts martial of BWIR soldiers further supports this conclusion. According to the voluminous *Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War,* there were a total of 304,262 courts-martial in

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585 Babington, *For the Sake of Example,* xi. For a differing opinion, see Corn and Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfold and Alone,* 1-38.

586 NAA 471/4337 McConnachy, Clifford Peter. Brigadier General Commanding Palestine Lines of Communication to General Officer Commanding, AIF, 7 March 1919

587 Of the seventy-nine sentences of field punishment, forty-three were of the harsher, “Number 1” variety, twenty-eight were the “Number 2” variety, and eight sentences did not notate the type (later, this chapter explains exactly what field punishment was and its importance).

588 Pugsley, *The ANZAC Experience,* 130-1. 78 percent of BWIR cases resulted in imprisonment or field punishment, versus 46 percent of NZEF cases. If only imprisonment sentences are compared, the ratio falls to 49 percent in the BWIR to 37 percent in the NZEF. The statistics for the full NZEF, including France, was 18.58 percent imprisonment, 23.6 percent field punishment, and 1.17 percent penal servitude.

589 Bowman, *The Irish Regiments,* 158. Percentages calculated based on the absolute numbers provided in his table on the page.
the British Army from August 1914 until March 1920, with 154,339 of these cases occurring outside of England. Of the cases occurring abroad, 10.05 percent of soldiers were found “not guilty.” At first glance, the “not guilty” rate of the BWIR for 1916-1919 is comparable—23 of the 226 courts-martial in Palestine, or 10.17 percent, resulted in “not guilty” verdicts. However, a closer examination of when these verdicts occurred reveals a more complex picture. Using the October 30, 1918 armistice with the Ottoman Empire as the dividing line, it becomes clear that the BWIR faced a significantly higher conviction rate during the war than during the occupation period. 161 courts-martial of BWIR soldiers occurred before the October Armistice, of which only 8 yielded a “not guilty” verdict, a rate of 4.96 percent—roughly half of the average army rate. After the October Armistice, however, courts-martial reached 15 “not guilty” verdicts out of 65 cases, a 23 percent rate. In contrast, Timothy Bowman has revealed that from October 1916 until February 1918, the “not guilty” rate for Irish units in France was 12.5 percent, two and half times greater than that of the BWIR in Palestine. Even though the aforementioned “10 percent” rate across the British Army included courts-martial constituted after the European armistice, when convictions would likely be lower, it still seems that West Indian soldiers were more likely to be found guilty than their army peers.

The severity of punishment often depended on the “character” of the accused—a word that encompassed both his past disciplinary record and whether his officers thought he was an effective soldier. As a result, it was common for accused EEF soldiers to have their officers speak on their behalf during sentencing. One Australian major noted the “exemplary character as a soldier” of one accused, and drew particular attention to his service at the battles of El Romani and Bir-el-Abd. At a different trial, another Australian major swore that the accused was “a capable and reliable NCO, his character on all occasions has been above reproach, and…one of the squadron’s best NCOs.” In the capital trial of a Jamaican BWIR private, James Mitchell, the company captain, in an attempt to avoid a death sentence, argued that Mitchell’s “character is excellent and he has never been accused of a crime before”. Private Clarke, on the other hand, had been deemed a problem; the description of Clarke’s character on his conduct sheet was one significant word: “Bad.”

A court might assume that a soldier without testimony on his behalf was unwanted by his officers, and anyone who had “bad” character, perhaps having committed multiple offenses, faced rapidly escalating punishments. One Australian trooper in the 2nd Light Horse received two minor punishments for separate infractions in March 1916, before a court-martial sentenced him to two months of field punishment for insubordinate language in January 1917. A few months

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590 Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920 (London: HMSO, 1920), 643. The total number is made up of 407 Officers and 153,992 soldiers.
591 Statistics of the military effort of the British Empire during the Great War, 1914-1920 (London: HMSO, 1920), 644. The total number of not-guilty verdicts as a percentage of officers and ordinary ranks, was 10.08 percent.
592 Unsurprisingly, privates stood a higher chance of being convicted than non-commissioned officers. There were one-hundred and ninety-five instances of BWIR privates facing court-martial in Palestine, and in only fourteen of them was a not-guilty verdict delivered—a rate of 7 percent. However, seven of the nineteen NCO’s tried were found not guilty—a rate of 37 percent. This disparity is, more or less, in line with general trends in sentencing across the Army, where officers were found innocent twice as frequently as regular soldiers (20.39 percent to 10.05 percent), a reflection of sharp British class divisions.
593 Bowman, The Irish Regiments, 158t.
594 NAA A471/4629, Poulett-Harris, HV.
595 NAA A471/20226, McPhee, Duncan. Testimony of Major Stodart, MC.
596 WO 71/629/16, 2nd Testimony of Captain TH Irving.
597 Conduct Sheet of HA Clarke, WO 71/595.
later, another trial for insubordination led this time to six months of imprisonment at hard labor. When the same trooper pled guilty to disobedience in a July 1918 court-martial, his past history guaranteed a harsh sentence—five years of penal servitude.\footnote{NAA A471/14773, Jarman, Edward George. Jarman would have known he would face a severe punishment—he had disobeyed an order to join a listening post allegedly stating “I’m fucked if I will go on”, and then punched his troop officer, 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lieutenant WK Thomson, in the face before threatening to murder him. The presiding officer of the court-martial, knowing full well that the sentence had to be severe, had repeatedly begged Jarman not to plead guilty, or at least to make a statement in his own defense.} Private Clarke’s disciplinary history also escalated—from eating on parade in March 1917, to “having a dirty Dixie” and being “improperly dressed” in May 1917, to finally “persistently marching improperly,” a violation of Section 40’s “conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.”\footnote{Conduct Sheet of HA Clarke, WO 71/595.} The latter charge, despite being relatively minor, was probably viewed as sufficiently compounding to earn Clarke the one year of imprisonment that he was beginning when the altercation occurred that led to his far costlier sentence. Inefficient soldiers tended to face harsher penalties, placing many West Indians at an inherent legal disadvantage, since there were many British officers who thought that “the West Indian would never be any use as a soldier, and that his fighting qualities are doubtful.”\footnote{Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 8} Such assumptions might further explain why BWIR soldiers were routinely sentenced with what appears to be an overly heavy hand.

The court-martial was, therefore, a legal proceeding in which assumptions, rather than the facts of the case, bore substantial influence. One Australian officer unwittingly revealed the structure of FGCMs in a letter, noting that his rulings were always balanced, “excepting in the cases of a few particularly and consistently ill behaved soldiers to whom I have been instrumental in awarding heavier punishment than was perhaps necessary for the actual offence.” This was the nature of the courts-martial system—it made examples of soldiers with “bad” character or poor service records. However, a liberal counter-weight was built into the system, which the same Australian noted, “in these cases it was done for disciplinary reasons by the effect of immediate promulgation, and in each of these cases remissions were made of portion of sentences awarded.”\footnote{NAA 471/4337 McConnachy, Clifford Peter. Major AE D’Arcy to DAAG and GOC, Desert Mounted Corps, Confidential letter of 12 March 1919} Officers passed down harsher sentences precisely because they wanted to make an immediate statement to their men, and assumed the DJAG would eventually revise the sentence downwards for legal reasons. However, factors beyond the individual case and charges could strongly influence decisions made by the DJAG and the confirming Commander during the sentencing review. Not only did the conduct sheet and character evidence of the accused accompany the case file, but also information about “the state of discipline within the accused’s unit.”\footnote{Babington, For the Sake of Example, 16.} The condition of the latter could determine the difference between life and death.

**Punishment as Public Influence**

Just before Private Clarke’s case file entered the review process, the administrative commandant at Kantara attached a confidential letter to Headquarters. He argued that Clarke’s case was an opportunity to deal with what he perceived as the general indiscipline of West Indian troops, writing,
I do not consider the sentence of death passed on Pte Clarke excessive, but I am personally of opinion that the sentences passed on Ptes. Smith and Banton [the two other prisoners involved] are light, as compared with the sentence passed on Pte. Clarke. A severe lesson is needed with regard to the repeated instances of insubordination committed by prisoners of the B.W.I. Regiment in the F.P. Compound at Kantara.\footnote{WO 71/595. Colonel AHO Lloyd to HQ, Palestine Lines of Communication, 7 August 1917}

The description of Smith and Banton’s sentences—several years of penal servitude—as “light” implies that the commandant would have preferred to see them executed as well, even though neither of them had wounded a policeman, as Clarke had done. A broader, commonly-held assumption lay behind his opinions—that “non-European” units required punitive discipline in order to function militarily:

\begin{quote}
I draw attention to the fact that, as appears on the conduct sheets, these, (and other soldiers of this Regt.) have repeatedly committed acts of insubordination, the punishment for which has been unduly light…No disciplinary lesson has been taught to insubordinate soldiers in the case of earlier offences – and the result appears to be total disregard for authority.\footnote{WO 71/595. Colonel AHO Lloyd to HQ, Palestine Lines of Communication, 7 August 1917. Italics added.}
\end{quote}

Such an attitude likely reflected entrenched prejudice—a report just before Clarke’s execution had stated that “the discipline of the [BWIR] men has been consistently good…and the smart turn-out of the men has often been noted.”\footnote{CO 318/349/49634. Confidential Memorandum of 25 July 1919 by Captain RJ Craig, 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR.} Other reports from officers continually noted the excellent discipline of the West Indians, including when under fire, throughout the war.\footnote{CO 318/348/35242. Forwarded report entitled, “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt,” 24 June 1917. Although General Murray signed off on the report, it was likely written by senior BWIR officers.} The commandant’s attitude then was rooted in the prevalent belief that soldiers of African descent were inherently problematic and ill-disciplined, regardless of evidence to the contrary.

While there were some officers in the BWIR who shared the commandant’s attitudes, others did not. One officer in the 1\textsuperscript{st} battalion noted in a confidential memorandum that the principal irritation of West Indian troops occurred when they were “handled in a tactless manner by officers—sometimes General officers—who did not understand them; who had never been in the West Indies and who were incapable of distinguishing between a West Indian and a Hottentot.”\footnote{CO 318/344/35242. Forwarded report entitled, “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt,” 24 June 1917. Although General Murray signed off on the report, it was likely written by senior BWIR officers.} One BWIR officer revealed further evidence of the application of this sort of salutary discipline, noting that FGCM’s would sometimes “receive instructions from General Head Quarters that they were desirous of securing a conviction in that particular case.”\footnote{See, for example, the statements of Lord Harding in WO 95/4410 1\textsuperscript{st} BWIR War Diary, July 1917 and 2 August 1917. After commanding several West Indian platoons during a raid, he wrote to headquarters that they had “worked exceedingly well, displaying…a keen interest in the work, cheerfulness and energy, coolness under shell fire and an intelligent application of what was required of them and the ability to carry it out.”}

The result was that some attempted to shelter West Indians from the punitive field courts-martial by using ‘summary punishment,” a process by which officers could issue punishment for infractions without convening a court martial. In his letter about Clarke’s trial, the same British commandant also complained to his superiors that BWIR officers were exceeding their powers by summarily punishing soldiers for severe offenses, instead of court-martiauling them.\footnote{WO 71/595. Colonel AHO Lloyd to HQ, Palestine Lines of Communication, 7 August 1917. These allegations were raised during the case of Private Hubert Clarke, which will be discussed later.} This process—which is, frankly, quite difficult to track—appears to have been a favorite technique of officers in Egypt and Palestine for protecting imperial and colonial soldiers. In the NZEF in
Palestine, the commanding officer often dealt with substantive charges, and it was also common among Australian units—where, for example, an officer might simply give a three-week field punishment sentence to a trooper for “assaulting natives,” instead of court-martiauling him. Although any soldier had the right to appeal summary punishment and request a formal trial, there are only six instances of West Indians doing so, significantly fewer than in other units for which comparable information exists. Interestingly, as one of the BWIR service battalions (the 2nd) spent more time in service near ANZAC units, its court-martial numbers plummeted, perhaps an indication of a broader pattern of imperial avoidance.

Table B:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Battalion</th>
<th>1916</th>
<th>1917</th>
<th>1918 (Pre-Oct 30)</th>
<th>1918 (Post-Oct 30)</th>
<th>1919</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>1st BWIR</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>34</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In contrast, the courts martial rates of the reserve West Indian battalion, a unit stationed in the rear and in close proximity to numerous British officers, maintained a consistently high record of official disciplinary punishment. In addition, this discrepancy reveals that the rapid, offensive movement of the Palestine campaign ensured that commanders in the field maintained some separation from rear headquarters, and could therefore exercise more latitude in disciplining their men.

The Kantara commandant’s desire to make an example of the three West Indians in order to instill discipline among the remainder of the battalions reflected an older notion of how to maintain order in the military. When a soldier in the British forces was executed during the Napoleonic Wars in the West Indies, his regiment was not only forced to watch the execution, but afterwards was “filed past the corpse in slow time so that each man got a good look at the mangled form on the ground.” Even though the execution of a soldier no longer took place in front of his unit, much of the intent was the same—pour encourager les autres. Corporal punishment evolved in a similar manner—the passage of the Army Act in 1881 had prohibited flogging (although the cat-o’-nine tails was in use until 1908, and caning continued well into the Second World War), but another punishment, with a similar intent, remained available to military courts.

Field Punishment (or FP) was one of the most common British disciplinary punishments in the First World War, yet it is unfamiliar to most non-specialists. Two varieties existed—known simply as “Number 1” and “Number 2”—and while both forms relied on physical

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612 October 30, 1918 marks the date of the British armistice with the Ottoman Empire, and the end of hostilities in the Palestine theater.
613 Buckley, The British Army in the West Indies, 204.
exertion and public shame as a means of punishment, Number 1 was significantly more severe. In both versions, soldiers spent part of each day either in a special area at the front or behind the lines at a field punishment compound or prison if not on active service. In Egypt, special field punishment compounds existed near major British installations, like Kantara and Abbassia, although some soldiers, like Australian trooper Louie Corcoran, completed their sentences at military prisons like Gabbari. Each day of their sentence, soldiers were subjected to hours of parade inspections and drilling, as well as various forms of pointless, heavy labor. One soldier in Palestine recalled that after drilling, men would be ordered in full kit out into the desert, where they were forced to exercise in the sun. Other times, they filled baskets with sand, carried them hundreds of feet before dumping them, and then carried more sand to refill the original hole. To exacerbate the punishment, soldiers lost their pay, and might still have to fulfill their normal responsibilities if at the front. “Number 1,” however, added a more brutal twist.

Despite many of the limitations on corporal punishment passed in the 1881 Army Act, “Number 1” still made an example of the guilty soldier via humiliation and pain. In addition to the penalties common to both forms, soldiers enduring Number 1 suffered an improvised crucifixion. For several hours each day, they could be “tethered to a wheel or post, or with their hands tied behind their backs, [be] suspended by their wrists” with rope or irons. Poor weather conditions, or a brutal overseer, could make conditions significantly worse. Exposure to extreme heat—as was common in the Middle East—or cold, a tighter tying of appendages, and many other variations turned a public warning of ill-discipline into severe corporal punishment. One officer from New Zealand referred to it simply as, “a means of inflicting unnecessary torture.”

Field Punishment reflected residual, nineteenth-century notions of discipline that remained in the British military justice system throughout the First World War. The tradition of improvised crucifixion stretched back to discipline in Wellington’s army one hundred years before, and existed to “deter” future offenders through public shame and pain. Field punishment reflected the long-held belief that military law should rely on “a policy of calculated terror and torture as a public spectacle” in order to deter potential offenders, rather than reform the guilty. This backwards-facing intent did not go unnoticed in Britain—after the war, a debate over its use took place in Parliament. One MP from Manchester, an army major with legal training, argued the punishment was “quite contrary to the spirit of the age” and called for its abolition. Yet, during the war, field punishment remained a key component of the punitive process, since it (arguably) maximized the utility of the example of the guilty soldier.

In Egypt and Palestine, a sentence of Field Punishment Number 1 was a rarity, but on the Western Front, it was one of the most common punishments. Not only was it common in

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615 NAA B2455, Corcoran L. Corcoran, a member of the 11th ALH, had been sentenced to two months of FP 1 for disobeying orders and striking an NCO in the military police.


617 Putkowski & Sykes, Shot at Dawn, 16; Julian Putkowski, British Army Mutineers, 1914-1922. (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 1998), 11. Putkowski claims that 21 days with two hours per day of crucifixion was the maximum allowed for this form of Field Punishment, but it is unclear whether this cap was actually enforced.


619 Ferguson, Pity of War, 346-7.

620 Buckley, The British Army in the West Indies, 203.

621 Hansard HC vol 113, col 118, 3 March 1919. Speech of Major Gerald Hurst
English units, but the detailed research of Timothy Bowman reveals that 45.6 per cent of court-martialed Irish soldiers in France received a sentence of Field Punishment Number 1, as did nearly 11 per cent of New Zealanders. In contrast, 19 per cent of BWIR courts-martial passed down an initial sentence of Number 1, and this percentage decreased further after post-trial, judicial review. However, while the more brutal form of field punishment was common in France, it appears to have been very rare in Egypt and Palestine—only three cases are recorded in NZEF trials—meaning that the BWIR’s rate of field punishment number 1 was actually very high for the theater in which it served. Given the corporal nature of the punishment, it is possible that some field courts martial in Palestine and Egypt used “Number 1” as a means of circumventing the British Army’s prohibition of bodily punishment, particularly flogging, to make examples of black soldiers and their bodies.

One historian has suggested that Field Punishment Number 1 was “capable of resurrecting the collective memory of slavery” amongst West Indian troops, a strong possibility if the military policemen executing the punishment used more brutal methods, or emphasized racial differences between punisher and the punished. However, there is no evidence that BWIR soldiers in Palestine thought this, and it is important to remember that English soldiers were continually subjected to “Number 1” in France. Field Punishment was not, therefore, necessarily redolent of racial slavery, but rather was part of the broader means by which the state exhibited power over its constituents. This is especially true when the punishment of West Indians is compared to the British Army’s disciplinary dealings with native Egyptians and Africans during the war.

The treatment of native Egyptians and Africans shows most clearly how the racialist thinking that justified slavery still dominated military justice for those at the bottom of the colonial hierarchy. Africans recruited by the British Army were subject to officially sanctioned beatings as punishment, as well as indiscriminate caning and flogging, punishments that British soldiers were immune from. Members of the Rhodesian Native Regiment, for example, faced flogging for crimes of insubordination, insolence, or desertion, and this sentence could be carried out in public, in front of the entire unit. Sentences like those passed on five African members of the 4th Nigeria Regiment, tried on charges of cowardice and all sentenced to three months of field punishment and twenty-four lashes, were not uncommon. In a different incident, an African soldier in the Gold Coast Regiment received 42 days of FP 1 and 24 lashes for disobedience. In general, African soldiers were sentenced much more harshly than any other

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622 I arrived at the Irish percentage by tabulating the sentences from Bowman’s table on page 158. Whether any portion of these sentences were commuted is unclear. A further 4.8 per cent of Irish soldiers received Field Punishment No 2. For the New Zealanders, see Pugsley, On the Fringes of Hell, 347.

623 There were 43 initial sentences of Field Punishment no 1 in the BWIR, although four of these sentences were commuted, quashed, or fully remitted.

624 Pugsley, The ANZAC Experience, 130.

625 Smith, Jamaican volunteers, 127-8. Smith argues that field punishment “may have provoked particularly strong feelings among black soldiers,” but gives no evidence of this. Given the nature of the punishment, it seems likely that it would have provoked “strong feelings” in all soldiers.


627 Stapleton, No Insignificant Part, 44. However, Stapleton is quick to note that no Rhodesian Native Regiment soldier was ever executed for a capital offense (desertion, cowardice, etc.).

628 WO 213/19/116. Privates Lawani and Agboola Ibadan, Ediga, Ekka, and Yagba. The trial was on 28 October 1917, and occurred at M'tama, in what is now Tanzania.

empire soldiers—records of those who had death sentences commuted during review indicate they still faced 14 years of penal servitude, substantially more than the 5-10 years commonly imposed upon West Indians who had death sentences commuted.\textsuperscript{630}

Nor were native Africans the only members of the British forces to face such punishments. The army treated the Egyptians who comprised the Egyptian Labour Corps (ELC), and built much of the infrastructure needed for Allenby’s march to Damascus, in much the same way. Egyptians attached to the ELC were subject to the rules of the Army Act, but Allenby sought for a special legalization of flogging as, “there are now and then cases for the lash” with the ELC.\textsuperscript{631} Although such a provision was never extended, there is substantial evidence that British authorities turned a blind eye to extrajudicial beatings of Egyptian laborers. One historian has found evidence of the “promiscuous beating and flogging of native drivers” by Australians, and argued this helped exacerbate conditions leading to the anti-British revolts across Egypt in the Spring of 1919.\textsuperscript{632}

However, no attempts were made to treat West Indians, or other “coloured” service troops, in a similar manner. Rather, the tendency seems to have been to rely on the more brutal form of field punishment to effect corporal punishment. Such processes suggest a multi-faceted racial hierarchy inside the British Army—one that might exact illegal violence upon those at the bottom of the racial ladder, but then revert to an intensified, but technically legal, set of punishments for others. While there was clearly discrimination against men classified as “non-whites,” it appears to have been more tiered than commonly thought. The West Indians, whether through virtue of being volunteer, combat troops, or because of perceptions of British acculturation, escaped the violence that, at first glance, many would assume they might encounter. Yet, while the disciplinary process allowed the brutal punishment of native laborers, and stopped short of truly protecting the native residents of Egypt and Palestine, there were occasions when it responded to the violence of EEF soldiers against locals.

The Other Execution: Private James Mitchell

As the British advanced into Ottoman Palestine, they created a legal vacuum, a presence occupied during the war by military courts. Despite a generally blind eye, there were occasions when the justice system took action against EEF soldiers when local Egyptians or Arabs brought complaints to British officers. Perhaps the most important of these trials was that of Private James Mitchell, a Jamaican teenager in the British West Indies Regiment who was the only soldier executed in Palestine itself during the war. Mitchell, apparently intoxicated, had approached a well near the village of Beit Duras in November 1917, where he encountered a local woman, Nazha ben Saleh Yousef, and her husband, drawing water. According to Nazha’s court testimony, Mitchell rudely propositioned her, exposed himself, and then lunged at her, at which point her husband interceded to separate them. As Nazha fled, she saw Mitchell un-shoulder his rifle and shoot her husband in the chest, fatally wounding him.\textsuperscript{633}

\textsuperscript{630} Compare the sentences of Privates Frafa and Dagomba of the Gold Coast Regiment (WO 213/19/106) to WO 213/26/103 CA Wilson (5 years PS), WO 213/11/172 V Hall (10 years PS), WO 213/17/147 H Hart (10 years PS) all in various West Indian units.

\textsuperscript{631} Hughes, \textit{Allenby in Palestine}, 100. The letter is from Allenby to General Robertson, and was sent on 4 December 1917.

\textsuperscript{632} Brugger, \textit{Australians and Egypt}, 77. See also Woodward, \textit{Forgotten Soldiers}, 58-62.

\textsuperscript{633} WO 71/629, Testimony of Nazha ben Saleh Yousef. Medical evidence given at the trial later indicated that her husband, Abda Rahman, had his back at least partially turned when shot.
After her husband’s death, Nazha’s uncle traveled to a nearby Jewish settlement and notified a British major of the attack. The British response was prompt—the next morning, a doctor, interpreter, and BWIR officer traveled to Beit Duras to examine the body. The West Indian battalion was one of the only units in the area, and a series of lineups occurred, at which Nazha was present. Although Nazha did not identify Mitchell during the lineups (she later claimed that the number of men present made identifying the attacker too difficult), he confessed to assaulting her. However, Mitchell was unequivocally clear that he had only shot her husband because he had attempted to seize Mitchell’s rifle. More importantly, Mitchell essentially recanted his confession, acknowledging that it existed, but also noting that he could not “remember what I told him as I was not in my right senses.” After a more substantial trial than Private Clarke’s—including a much more significant defense—Mitchell was found guilty and sentenced to death, largely on the basis of Nazha’s testimony. Despite his popularity inside his platoon, strong character evidence from officers, no past disciplinary history, and other possibly precluding discrepancies during his trial (notably that he might have improperly enlisted while underage), Mitchell was shot eight days later at Ramleh.

The decision to execute Mitchell can be interpreted as a statement of both imperial accountability and imperial power—the British would respect local inhabitants, provided that they acknowledged the British, in this case the army, as sole arbiter of the region. Nazha, it turned out, was the niece of the *mukhtar*, a prominent local elder in charge of the area around Beit Duras. This was a figure whom the British wanted to respect and co-opt, both to avoid potential short-term difficulty with their supply lines, but also for the longer term, when they would need local elites to serve as intermediaries of empire. The *mukhtar’s* actions in the wake of his nephew’s death had signified a willingness to cooperate with the new imperial authority in the area—he had not sought local retribution, but rather initiated proceedings via the presiding judicial process. The trial of Mitchell had been held at Ramleh—some 40 kilometers north of Beit Duras, and a not inconsiderable distance for the *mukhtar* and his niece to travel during a war, thereby signaling further cooperation.

Executing Mitchell, rather than imprisoning him, enabled the British to demonstrate their supreme authority, and also helped persuade local inhabitants to warm to the British Empire by ensuring that their first major interaction with it ended with the desired resolution. Had Mitchell been convicted of a voluntary form of manslaughter, the more appropriate charge given his lack of intent to kill “willfully and of malice aforethought”, it is unlikely that he would have been executed. In two other cases involving the BWIR, soldiers facing murder charges had only been convicted of manslaughter, and both had been sentenced to penal servitude, rather than execution. Executing Mitchell, then, was more of a public statement to the surrounding community than it was to his battalion.

Neither the reporting of crimes against locals by EEF soldiers, nor the reliance of the prosecution on native witnesses in assessing guilt, were incidents isolated to Mitchell’s case. An Australian lieutenant in the Imperial Camel Corps, Bertram Arthur Clark, was court-martialed at Suez in May 1918 for beating an Egyptian, Mohammed Hassan. After being attacked, Hassan

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635 Testimony of Private JA Mitchell, WO 71/629
636 WO 71/629. Trial of James A. Mitchell. In addition to the strong character evidence presented by Captain Irving on Mitchell’s behalf, a childhood friend, Sgt JA Fontanelle, also testified that he “was known as a very good boy at school and he has always borne a good character since he left school.”
637 See the cases of Blenman WO 213/22/6, Johnson 213/25/19, and for a post-Armistice case in Europe, Richards WO 213/27/74. Johnson, tried six months after Mitchell, was actually from the same battalion.
had notified a military policeman, which had resulted in an Australian officer preparing lineups and disciplinary proceedings. The prosecuting officer’s case against Clark rested almost entirely on Hassan’s statements, as well as the testimony of several other Egyptian witnesses who had seen an officer strike Hassan in the neck with a cane from a taxi, before later whipping the (justifiably) indignant Egyptian with a belt. Despite Clark’s rapid rise from sergeant to lieutenant, the Distinguished Conduct Medal he won in 1917, and the fact that the prosecution based its case on the testimony of Egyptians while the defense relied on the testimony of several Australian officers, the court still found Clark guilty, though it prescribed the minimal punishment of a severe reprimand and a reset of his seniority date. While such a sentence was a relative slap on the wrist, the simple fact that any punishment resulted against a white officer decorated for bravery, when it was routine for British and Australian soldiers to flog Egyptian laborers, is somewhat remarkable.

Checks and Balances?

In evaluating the court-martial process, it is important to note that despite its appearance as an overwhelmingly punitive process, there were still entrenched checks against abuse. Officers from the DJAG office, tasked with reviewing trials, were on alert for abusive sentences, as well as for procedural violations that contravened the Army Act. Despite their critical role in the justice system, their work generally escaped both public and historical attention. In the postwar Parliamentary debates over the wartime justice system, one MP from Antrim—a former DJAG in Egypt and Palestine—called the Commons’ attention to the system of oversight against abuses, concluding that military justice had “not failed” as egregiously as some thought. Importantly, there is evidence to support the MP’s somewhat self-serving contention. Sometimes, DJAGs focused on appropriate charging, as when one demanded to know of an Australian trial, “why this man who was absent for a few hours was charged with desertion.” Such oversight could protect an ordinary soldier from the whims of an overly-punitive-minded officer—an AWOL charge would normally be punished by a stint of field punishment, whereas desertion could result in a death sentence. On another occasion, an Australian trooper sentenced to six months of imprisonment with hard labor for attempting to plunder supplies had his conviction promptly quashed after the DJAG found a number of problems with the trial proceedings—the charges were filed under the wrong section of the military code and a witness was not examined correctly. At other times, a review might turn out worse for the accused. Initially punished with a “reprimand” at his first court-martial, Lt Corporal Duncan MacPhee

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639 Clark went on to face court-martial two more times while in Egypt and Palestine—once for significantly overdrawing his pay, and the other for organizing a, possibly dubious, commercial sugar-selling enterprise. On both occasions, his punishments were financial—an order to repay the extra salary, and another reset of his seniority date.
640 Hansard HC vol 113, col 127-8, 3 March 1919. Speech of Major Hugh O’Neill. One should note, however, that nothing was said about whether military justice had succeeded.
found himself facing a reassembled court after the presiding officers were notified by the DJAG that such a light sentence was "not a valid Court Martial sentence on an NCO."  

This system of review was of particular importance to BWIR soldiers, who as noted earlier, often faced particularly aggressive, race-based sentencing that even Australians generally escaped. Yet, this prejudice appears somewhat mitigated by careful examination of the court-martial statistics of BWIR soldiers in Egypt and Palestine, which show frequent commutations of sentence, as well as partial reductions of sentence length (known as "remittance"). Almost 40 per cent of BWIR convictions in Palestine featured a modification of sentence, often significant. Of the eighty-eight cases in which a BWIR sentence changed during review, thirty-eight involved a commutation to a lesser penalty, forty-nine sentences were decreased in length, and one conviction was simply quashed. Importantly, exactly three-quarters of the modified sentences occurred before the October armistice, indicating that despite the punitive tendencies of wartime courts, a level of judicial review still provided some protection to BWIR soldiers.  

The following chart depicts the instances of review in the 190 cases where a BWIR soldier was sentenced to some form of detention:

![Figure 3.2 Modified Prison Sentences in the BWIR, 1916-1919](image)

While there appears to be some tendency to commute sentences of imprisonment or penal servitude, the above chart makes clear that review more often involved remitting a portion of the original sentence. At a minimum, one-third of the original sentence length was remitted, but more often remittance occurred on a larger scale—between one-half and two-thirds of the original sentence length in the cases of field punishment and imprisonment, along with the occasional remittance of three-fourths of a sentence. Additionally, when DJAG’s commuted sentences of imprisonment with hard labor to field punishment, the length of the sentence was often substantially reduced as well.

The frequency of commutation and remittance reinforces the contention that most courts-martial of BWIR soldiers in Palestine yielded overly harsh sentences. In one particular case, a FGCM sentence of three years of penal servitude was commuted to only six months of hard

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643 NAA A471/20226, McPhee, Duncan. Staff Captain, AAG Palestine Lines of Communication to GHQ Jerusalem, 23 December 1918.

644 Of the 88 cases modified, 66 occurred before 30 October 1918.
labor—a significant alteration that implies severe overreach in sentencing by the officers of the FGCM. Still, sentence modification demonstrates that there was some sort of oversight to the punitive nature of military law, even for “coloured” soldiers. In fact, it is one area where West Indian soldiers fared comparably well—46 per cent of their sentences of imprisonment or penal servitude were modified, compared with 54 per cent for the entire NZEF. While commutations or partial remittances were likely little consolation to sentenced soldiers (and do not suggest that even the modified sentence was fair), the existence and utilization of a check against abusive sentencing is an oft-overlooked feature of the military justice system, and perhaps evidence of a more complex relationship between the British Empire and its imperial and colonial forces during the First World War.

An incident related in CLR James’s biography of Captain Arthur Andrew Cipriani—an officer in the BWIR in Egypt and Palestine—clearly encapsulates the contradictory impulses of military justice towards West Indian servicemen. After rifles were stolen by local Egyptians from a BWIR encampment during the unrest of March 1919, several BWIR soldiers were court-martialed despite the Adjutant’s attempts to halt prosecution. The result was as unfair as was to be expected in this type of public show trial, and the convicted soldiers each received six month sentences to imprisonment with hard labor. Yet, this punitive example was reversed after Captain Cipriani petitioned Allenby for clemency, with the West Indians released after four days in prison.

This vignette firmly illustrates the West Indian experience with the British Army’s military justice system in the First World War. On the one hand, black West Indians could be, and were, made into public examples by British officers convinced that West Indians were racially inferior, disposed towards criminality, and inherently ill-disciplined. While common, these were not universalist assumptions, and the result was that there was room for review, commutation, and remittance of West Indian sentences from both the DJAG and higher levels of the British command. This was made all the more possible by the BWIR’s status as British Army soldiers, rather than as a separate or distinct colonial command. In addition, officers inside the BWIR battalions were able to protect their troops either by avoiding courts-martial, acting as prisoner’s friends, or pressing for “fair play” when convictions were unnecessarily harsh. Thus, while the BWIR’s encounter with military justice in Egypt and Palestine was hardly “fair” in a modern, legal sense, on balance it was more nuanced than might be first assumed. This is particularly critical to note in light of the only existing histories of West Indians and military justice in the First World War, which all focus on the mutiny at Taranto.

Taranto

The BWIR mutiny at the port of Taranto in Italy has become the fulcrum of a narrative highlighting the entrenched prejudice meted out to British West Indians in Britain’s armed forces during the Great War. The execution of Private Clarke—not least the secret correspondence urging execution of black West Indians—has helped anchor this to the West Indian battalions in

645 WO 213/22/88, Case of Private T. Ellis.
646 51 sentences out of 111 modified for the BWIR, and 211 out of 392 modified for the NZEF. For the pre-calculation New Zealand numbers, see Pugsley, On the Fringes of Hell, 348.
647 Even CLR James admits that this system did overturn particularly unjust sentence. See CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 35.
648 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 31.
Egypt and Palestine. Yet the preceding sections of this chapter have demonstrated that at least in Egypt and Palestine, a story of complete and unmitigated injustice is perhaps not quite correct. While neither the incident at Taranto in December 1918 nor the history of West Indians in the European theaters are the primary focus of this work, a brief discussion of Taranto reveals an immediate and important distinction between BWIR service in Europe and that in Egypt and Palestine.

With the armistice of November 11, the British command moved to consolidate all of the BWIR in Europe at Taranto for demobilization back to the Caribbean. The battalions in Egypt and Palestine were again the outliers—as service troops, their role in maintaining Britain’s newly occupied Middle Eastern Empire meant that they were not present at Taranto in December. However, several of the BWIR battalions had been stationed at Taranto during the war, and had been dragooned into labor duties despite their supposed enlistment as British Army soldiers. These duties had been motivated by deep prejudice; the Commandant at Taranto was a South African who maintained a viciously racist attitude towards anyone of African descent.

The result was a justified explosion of discontent amongst the West Indians in early December. Unrest rumbled through the 9th BWIR, while a large portion of the 10th BWIR refused their orders on December 9. In one particularly tense incident the night before, an NCO in the 7th BWIR battalion shot an insubordinate West Indian private and was subsequently attacked by the man’s comrades. The British response was to immediately disarm the battalions, confine them, and secretly encircle them with machine gunners who probably had orders to open fire in the event of further unrest. Now, however, the unrest moved from localized outburst over poor treatment, to something substantially more political.

Some of the disaffected men inside the BWIR battalions became increasingly politicized, and in secret meetings, formed a “Caribbean League.” The “League” drew support from across the different battalions, but as it took on a distinctly anti-imperialist and nationalist bent, some men, particularly NCO’s, renounced their association. In fact, the Colonial Office received its information about the creation of the Caribbean League because two sergeants, one from the 8th battalion and the other the 10th, reported its establishment to their commanding officers. Still, the dissatisfaction with their treatment during the war had helped kindle nationalist sentiment among some of the West Indians. After all, why had they volunteered their lives to defend an entity that responded to their presence with prejudice and disdain? For some historians, the mutiny of the BWIR at Taranto and the accompanying formation of the anti-colonialist Caribbean League by the mutineers was a seminal event in the history of black Caribbean nationalism—"the modern advent of mass resistance by West Indians to British rule.”

But these men were still under British rule, and their unrest carried a price. Dozens of soldiers from the 4th, 9th, and 6th BWIR battalions were convicted of mutiny, and with the

649 CO 318/350/7060 Army Demobilization Regulations, Part III, Chapter XXXIII, British West Indies Contingent. This document notes that on January 20, 1919—one month after Taranto—the 1st, 2nd and 5th battalions were still in Egypt.
650 CO 33/951/619A. Telegram, Base Commandant, Taranto to WO, December 9, 1918 #BC 119.
651 IWM PP/MCR/173 Memoirs of Lt DC Burns, Jan 1919, pg 136. “…we had machine guns secretly mounted against them in case of further trouble.” See also WO 33/951/625, Inspector-General of Communication, British Forces Italy to War Office, December 11, 1918 #IC 1609.
652 CO 318/344/6165. Secret Communique, Major General HF Thuillier to GHQ Italy, Jan 5, 1919. Interestingly, an internal minute revealed the Colonial Office’s belief that many BWIR men “objected to the officials of the League being all Jamaicans.” See CO 318/344/6165. Handwritten Minute of Feb 2, 1919, signed CRD.
exception of twelve who had their sentences commuted to imprisonment with hard labor, were sentenced to several years of penal servitude. However, the outburst at Taranto had catalyzed and focused political sentiment. When disaffected servicemen returned home to find no employment, they quickly became involved in a series of disturbances and political movements that began to alter the contours of the British Empire in the Caribbean. But while the outburst at Taranto deserves its attention as an important marker in Caribbean political history, it should also be considered within a broader context.

Despite their homogenous regimental identity, the reality, as Chapter 1 has pointed out, was that the service battalions in Egypt and Palestine had a markedly different wartime experience. As a result, even when they came up against entrenched prejudice in military justice or in the pay issues of Army Order No 1 of 1918, they tended not to react like their peers in Europe. In fact, it was only while transiting Taranto during demobilization that the BWIR battalions from Egypt and Palestine came up against mutiny charges. The context of Taranto was the key—once out of the EEF, the battle-proven West Indians found themselves detailed to wash dirty laundry and clean latrines, which they protested, albeit while still completing the tasks as ordered. The result were charges of mutiny and a show-trial, those charged having their names drawn at random when the BWIR officers refused to finger any of their men as “ring-leaders.” Thus, when placed inside a context of entrenched prejudice—particularly when a racist General had command—BWIR soldiers found themselves incapable of mitigating the comparatively milder racism found inside Egypt and Palestine.

The contextual distinction of Egypt and Palestine might explain why despite the sentences issued by field courts martial to BWIR soldiers there, there is surprisingly little concern over the disciplinary system in the few remaining pieces of subaltern testimony from this theater. In a letter in which several members of the BWIR complained about the various discriminatory obstacles the BWIR in Palestine faced, no concern was expressed about the military justice system. In fact, the letter conveyed the West Indians’ perception that in terms of the punitive nature of military law, they were treated no differently than regular English soldiers—“Under military law subject to its various amendments we suffer the full and just penalty when we break that law just as any other British soldier.” A later letter, signed by forty-two non-commissioned officers from the 1st and 2nd BWIR, complained about discrimination over pay, but also made no notation of disciplinary discrimination, noting—“We were treated as British soldiers in equipment, training, discipline, and were used as such in the field.” And a later postwar dispatch from the Governor of the Bahamas to the Colonial Office noted the anger of demobilized 1st and 2nd BWIR soldiers at their treatment—not in Palestine, but because of the racial abuse and official discrimination they had suffered while waiting in Taranto for ships to the West Indies. The implicit contrast between Palestine and Taranto again suggests that, on the whole, West Indian soldiers in Palestine perceived the system of military

654 WO 213/27/23-25 reveals forty-seven men directly charged with mutiny. For the twelve with commuted sentences, see WO 213/27/23. Interestingly, while convicted of mutiny, most of them were found “not guilty” of disobedience.
655 CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 33.
656 CLR James even went to far as to imply that the Taranto Commandant was perhaps not the norm, referring to his actions as “the behaviour of a stray South African General.” See CLR James, Captain Cipriani, 38.
657 Letter from BWIR soldiers in Palestine to the Hon. JC Lynch, August 2, 1918. Located in CO 28/294/56561.
justice to be a normal burden to be borne by the British soldier, even if their burden was unknowingly heavier.

Military justice, then, was an uneven affair for West Indian soldiers—one that featured punitive sentencing, but was balanced in part by a system of review. West Indians were perceived as particularly ill-disciplined by many of the British officers in Egypt and Palestine, and they lacked the protection that the similarly perceived Australians received from their own officers during trials. The result was that West Indians were often at the mercy of the court and the DJAG, although the latter treated them fairly. Critically, while they suffered more severe punishment than white, imperial forces, the “discipline” meted out to “non-white” colonials, such as Africans and Egyptians, was significantly more abusive. Whether West Indian soldiers in Egypt and Palestine were aware of the punitive obstacles they faced, as well as the subtle distinctions and nuances that helped reduce these punishments, is unclear. But West Indians were not the only minority soldiers in the EEF to occupy a distinct position inside the British military hierarchy, and to further flesh out military justice in Egypt and Palestine—as well as the charged atmosphere of the immediate postwar period—this work now turns to the Jewish encounter with courts-martial.
Chapter 4

“In the army, held by iron chains”

The Jewish Battalions and Military Justice

Prejudice, distrust, and mutiny. This is the common narrative sequence used to explain the Jewish Battalions’ encounter with military justice during the Palestine campaign. Men who had voluntarily enlisted in the British Army to liberate Palestine from the Ottoman Empire found themselves facing discrimination and antisemitism at every turn, engendering an atmosphere of distrust and unrest. Eight months after the fighting had ended but demobilization had not, the situation ignited into mutiny, a peaceful revolt of men who had simply endured too much abuse to continue following orders.

Flashpoints—like capital courts-martial or mutinies—are how most historians interpret military justice. As the last chapter argued, the disciplinary history of the British West Indies Regiment has pivoted off the rebellion of several battalions at Taranto, Italy and the punitive execution of one private as a way of situating a growing nationalism. While these events are important, it is also clear that their predominance obscures important nuance in the ways in which minority soldiers experienced entrenched hierarchical governance through military justice. Yet discussions of the Jewish Battalions’ experience with military justice employ exactly this method, focusing on the “Mutiny” in the 38th and 39th battalions in July 1919 to extrapolate broader themes, particularly the possibility of latent discrimination inside the military hierarchy.

The result has been a decontextualization of the broader Jewish experience with military justice, a significant hole that the following seeks to fill by offering an overview of the battalions’ courts-martial, as well as examining the “Mutiny” within its immediate political context.

This chapter argues that unlike the West Indians, whose disciplinary history revealed a system of differentiated racism inherent to the imperial military system, the courts-martial of Jewish soldiers demonstrate the problems confronting the EEF once the actual fighting stopped. With the Armistices of both Mudros and Compiègne seemingly signaling the end of the war, men throughout the British Army began to agitate for demobilization. This was particularly true in Egypt and Palestine, where empire soldiers were not only anxious to get home to their families and friends, but deeply fearful that slow demobilization would prevent them from securing employment upon their return. However, the acceleration of Egyptian Nationalism into a full-blown, anti-British revolt in March 1919 impeded the pace of demobilization, aggravating many soldiers to the point of military and political unrest. This general anger was badly exaggerated inside the Legion for one major reason—the place they hoped to demobilize to was quite literally in front of them.

The late arrival of the Jewish Battalions to Egypt and Palestine, coupled with the unrest of 1919, their slow demobilization, and their attachment to Palestine, ensured that their encounter

660 Quote from Liss Diary, Keren and Keren, We are Coming, 100.
661 For examples of this trajectory, see Freulich, Soldiers in Judea; Gilner, War and Hope; Jabotinsky, The Jewish Legion, Op. cit.
662 Only one, Martin Watts, has attempted to examine the actual courts-martial records from the mutiny, while others have simply relied on the statements of various soldiers. See Watts, Jewish Legion, 218-225. Despite good intent, Watts’ analysis falls short of conclusive—an assessment which will be explained later in the chapter. I have placed “Mutiny” in quotations here to alert the reader that it was really two separate, small-scale demonstrations of disobedience rather than a single, mass uprising.
with military justice was unique. Unlike the BWIR, who served for years in the active theater, most of the Jewish soldiers only served in Palestine for between two and eight months while it was an active combat theater, and some for less. The 40th battalion, for example, did not even arrive in Egypt until several weeks before Allenby’s Megiddo offensive, meaning most of their military and disciplinary experiences were in the post-Armistice era.

The result was that Jewish troops had several potential disadvantages when facing court-martial, as well as a particularly unique issue that exacerbated unrest. First, they had little time to demonstrate their military value, and prevailing stereotypes considered Jews to be weak, effete, and terrible soldiers. This belief could, and did, put them at a significant disadvantage in the ‘character’ portion of trials. The nature of their enlistment—some of the 38th, for example, had been pressured into enlistment via threat of deportation to Russia—did not help either. Secondly, but of equal importance, was the geographic location in which they served. A sizeable bloc of the Legion had Zionist leanings, which exacerbated natural tendencies in Armistice-era soldiers to escape the boredom of camp life and occupation-related duties. Jews had welcoming colonies, like Rishon Le Zion, to which they could sneak off to for food, wine, and adulation—or to whom they might give weapons to for protection.663 Between anti-imperial revolt and a borderline mutinous army of occupation, Egypt and Palestine was one of the most combustible areas of the British Empire—certainly deserving to be included in the discussion of immediate postwar dissent in the Caribbean, India, and Ireland—and, therefore, a unique context for the application of military justice.664

The Battalions’ Disciplinary Infractions

As it was for many idealistic volunteers to Britain’s armed forces during the Great War, the Jewish Battalions’ first encounters with military discipline and justice were something of a rude awakening. The vast majority of the Jewish Battalion members had no prior military experience, and the abrupt shift from civilian rules and culture to military norms and laws was a shock, particularly for those absent or segregated from British civil society. An American recruit

663 See Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 139 for an account of how three legionnaires gave their rifles to Jewish colonists. According to Freulich, one of the men was Eliezer Sukenik, the translator of the Dead Sea Scrolls and father of Yigal Yadin. Sukenik, who had arrived in Palestine before war broke out, was a member of the 40th.
664 Thus while the foil to the chapter on the West Indian encounter with military justice was primarily Australian soldiers, the comparative baseline for the Jewish units in this chapter is the entire EEF in 1919. However, comparisons are still drawn between the Jewish and West Indian battalions, in part because of their similar size, shared theater of operations, and potential to experience prejudice related to their “otherness.” In addition, despite my best efforts, the inconsistencies of memory, the passing off of second-hand stories as personal experience, and the possibility of incomplete record-keeping makes accurately compiling the Jewish battalions’ disciplinary record extremely difficult. Incorrect terminology complicates the issue further—what a soldier might recall as a field court-martial might actually have been a simple summary trial with the commanding officer. Freulich, for example, seems to have conflated the various forms of imprisonment—drawing no real distinctions in his work between detention, field punishment, and the various forms of more severe imprisonment. On page 184 of Soldiers in Judea he tells the story of an NCO named Louis Fischer, whom he claims was court-martialed for taking leaving without a pass, and sentenced to two weeks of military prison at Kantara. Yet, no DJAG records exist for this case and it is more likely he was summarily punished via detention for such a short period—imprisonment with hard labor was almost always a sentence of at least several months. Other problems, such as possible misspellings inside the DJAG records (it’s not clear, for example, whether the trials of Privates Belonsky and Belontsky are of the same man) also muddles matters. With reference to last names, I have used the name recorded in the DJAG records for footnotes in order to ease the task of any citation-trackers. However, I am also aware that these recorded names are often misspelled, and in the main text have converted them to their proper spelling if I am aware of it.
named Joe Davidson recalled the recently enlisted Americans’ introduction to British military discipline as “hard and unbearable,” and remembered his Irish drill sergeant as “rough and tough.” While the East Enders and other residents of Britain also faced a significant adjustment process, it appears that the American contingents—often brimming with idealistic, young Zionists—fared the worst. Redcliffe Salaman, a British Jew serving as the Medical Officer in the 39th, frequently noted in his letters home the disciplinary strife inside the unit. In July 1918, he wrote that despite potential, the American volunteers had poor discipline, and one month later, he argued that their ability to adapt to military life “is certainly lower than in ordinary battalions.”

This was a prevailing sentiment amongst many Anglo-Jewish officers attached to the battalions, even though the Jews enlisted from Britain were not always considered highly; as one British Major put it, “the 38th Battalion had already taken the cream off the rather poor milk that the British Isles had yielded from the residue of the Jewish Community.” The Americans, however, were considered on the whole more troublesome from a disciplinary perspective, even if they sometimes appeared militarily preferable to the Yiddish-speaking Russians immigrants from London’s East End. But even though evaluations of the 38th and 39th battalions were caught up in conceptions of racial worth, their arrival in Egypt and Palestine while the war still raged, and while military justice was still keenly enforced, was perhaps more important initially.

The field courts-martial records of the 38th and 39th battalions reveal not only the initial challenges of life under military law, but also reflect a policy of encouragement through punitive process. Before fighting ended on October 31, 1918 with the Murdos Armistice, fourteen members of the 38th and 39th battalions had been court-martialed in Egypt and Palestine. Seven of the trials involved members of the 38th battalion, and all occurred between March and August. More importantly, at least four, and likely five, of these trials revolved around charges dealing with contravention of authority—whether it was insubordination, striking a superior officer, or disobedience. These trials imply that officers were willing to make examples of men who did not fall into place quickly—a suspicion that appears to be confirmed by the punitive sentencing inside the 38th in 1918. With the exception of Sergeant C. Gregor—reduced to the ranks for insubordination and disobedience (and unlikely to have been Jewish)—the members of the 38th tried in 1918 received initial sentences of imprisonment with hard labor, penal servitude, and death. In two of these cases, sentences of imprisonment were commuted to the relatively light punishment of ninety days of Field Punishment 2, indicating that the officers presiding over the early FGCMs were either grossly prejudiced against Jewish soldiers, or were attempting to send a message to the enlisted men of the Legion. While discrimination was certainly possible, it seems less likely. In the courts-martial of 38th soldiers immediately after the armistice, insubordination and disobedience merited only several weeks of field punishment, indicating that

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665 YIVO RG 1530. Joshua Joseph Davidson Papers. Handwritten, untitled manuscript, Box 2. Davidson did not arrive in Palestine until after the Murdos Armistice, but his feelings on discipline still seem to be reflective of broader sentiment inside the earlier, and later, American contingents.

666 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 30, 55.

667 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 98.

668 One other member of the 39th had been court-martialed while transiting through Italy on charges of Striking a Senior Officer. For the case, see WO 213/23/128 I. Shulman. For the total numbers of the 38th, see in WO 213 files 21/129, 25/146, 23/18, 24/51, 25/99, 26/1, and 26/2. For the 39th, see in WO 213 files 26/97, 26/102, 27/81, 27/46, and 27/47.

669 The “fifth” case of Private D. Fresco (WO 213/23/18) was on charges of Section 40, a charge usually applied for authority-related situations when a more specific charge was inappropriate (or unlikely to convict).
early trials were less about prejudice than public warnings. Punitive warnings, of course, could be more than just an encouragement to fight; as the last chapter demonstrated, they could indicate particular perceptions of discipline and martialness generally related to imperial race hierarchies.

A similar, but slightly different, narrative emerges with the pre-Armistice courts-martial of soldiers in the 39th. Of those seven trials, three were for disobedience, one for insubordination, and two others for violating Section 40—again illuminating how most early courts-martial of Jewish soldiers inside Palestine were over authority-related issues. The surprise, however, was in the sentencing, encapsulated by the battalion’s first court-martial inside Egypt and Palestine—an appeal of a summary punishment issued for Section 40, “conduct prejudicial to good order.”

The soldier, Private I. Pressman, was found not guilty of the charge. The exceedingly vague nature of the charge, the tendency of officers to side with a fellow officer’s judgment (especially in an appeal), and the fact that the first battalion court-martial was an opportunity pour encourager les autres, should have all led to a “guilty” verdict. Similarly, the first FGCM in the 40th battalion—a November 1918 trial of Private H. Weinstock for Disobedience—ended with an equally surprising “not guilty” verdict. The sentencing of the other six members of the 39th battalion in 1918 was also dissimilar to what occurred in the 38th—with one exception, the authority-related FGCM’s ended with initial sentences of field punishment, not imprisonment. However, there was still a punitive element to these lighter, field punishment sentences—those passed before the Megiddo offensive were for No 1, the significantly more brutal, and publically cautionary, version of field punishment. So while the contrast in sentencing between the battalions in 1918 suggests a lack of a homogenous view of Jews inside the EEF officers corps, even the lesser sentences meted out in 1918 contained a salutary element.

Despite the conclusions drawn from the pre-Armistice trials of Jewish soldiers in Palestine, the relatively late arrival of the Jewish Battalions into the Palestine theater, coupled with their late demobilization, ensured that the majority of their courts-martial occurred in 1919. This was particularly true for the 40th battalion, which saw only two FGCMs in 1918, in part because it did not arrive at Port Said until August 28. In sum, there were twenty-two courts-martial of Jewish battalion members in 1918, of which fourteen occurred before the Murdos Armistice and four before the Compiègne Armistice with Germany (including one trial for desertion on November 11 itself). As the table below shows, this was but one-tenth of the total FGCMs in the Jewish Battalions from their arrival until the end of December 1919:

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670 This is also borne out by the 38th’s two cases in 1918 involving violations of Section 40 and Section 41. The former received 2 years of imprisonment with no commutation or remittance, while the latter received the extremely punitive sentence of 10 years of penal servitude (eventually remitted by five years). Given the DJAG’s willingness to remit or commute sentences that involved obvious prejudice, it seems that these sentences would have been revised much further downward had they been motivated by anti-Jewish sentiment (WO 213/25/146 M. Beloknetsky. WO 213/23/18 D. Fresco). With regard to the post-Armistice courts-martial, authority-related trials began to see elevated sentencing again from May 1919 onwards, as discontent over demobilization grew.

671 WO 213/26/97 I. Pressman.

672 WO 213/27/106. H. Weinstock. While there was an armistice in Palestine by Weinstock’s trial, there had not yet been an armistice on the Western Front, and finding a soldier not guilty of disobedience in the battalion’s first court-martial hardly set a tough standard.


674 WO 213/27/100 J. Colnbolsky. While possible, it’s not clear whether this was more than a coincidence—Colnbolsky received six months of detention commuted to ninety days of field punishment no 1.
Table C: 
Charges Brought Against Jewish Legion Soldiers in Egypt & Palestine: 1918-1919

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>Occurrences 38th RF</th>
<th>Occurrences 39th RF</th>
<th>Occurrences 40th RF</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence or Breaking Out of Camp (AWOL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping Confinement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination and Threatening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>Losing Property</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>Mutiny</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>Misc 18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc 40</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
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<td>Offense against Inhabitant</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting or Escaping Escort</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Sleeping on Post</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence or Striking Senior Officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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<td>Total Charges</td>
<td>112</td>
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<td>Total Courts-Martial</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most immediate conclusion from this table is the significant disparity in the number of courts-martial between the two service battalions and the reserve battalion, the 40th. Even if the active service units’ twenty FGCM’s from 1918 are removed for balance (since the 40th arrived many months later in 1918), the 40th still appears to have seen a substantially lower number of courts-martial. This is a notable departure from the comparative case of the BWIR in Palestine, whose reserve battalion faced a substantially higher number of courts-martial than its service.

675 When a soldier from one battalion was court-martialed while attached to a different battalion, I have included him in the statistics for the battalion he was serving in when court-martialed. The December 1919 cut-off is because with the exception of one additional FGCM in the 40th battalion after December 31, 1919, all other courts-martial occurred in the 38th. This was due to demobilization, which reduced the Legion into one, larger battalion—the “Judeans.” An additional 12 FGCM’s took place in the 38th from 1920 onwards (including the trial of J. Mayofis, listed as a member of the 39th but attached to the 38th).

676 Including one charge of Misc 40(18).

677 A catch-all clause for trying Army soldiers for a variety of civil offenses, like murder, in an Army court. Manual of Military Law, 299.

678 This total does not include Private I. Shulman, tried in Italy on June 29, 1918 for Striking a Senior Officer. WO 213/23/128. Shulman is also not included in the tables breaking down military justice by charges or ranks.
battalion cousins. Yet closer inspection reveals that the reasons for higher disciplinary counts in the 38th and 39th are the large number of Section 40 charges in the 38th, and the mutiny charges in the 39th. These charges refer to two separate, but related, outbreaks of dissent in July 1919—commonly grouped together by Jewish soldiers as “the Mutiny”. As the next table demonstrates, when the various charges related to the Mutiny are dropped, the total numbers even out across the three battalions:

Table D:
Charges Brought Against Jewish Legion Soldiers in Egypt & Palestine
(Not Including Charges Related to the Summer 1919 Mutinies)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Charge</th>
<th>Occurrences 38th RF</th>
<th>Occurrences 39th RF</th>
<th>Occurrences 40th RF</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Absence or Breaking Out of Camp (AWOL)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desertion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drunkenness</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Escaping Confinement</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insubordination and Threatening</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Losing Property</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murder</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mutiny</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc 18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc 40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc 41</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offense against Inhabitant</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting or Escaping Escort</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleeping on Post</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence or Striking Senior Officer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Charges</strong></td>
<td><strong>49</strong></td>
<td><strong>64</strong></td>
<td><strong>60</strong></td>
<td><strong>173</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Courts-Martial</strong></td>
<td><strong>42</strong></td>
<td><strong>45</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>128</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Despite the general leveling in total courts-martial, the 39th and 40th seem to have been more likely to face multiple charges (which could increase the odds of conviction). Additionally, with the Mutiny removed, there is a noticeably higher percentage of disobedience charges in the 39th battalion—a 100% increase over the same set of charges in the 38th, and a point also underlined by a 50% higher number of insubordination charges over the 38th. Given that the Section 40 charges remain relatively constant across each unit, it would seem that the 39th were either worse soldiers from a disciplinary standpoint, or as earlier commentary from officers’ revealed, the
heavy American composition of the unit led to perceptions of poor discipline. Interestingly, none of these charges appear caused by alcohol; there is but a solitary charge for drunkenness—a point that Patterson proudly called attention to in his memoir, claiming that his men were in demand not only for their reliability, but for their consistent sobriety. On the whole, however, the dominant sets of charges remain those related to leaving camp without permission, and for behavior seen as disobedient and insubordinate.

Referring back to the broader disciplinary picture provided by Table A, it’s clear that charges related to the contravention of military authority outpaced other charges. The three most frequent charges across the battalion were: violation of Section 40, mutiny, and disobedience—comprising 49% of the total charges. If two other similar charges are included—insubordination and violence towards a senior officer—the percentage rises to nearly 60%. It’s also noticeable that the majority of these charges stemmed from the 38th and 39th battalions, rather than the reserve unit. This is easily explained; these battalions served longer during the pre-Armistice period—the period in which the British military seemed to more seriously enforce disciplinary breaches via the military justice system—and were the two units involved in the Mutiny. It is worth noting that charges related to the Mutiny significantly inflate the totals. When removed, the percentage of charges related to contravention of authority would fall to 40% of the sum total, and the individual battalion totals come closer to approaching parity.

The 40th battalion, however, far outpaced its sister units in courts-martial related to being AWOL or “Absent Without Leave,” an offense generally listed as “Absence and Breaking out of Barracks” in FGCM records. The combination of AWOL and Desertion charges for the 40th are roughly three times that of the 39th, and four times that of the 38th. The underlying explanation for this was probably the battalion’s composition; more members of the 40th were from Ottoman Palestine, and undoubtedly would have wanted to see their families and friends, or simply have “deserted” when they thought the war was over and their service completed. In addition, the 40th featured several notable figures in the Zionist movement—men who were involved in local political issues and anxious to shrug off the British Army, regardless of whether they had been formally demobilized. There is some evidence that May 1919 was a particular tipping point—a time when many soldiers decided that their service had run its course. With one January 1919 exception, all of the “A and B” related courts-martial occurred after April 1919, with the overwhelming majority taking place between April and August—the period in which demobilization issues became particularly acute. This was especially true inside the 40th, where there were not only ten “A and B” courts-martial in May, but over 75% of the remaining courts-martial (eleven out of fourteen) to take place in the unit during 1919 were on AWOL charges. More serious instances appear to have elicited desertion charges, although there are several instances where soldiers charged with desertion received light sentences of field punishment, implying that there were instances where soldiers faced charges too severe for the infraction they had committed.

A different method of assessment suggests that the 40th might have been the worst-disciplined unit. The 38th, and also the 39th, had significantly longer exposure to the British military justice system due to their earlier formation. Thus, on a per month-in-service metric the 40th, with its shorter period of service, was actually the worst-behaved unit.

Patterson, With the Judeans, 217.

165 charges out of 280 total yields 59%.

Removing the Mutiny yields 69 authority charges out of 173, almost exactly 40%. Per battalion totals are close, but the 39th, as was pointed out earlier, still outpaced the 38th and 40th.

For examples of this, see WO 213/29/85 D. Weiss or WO 213/29/92 J. Masud.
While the period between the signing of the Armistice and the acceleration of demobilization was a tumultuous period for almost all military units, it was far worse in the Jewish units, whose geographic location inside a long-desired territory ensured that they would consistently agitate for immediate demobilization from the army. After all, while Territorials and ANZACs might demand immediate demobilization as well, they were not in a position to simply walk several miles outside camp into their former home or a Jewish colony, nor involve themselves in the local and imperial politics of the newly occupied territory.

Despite the prevalence of AWOL charges in the 40th battalion, many of these infractions appear to have been handled summarily by commanding officers instead of via court-martial. One particular instance, that of a notorious offender named David Grun—better known as Ben-Gurion—was recounted by another legionnaire:

When David Ben Gurion left the battalion AWOL, within a few days he was arrested and brought on charges which were at that time serious, punishable by a prison term. Colonel Margolin decided personally to try Ben Gurion, who stood before the Colonel silent and sulky. B.G.’s uniform was baggy, his brass buttons unshined and his face unshaven. Margolin asked him one question, “Where were you?” Ben Gurion was silent. Margolin leaned back in his chair and in his ‘litvak’ English, calmly said, “Look at yourself…you haven’t shaved for several days…your shoes are dirty…I would have not minded if you were brought before me for murder, or robbery, but not for being absent without a pass…” And then with a gesture of despair he pronounced his judgment, “Thirty days confinement to barracks—and you are no more a corporal.”

The story is mostly true. Ben Gurion had left his battalion and walked five-hours to meet with Joseph Sprinzak in Jaffa, where he had proceeded to stay for five days without leave. Upon his return, he was brought before Margolin on December 13, 1918 and fined three days pay, demoted to private, and transferred to the lowest-ranking company inside the unit—far away from other political activists in the unit. However, he does not appear to have suffered any sentence of detention, despite the confirmation of his preference for politicking over soldiering, after four months of service in Palestine (during much of which he was sick).

Ben Gurion was not alone in this sort of escapade. As Gershon Agronsky pointed out in 1919, “the men themselves are not entirely blameless” for AWOL prosecutions, for they routinely exploited leave. Zionist inside the battalions—particularly Americans—often had little interest in observing military regulations restricting their movement once in Palestine. When areas were placed “out of bounds” to Jewish troops to avoid conflict with Arabs, enterprising souls found ways around the regulations. One, Leon Cheifetz, recalled how he and a friend switched out their distinctive menorah badges for regular Royal Fusiliers badges, and then grouped up with several Australians in order to fool the military police and enter Hebron and Bethlehem. Others snuck into prohibited areas, particularly the Old City of Jerusalem, or

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684 AJHA, I-429 Jewish Legion. “Saluting the Memory of Colonel Eliezer Margolin,” in Honoring the Memory of Ze’ev Jabotinsky…, pg 11a.
685 Teveth, Ben Gurion, 137-8. Teveth names Ben-Zvi and Katznelson as specific figures.
686 JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 120. There is little reason to distrust Agronsky’s report, which was written before both battalion mutinies occurred and before the conflicts between ex-legionaries and Mandate officials in the 1920s. In other words, he wrote before later events might distort his perspective.
687 Cheifetz became the Secretary of Bet Hagdudim. He recalled this story in the Bulletin Veterans Jewish Legion Vol 1, Number 2 (Avichail , Israel), May 15, 1973 on page 16.
simply bluffed their way past sentries with bravado (and a little luck). Most of them were caught—including Cheifetz—and received punishment that usually entailed several weeks of Field Punishment No 2 or a pay stoppage. Jewish veterans often recalled these stories of summary punishment with wry humor, but their tone often shifted with regard to courts-martial in the field.

Jewish perspectives on military justice

The act of court-martialing a soldier was in itself, a public pronouncement to the rest of the unit. The tremendous, seemingly arbitrary, power of an FGCM—in which men could be imprisoned with hard labor for offenses that in the civilian world merited no more than the loss of employment—could be terrifying to ordinary soldiers.

Ira Liss, a Russian immigrant to the United States who volunteered for the 39th, provided a lengthy entry in his diary about the fearful spectacle of the FGCM of another member of his battalion, Private J. Strasburg. Strasburg faced court-martial in March 1919 on charges of mutiny and insubordination, and Liss stood guard at the trial. Liss’ duty was all the more difficult, and possibly intentional, because he and Strasburg had been tent-mates and were friendly. Describing the day in his diary, Liss wrote:

The ceremony itself was enough to frighten the attendees. We were arrayed in the form of a U and the one charged was in the middle with 2 policemen as escorts. Behind the prisoner was the Corp[oral] of the police. When the Adjutant gave the command: “Attention! Stand!” and he began to read the private’s [name] and number. (At these words, the Police Corp[oral] took his hands off the accused.) What he was accused of was trying to foment a revolution among the soldiers and not obeying the orders of his officer. He pleaded, “Not guilty,” but he was found guilty on both counts and was sentenced to one year’s hard labor, but, out of kindness, his sentence was reduced to 6 months. “Parade attention!” [was called], and the police escort than turned so they stood with their faces to the guilty party.

There is no mention of the proceedings of the trial, particularly whether Liss had a prisoner’s friend to defend him. Additionally, it’s unclear whether the FGCM immediately reduced Strasburg’s sentence, or whether the diary entry is from a later date and integrates DJAG remittance into the original trial. What is clear is that the severity of the sentence shocked Liss, especially because he felt that his friend was innocent:

It hit us like a death blow, when we heard such a sentence for something that was mostly a frame-up on the part of several sergeants, who had it in for him. The escort led the prisoner back to jail, and we were taken through the guard ceremony, even though we could barely stand on our feet after having gone through such a bad experience. But what could one do? We were in the army, held by iron chains. And we went off to do our duty as if nothing whatsoever had occurred.

688 AJHS I-429. “Marginal notes by a Legionnaire” by Felix Wolofsky. The Canadian Jewish Chronicle, Jan 13, 1933. p 15
689 WO 213/29/86 J. Strasburg. The charge of mutiny was somewhat unique due to the isolated nature of the trial (no other soldiers were also tried for mutiny).
690 Keren and Keren, We are Coming, 101-2. The two Kerens translated Liss’ diary from Yiddish and then provided the lengthy diary entry in their volume. The bracketed text is theirs.
691 The latter is a possibility, not least because there is a discrepancy in the date of the trial between Liss’ diary (which dates the entry April 4, and describes the trial as that afternoon) and the DJAG records in the War Office (which list the FGCM as March 29).
692 Keren and Keren, We are Coming, 102
Liss revealed the harsh and inescapable realities of military justice. Despite some of its liberal counterweights, it was still a system designed to enforce hierarchical control for the purposes of waging war. At least for someone like Liss, the public trial and sentencing was a direct encouragement to fight; if someone could be imprisoned by a “frame-up,” what would happen to those that deserted? That a group of NCOs “had it in” for the accused, in Liss’ view, is a particularly revealing insight into the ruptures inside the Jewish battalions, and a notable deviation from postwar accounts that fixate on the Senior Officers outside of their battalion, particularly the General command, as antisemites intent on persecution. Accusations of antisemitism and discrimination abound in some ex-legionnaires writings—but anger at NCOs rarely appears.

Most soldiers in the Jewish Legion, however, did not experience the military justice system through courts-martial, but rather through internal summary punishment. Meant to cover less severe offenses than a field court-martial, the ability to award a summary sentence concentrated a tremendous amount of disciplinary power within the person of the commanding officer. However, British Army soldiers—including the Jewish battalions—had the option to appeal summary sentences by requesting a Field Court-Martial; a surprisingly liberal process for a military justice system. Yet, only two members of the 38th appealed their summary punishment for disobedience (they were both convicted and sentenced to one year of imprisonment with hard labor), and there was only one appeal in both the 39th and 40th. The lack of appeals suggests that summary sentencing was preferable to a potential court-martial, and that it may even have been used as a way to shield Jewish troops from discrimination. There is, for example, a noticeable drop in courts-martial for the 38th once they entered the Jordan Valley in 1918, and it is possible that Patterson may have, similar to BWIR commanding officers, utilized his powers of summary punishment as either a protective measure or preferred them to the difficulty of convening a FGCM in a combat zone.

Summary punishment might result in a range of different sentences, even for the same offense. Arriving late for parade, for example, might result in a sequence of exacting (and somewhat mindless) inspection parades for some, while others might be punished with one hour of heavy pack drill each day for one week’s time. These sentencing differences were the likely result of several factors: the mindset of the sentencing officer, the disciplinary record of the offender, and the context of the offense.

The frequency with which commanding officers resorted to summary discipline often dominated subalTERN memories of them. The Australian-Jewish commander of the 39th battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Eliezer Margolin, in particular, developed a reputation as a “stickler for discipline.” Soldiers recalled how he frequently drilled his NCOs and lectured them whenever he felt they were becoming too slack (on at least one occasion, notifying them that it was as easy to sew the stripes off their uniforms as on). Margolin’s insistence on discipline, however, did not tarnish his image nor authority to most of his men. Rather, he seems to have been considered exacting and demanding, but also fair and loyal to the lower ranks.

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693 WO 213/31/16, M. Basel and L. Schwartz. There was one appeal each in the 39th and 40th.
694 Keren and Keren, We are Coming Unafraid, 101; AJHS I-429 “Marginal notes by a Legionnaire” by Felix Wolofsky. The Canadian Jewish Chronicle, Jan 13, 1933. p 7
695 AJHA, I-429 Jewish Legion. “Saluting the Memory of Colonel Eliezer Margolin,” in in Honoring the Memory of Ze’ev Jabotinsky…. pg 11a.
opined that Margolin’s exactness was deliberately designed to overturn existing stereotypes of Jewish weakness and martial ineffectualness, a sentiment that fits with a number of other battalion officers’ predilections about presentation and discipline. Jabotinsky, in particular, was noted for being “stricter than all the others”—the byproduct of his obsession with the Legion presenting itself perfectly to the British government and army.

For the most part, Jewish soldiers respected the summary powers of their officers, but did not fear them in the same way they feared the severity of court-martialing. In part of a mock, epic poem about the founding of the Legion that was published in that battalion newspaper, The Judean, a member of the 39th focused on the summary disciplinary powers of Colonel John Henry Patterson, the official Commanding Officer of the 38th battalion, but also the unofficial “C.O.” for the entire Legion:

19. But certain of them there were, who would not bow down before Atter, the son of Pat, and upon these did his wrath fall. He did send for these men saying “Am I not your leader? Take then my punishment.
20. “For a hundred and sixty-eight hours shall ye be confined in a dungeon, and this shall be called detention.”
21. Some there were that were taxed of their wages, others that were both taxed and punished with detention; and so, Atter, the son of Pat, became both loved and feared, for he was wise in the ways of men.

In addition to evident admiration for Patterson, other parts of The Judean mocked officers and NCOs in ways that tested the limits of military hierarchy much further. Some officers were teased for their height, others for their weight (one sergeant was referred to as “corpulent”), others their fastidious uniforms, and others for their local love interests. At least in the Jewish battalions, some officers realized that this was an important outlet for their men—one wrote home to his wife that a Corporal’s published “caricatures of me are really A 1,” promising to send her copies. This humorous deprecation was not unique to the Jews; soldiers throughout the EEF performed public comedic sketches that made officers and the British command the butt of their jokes. Yet the gentle teasing in The Judean seems to indicate a level of casual camaraderie between commissioned and enlisted men, a bond that could be potentially important when serious disciplinary issues emerged.

Escaping Capital Punishment

Just as in other non-British units, officers could—and did—work to protect their men in cases where severe penalties might be enforced. One particular intercession by Colonel Patterson not only prevented the execution of a soldier in the 38th, but also exploited a particular Army Act in order to return him to service from prison. The soldier, a young private named Ziff, had been caught asleep while on sentry duty, court-martialed, and sentenced to death. The timing of the incident was terrible for Ziff—the Jewish battalions were still new to the theater when he was tried in July 1918, and preexisting perceptions that the Jews were bad soldiers in need of a lesson surely led to an excessive sentence. This is borne out by a brief comparison to

697 Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 114.
698 Keren and Keren, We are Coming, 100. Jabotinsky did, according to Liss, inform them of this—but did so in Yiddish. The easy assumption, of course, is that this prevented senior British officers from overhearing.
700 IWM MS/E/S, E.149 The Judean
701 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 14.
702 Woodward, Forgotten Soldiers, 130-1.
703 WO 213/26/2 D. Ziff.
others in the EEF caught asleep at their post and court-martialed. Several members of the 5th BWIR were court-martialed at the same time as Ziff for sleeping at their posts—all receiving two years of imprisonment, with one year remitted.\(^{704}\) Several months later, two members of the 39th were court-martialed for the same offense, and while one initially faced imprisonment, both ended up with several weeks of Field Punishment 2.\(^{705}\) Ziff, however, probably would have been executed had his commanding officer not intervened.

Ziff’s C.O. was Colonel Patterson who revealed much of the story in his memoir of service in Palestine:

…one of my men, quite a youth, was found asleep at his post, and as this is about the most serious crime of which a sentry can be guilty, he was tried by General Court Martial, and sentenced to death. A few days later a telegram came from the Provost Marshal ordering me to send the condemned man under strong escort, with two senior non-commissioned officers, to the prisoners’ compound some distance away. I feared that the unfortunate lad would be shot at dawn, and as I knew he had been working exceedingly hard, day and night for forty-eight hours before he was found asleep at his post, and was of good character, and very young, I determined to try to save him. I therefore sent a private wire to General Allenby asking him on these grounds to reprieve him.\(^{706}\)

Patterson’s wire to Allenby, unsurprisingly, invoked the particular military language that the British used to assess future martial merit in relation to sentencing—“character.” Ziff’s youth was irrelevant (youth did not prevent execution), what mattered was that his crime was one of exhaustion, not delinquency, and that a senior British officer was vouching for his future military potential. It’s unclear why Patterson waited until Ziff was to be moved before intervening; it’s possible he was unaware of the court-martial until the telegram arrived or that he expected the DJAG to commute the sentence. Regardless, Patterson’s telegram to Allenby was a highly unorthodox maneuver that clearly violated the chain-of-command—an indication that the officers between Patterson and Allenby might block any attempt to commute Ziff’s sentence. This, according to Patterson, still nearly occurred:

…the Brigadier, saw the wire before it was despatched and stopped it. However, one of my men in the Signal Office told me of this. So I immediately wrote a confidential letter to General Allenby, gave it to a motor cyclist, and sent him off post haste to G. H. Q., some thirty miles away, telling him to ride for all he was worth, as a man’s life hung on his speed. I am glad to say that not only did General Allenby reprieve the man and reduce the sentence to a certain number of years’ imprisonment, but he suspended even that punishment provided the man proved himself worthy of forgiveness by doing his duty faithfully in the Battalion. The young soldier returned to us overjoyed, and full of gratitude for his release. He proved himself worthy in every respect, and was never afterwards called upon to do a day’s imprisonment.\(^{707}\)

Patterson’s account suggests the possibility of what might be called the “politics of discipline”—ruptures inside the hierarchy of senior officership as to appropriate punishment and channels of review. Allenby would still have needed to, at the least, nominally review Ziff’s file and approve the execution, but it would have been possible for a senior officer to frame the case in terms of a salutary lesson to the Jewish battalions. Patterson’s account implies that this “framing” was

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\(^{706}\) Patterson, With the Judeans, 75-6.

\(^{707}\) Patterson, With the Judeans, 75-6. Patterson concluded the story by discussing the internal conflict, and what he perceived to be anti-Legion prejudice: “Not satisfied with having held up the wire, the Brigadier motored some miles away to report the matter to the Divisional General, Sir John Shea. I was duly hauled before the General, not knowing for what reason, until he said, “You know you will get yourself into trouble if you go sending telegrams direct to the C-in-C’ It then dawned upon me for the first time why I had been sent for.”
likely, and given the severity of the 38th’s disciplinary sentencing in 1918, certainly seems possible.

The Ziff case also reveals a particular wrinkle inside the British military justice system during the First World War. Ziff’s immediate return to duty suggests that Allenby pardoned him under the Army (Suspension of Sentences) Act of 1915, which allowed for accused soldiers to override their guilt by demonstrating exemplary service in the field. Allenby’s exercise of this act could stem from multiple motivations—a good will towards the Jewish battalions, a shrewd sense of the political consequences inside the EEF of executing Ziff, or possibly council (such as a DJAG) who felt the sentence too harsh given the circumstances. While Ziff’s sentence was severe for the EEF, it was not uncommon in other theaters. Two privates serving in Mesopotamia with the 6th South Lancashires, Robert Burton and Thomas Downing, had also fallen asleep at their posts after a long march. Despite the attempted intercession of their Colonel for mercy and their previous “good character,” both were shot on February 19, 1917. Character and the support of a Commanding Officer could help commute a sentence, but if a senior General felt execution was merited, they mattered little. As much as the British system of military justice functioned within a perceived set of punishment fitting crime norms, the ease with which a death sentence could be passed meant that senior theater commanders maintained authority not standard in a liberal justice system.

While Allenby’s reasons for pardoning Ziff are unclear, the case still demonstrates how critical the idea of “good character” was in the justice process. “Character” rarely prevented a conviction, but could be the difference between an extremely unpleasant punishment and a much more palatable one. Jewish soldiers, however, were at an innate disadvantage in these assessments—they had entered military service late in the war, which meant fewer combat opportunities and a corresponding tab as “shirkers” due to their late enlistment, an identity that could only be overturned by front-line performance. Given prevailing prewar images of Jews as effete and un-martial, the Jewish battalions faced a particularly problematic and self-reinforcing cocktail of slights to their military worth. As the next chapter argues, success at athletic games became particularly critical for Jewish troops—it was a means to refute key stereotypes, which could have a serious effect on any disciplinary proceedings. Yet, it seems likely that precisely because of these issues, the commanding officers—particularly Patterson—became something of “character” activists for their troops, being well aware of the problems they would face in sentencing. Patterson’s role in the Ziff court-martial—an appeal rooted in the idea that Ziff was a “good” soldier—is evidence of this. No matter the circumstances of Ziff’s case, without Patterson’s attestation to the military worth of the young man, there is little doubt he would have ended up either executed or in a penal colony. However, in 1919, with the general assessment that the Jewish battalions had done little during the Megiddo offensive and that they were causing problems for the Mandate, plus the increasingly administrative role of Patterson, Jewish soldiers tried in the later half of 1919 were at a serious disadvantage.

The near-execution of Private Ziff raises a critical issue—whether or not the military justice system was a means for senior British officers to discriminate against or abuse Jewish soldiers. In Ziff’s specific case, a senior officer blocked Patterson’s initial attempt at securing a pardon, a possible indication of prejudice. Yet in many recollections, Jewish soldiers recall

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British prejudice in terms of favoritism towards the local inhabitants of Egypt and Palestine at their expense.

Local Conflict?

With the fighting concluded, the Jewish battalions served with the rest of the EEF as an army of occupation—a duty that brought them into contact with local Egyptians, Palestinians, and Bedouins. The result was a cycle of controversy and conflict. In early February a detachment of the 39th battalion had been stationed near the village of Ramleh, where the village head accused Jewish troops of attempting to rape his wife and deliberately liaising with a prostitute inside the village mosque. The complaints resulted in a British inquiry, but no evidence of these abuses were found, and no Jewish soldiers were punished. One month later, an Anglo-Jewish Major wrote a furious letter home about accusations against Jewish troops and the British response. Arguing that he did not “think the Battalion is being fairly dealt with” he laid the blame at local Arabs, claiming that they

...make every kind of lying accusation they can think of and the Authorities seem quite ready to punish us without investigating the charges at all...Only English good-nature or rank anti-semitism could permit of anyone listening to the charges that have been made. Really one is now face to face with anti-semitism in a form that I have never met it before. Whether the Authorities know that they are countenancing it or not, I am not clear, but the situation gives me food for thought.

Civilian accusations created a hostile atmosphere, but it was the British willingness to entertain complaints that the Jews found insulting and spurious that truly aggrieved them, and exacerbated the tensions of 1919.

Despite the problems recorded by battalion officers in early 1919, true prejudice would be reflected by the quantity, and outcome, of disciplinary proceedings against Jewish soldiers. In fact, shortly after the Major’s written outburst, a Private Mattuck from the 40th battalion was court-martialed for offenses against inhabitants. Martin Watts has argued that the Mattuck trial, in particular, bears out the claims of anti-Jewish sentiment inside the EEF command. Private Mattuck, however, was acquitted, and no other Jewish soldier faced court-martial in February or March on civil charges. In fact, given the animosity between many local inhabitants and Jews, there are surprisingly few cases of offenses against inhabitants across the battalions’ entire disciplinary history—only 4 out of a possible 128 non-mutiny trials. Soldiers might also be court-martialed under Section 41, a clause designed to encapsulate a variety of civil charges, and usually denoting a disruption with the civilian community. Yet across all the battalions, there were only four instances of a Section 41 court-martial, which meant that a mere 8 out of 128 trials revolved around alleged misconduct towards civilians. Most importantly, in two of these, the soldiers were found not guilty, and in another case, while guilty of military charges, the soldier was innocent of those related to civilians. Five convictions spread out over three

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711 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, Letter of March 14, 1919, pg 171. His ellipse. Myer refers to them as “Syrians,” but his battalion was not stationed in Syria proper.
712 Watts, Jewish Legion, 218-9
713 WO 213/29/76, S. Mattuck.
714 Three of the soldiers charged with “offenses” were also charged with Section 41: WO 213/29/171 M. Epstein, S. Lusky, D. Rappaport, all tried together on May 1, 1919.
battalions in nearly two years hardly indicates systematic prejudice inside the military justice system.

The relative lack of civilian-related courts-martial, particularly in the Spring of 1919 indicates that the military justice system was not a tool used by the British command to indulge anti-Jewish prejudice. Rather, the overwhelming disciplinary problem inside the battalions in the Spring of 1919 were AWOL incidents—an issue that this chapter has previously examined. While false charges motivated by anti-Jewish sentiment must have badly aggrieved battalion members, it seems they rarely moved beyond the initial inquiry phrase, and even if a trial was convened, conviction was not assured. There were, however, significant conflicts between Jewish soldiers and local Egyptian and Palestinians, and Allenby himself notified the War Office of the conflicts in a written opposition to increases in Jewish troops, pointing out the “incidents between Jewish troops and non-Jewish inhabitants.”

Much like the other members of the EEF, many Jewish soldiers maintained deeply prejudiced views of the inhabitants of Egypt and Palestine. Captain Salaman, a particularly fond adherent of race-based science, reflected popular views when he noted that without a strong government and police in Egypt, the only alternative was to “treat the Gypies and their like as a subject race.” With Jewish soldiers’ Magen David badge an easy identifier for abuse, the widely-shared attitude of Salaman ensured that abuse often escalated. Freulich related how two battalion members ended up in an altercation with an Egyptian Captain in the military police near Rishon—a fight that Freulich claims was provoked by the captain’s antisemitism. During the fight, one of the Jewish soldiers stabbed the captain in the chest (inadvertently, Freulich claims), an act witnessed by another military policeman. No trial occurred, however. Margolin, according to the probably exaggerated story, had hidden the men in his tent during the inspection parade to find the guilty parties.

On another occasion, an Argentinean member of the Legion was attacked (supposedly without cause) by Bedouins near Surafend. Fully aware of the “Australian method” of reprisal—the ANZACs had murdered dozens of Bedouins at Surafend in response to the murder of a New Zealand trooper—the battalion members decided to replicate it, without deadly force. Armed with bayonets, the Jewish troops attacked the Bedouin camp before dawn, beating up every Bedouin man they could find. Whether this incident actually occurred is not clear. If it did, just as in the Australian case at Surafend, it would imply the tacit approval of battalion officers for extrajudicial revenge against local natives. While unlikely, this was possible. Salaman had seemed to condone the Australian attacks at Surafend in a letter to his wife, writing that “when I get home I will tell you a rather terrible tale concerning the way the Australians avenged a

716 WO 33/981/11194 Allenby to War Office, June 6, 1919, EA 2501.
717 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 214.
718 Unsurprisingly, the details in this story seem duly weighted to the favor of the Jewish soldiers. Additionally, it would have been unlikely for a native Egyptian to hold a Captain’s rank in the British Army.
719 Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 138. There is no way to corroborate this particular story though—and given the severity of the crime, it seems likely that the command would have persisted in looking for the soldier (or, if the allegations of antisemitism were to be believed, simply tried a random soldier for the offense). It’s worth noting that in addition to his tendency towards exaggeration, Freulich’s vignettes were published after both 1948 and 1956, and it is certainly possible that he wanted to falsely historicize anti-Egyptian sentiment, given Israeli-Egyptian tensions.
720 See Harry Granick, “An Incident in Cairo” Bulletin Veterans Jewish Legion Vol, 1 No 3, Aug 15, 1974 (Baltimore and Avichail), pg 8 for evidence that Jewish soldiers knew what had occurred at Surafend. Freulich claims the Australians machine-gunned the Bedouin, and that they publically challenged Allenby when shamed by him during parade. Neither of these seems to have actually happened.
721 Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 162-5.
murder of one of their men here. It was an ordered lynch law—a mixture of chivalry and sternest justice, absolutely spontaneous.” While tacit approval for the Australians’ actions was a common sentiment, the furious reaction of Allenby and the EEF command to the massacre makes it unlikely that the Jewish troops would have dared embark on a similar action in its wake. Thus, while there does appear to have been significant hostility between local groups and the Jewish soldiers, there is little to indicate that the British authorities—at least during 1918 and 1919—openly sided with locals in persecution of Jewish troops. While the British attempted to keep Jewish troops away from areas where they thought conflict likely—a posture that contributed to AWOL violations and allegations of unfair treatment, particularly from Zionist troops—there is little empirical evidence to suggest that this translated into severe and retaliatory court-martialing.

Judicial Review in the Jewish Battalions

While the courts-martial records of the Jewish battalions do not indicate entrenched disciplinary prejudice with regard to localized conflict, the best means of determining systematic prejudice is through the rates of acquittals and sentence modifications. As the preceding chapter has pointed out, racial discrimination could certainly influence the likelihood and nature of courts-martial charges, and non-British soldiers were at significant risk of being over-sentenced. Yet, those differentiated soldiers that enjoyed status as “official” British Army soldiers were also protected from these abuses by the inherent system of judicial review. Given the Jewish Battalions’ status as official units of the Royal Fusiliers—and not an expressly colonial or minority-national auxiliary unit—they should have enjoyed the privilege of review.

Excepting the mutiny trials, which significantly increase the not-guilty rates in the service battalions, there was remarkable consistency in the rate of “not guilty” verdicts. In the 38th, four soldiers were found not guilty, almost 10% of the total trials. Both the 39th and 40th had five soldiers escape conviction—rates of 11% and 12% respectively. Not only are these percentages relatively equal across all three battalions, but they are also roughly in-line with the wartime average across the British Army of 10%. In addition, fourteen other trials across the battalions saw soldiers escape conviction for one of their charges, which would have lessened the severity of their overall sentence. Given the period of service the Jewish battalions had in Palestine, it is not possible to meaningfully determine if, like the BWIR, they too were more likely to be convicted while active military operations occurred. However, the broader sweep of British military justice would seem to imply that this sort of punitive “letting up” probably occurred, at least before political tensions ratcheted up in the Spring of 1919.

Adding the trials related to the 1919 Mutiny increases the rate of acquittal significantly in both the 38th and 39th battalions. In the 38th, an additional thirty men were acquitted, bringing the battalion’s rate to an astounding 35%. For the 39th, nineteen additional men were acquitted—thus leading to a slightly less dramatic 21% acquittal rate, but still double the wartime average. While much of the credit for these additional acquittals was due to a spirited legal defense by the

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722 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 143-4
724 Per battalion, the numbers are: 38th (10 cases), 39th (1), 40th (3).
725 For the 38th, the calculation is based on 96 total trials in Palestine before Jan 1, 1920. For the 39th, the number is 89 total trials.
brilliant Ze’ev Jabotinsky, they still suggest the difficulty in arguing that the Jewish battalions were systematically discriminated against, at least in formal disciplinary terms. Recounting how he helped a peer escape from a detention center, but received no additional punishment, Felix Wolofsky, summed up these broader conclusions: “all this is told to prove that we were not handled too severely.”

However, assessments of systemized prejudice inside the British military justice system must look beyond initial verdicts and examine the role of the DJAG in modifying sentences. The DJAG in Egypt and Palestine appears to have consistently modified sentences it found too harsh, as well as force retrials when necessary for legal reasons. Major Henry Myer, while never mentioning the DJAG explicitly, hinted at their influence when noting in his diary that he “had made an error in court martial, so had to go back again”, presumably to retry the case. As British Army soldiers, Jewish battalion members were eligible for judicial review. Exempting the mutiny trials, in the 38th, five sentences were commuted, and eight were remitted—a modification rate of 31%. In the 39th, seven sentences were commuted, and six remitted—just over 28% of the total trials. The 40th, however, saw significantly less judicial review than its sister battalions. Three sentences were commuted, and two remitted—only 12% of the total, a figure far below those of the 38th and 39th. The 40th did have two sentences “quashed,” which brings their judicial revision rate up closer to 17%, but still far below the other two units.

One possible explanation for this significant disparity between battalions is that while the 38th and 39th featured high numbers of disobedience and insubordination trials, most of the 40th’s FGCMs dealt with AWOL charges. As this and the previous chapter have shown, courts-martial related to the contravention of authority were often over-sentenced to make examples, something the DJAG would later correct. AWOL charges, however, were relatively minor in terms of both severity and punishment. In addition, the 40th had arrived too late in the war for any pre-Armistice combat experience—unlike the 38th and 39th, where soldiers might have performed well during the September offensives, members of the 40th were at a distinct disadvantage for commutation or remittance based on character. Without proven combat experience, they would be unable to convince a panel of officers that they were “good” soldiers—one of the key determining factors in the entire military justice process.

If compared to the BWIR battalions, it’s clear that the Jewish battalions had significantly lower rates of sentence modification. Depending on the punishment, the West Indian soldiers saw between a 40% and 50% rate of remittance, commutation, or quashing—well over the rates extended to the Jewish battalions. Yet these remittance rates were only for punishments that involved some form of bodily detention—be it field punishment, imprisonment, or penal servitude. Focusing only on the trials of the Jewish battalions in those categories provides the following:

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The chart details the 163 sentences initially meted out to Jewish battalion soldiers that fall within the same categories as the BWIR remittance analysis. Out of these sentences, 78 were modified in some manner by the DJAG—roughly 48% of the total.\textsuperscript{728} While this overall number more closely parallels the modification rates in the West Indian battalions, a close examination reveals a more complicated picture.

The most immediate issue is that the sentence modification of penal servitude sentences is nearly 100%. Almost all of these commutations are related to the Mutiny sentences, thus demonstrating that even those not acquitted for their participation were not punished with quite the severity as initially appeared. Importantly, this extremely high rate of commutation significantly alters the overall modification percentages; the modification rate of imprisonment sentences for the Jewish battalions is lower than for the BWIR, as is that of Field Punishment sentences. It is difficult to tell whether the lack of remittance around imprisonment is the result of discrimination, or rather simply reflective of “appropriate” sentencing. The latter seems likely, in part because previous data has shown the lack of sustained or systematic prejudice against Jewish soldiers inside the justice system. Additionally, the Jewish battalion data indicates how much more severely the West Indian soldiers were initially sentenced, given the frequent DJAG involvement in their sentences. For field punishment, however, the Jewish case is slightly more nuanced.

As the previous chapter illustrated, field punishment was an extremely common sentence in the British Army during the First World War, but it had two highly distinguishable versions. The punishment was either “Number 1” or “Number 2,” and the difference for the sentenced soldier was significant. “Number 2” was the milder variant, requiring soldiers to drill or complete other strenuous physical activities in addition to their regular duties. The idea was to physically punish soldiers, but not seriously reduce the fighting efficacy of army units. “Number 1,” however, elevated the punishment to a brutal level by adding in “crucifixion,” a period during...

\textsuperscript{728} This does not include five sentences in which there may have been DJAG intervention. If they are included, the total percentage increases to 51%.
which soldiers might be tied to a gun, wagon wheel, or post and exposed to the elements without food or water.

Although it occurred frequently in France, “Number 1” was a less common sentence inside Egypt and Palestine. In fact, one ex-Legionnaire claimed “[t]his sort of punishment was reserved for the “natives” and was not practiced in white units.” This was a particularly critical piece of misinformation, because it was a sentence of “Number 1” that helped spark the second phase of the 1919 Mutiny. A relatively new, and young, soldier in the 39th’s transport division received a summary punishment from an officer for slightly mishandling his mule—in this case, FP 1. Stripped of much of his clothing and deprived of water, he was tied to an artillery piece and left in the sun for hours, infuriating many in the 39th battalion who viewed the summary sentencing as antisemitism. While this particular case certainly resulted in a punishment that did not meet the (minor) infraction, Jewish troops did receive sentences of “Number 1” throughout their service.

There are nine confirmed sentences of FP 1 in the 38th’s JAG records, most stemming from the May 1919 FGCM of six privates and two acting lance-corporals. In the 39th Battalion, there were four confirmed sentences of FP 1, leaving the service battalions with 13 sentences of FP 1 out of 88 courts-martial (excluding the mutiny cases)—a percentage of nearly 15%. However, the reserve 40th battalion had zero sentences of FP 1, but a tremendous number of sentences of Field Punishment 2. In fact, an astounding 56% of the 40th’s courts-martial ended with a sentence of FP 2, compared to 26% in the 38th and 37% in the 39th.

The difference between the service and reserve units is quite notable—the 40th had the least “British” composition of any of the Jewish battalions, drawing most of its manpower from Americans, but also local Yemenite, Ottoman, and Palestinian Jews. If the “crucifixion” of FP 1 was a means for the Army to demonstrate the power of the state and hierarchy, it is somewhat odd to see it not employed in the unit full of those lower on an imperial racial hierarchy.

It is worth noting, however, that unlike the West Indians of the BWIR who were certainly tried due to perceived racial notions, there is no clearly discernable tread of sustained, deliberate persecution in the FGCM records of the battalions. No courts-martial occurred due to soldiers resting on the Sabbath, and despite the perceived anti-Jewish local atmosphere, the number of trials relating to conflicts with inhabitants is very low—only five men were tried and convicted. Instead, the majority of courts-martial seem to have stemmed from the problems of many American volunteers at adapting to the banality and rigors of military life, as well as to the desires of many battalion members to emigrate into Britain’s newly occupied territory.

Jabotinsky, in a petition for clemency to the King during the mutiny trials, argued that prejudice intensified after the 1918 Armistices, particularly inside the military justice system. Yet, the

730 Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 145.
731 In the 39th, three of the FP 1 sentences were passed down at trial, and one was a commutation from imprisonment. There were also 3 sentences across the service battalion DJAG records where the FP type was not noted.
732 There were eleven total cases of FP 2 in the 38th battalion, and seventeen in the 39th (“total” in this case indicating the number of confirmed sentences in addition to any harsher sentences commuted to an FP 2 punishment). The 40th, in contrast, had twenty-three FP 2 sentences.
733 Somewhat surprisingly, FP 1 seems to have become the dominant form of punishment after the battalions merged into the Judeans—in the eleven FGCMs that occurred after January 1920 and convicted a soldier, FP 1 was sentenced and confirmed six times.
734 FO 371/4238/144798. Typed Petition for Mercy by V. Jabotinsky
trials of the 38th that took place in 1918—the period during which Jabotinsky does not allege abuse—resulted in comparatively harsher sentences than those in 1919. However, the disciplinary history of the Jewish battalions has not been defined by the intricacies of total courts-martial, but by a sequence of events in the summer of 1919—the Mutiny of the Jewish Legion.

Mutiny

In July of 1919, several dozen men inside the Jewish battalions rebelled against British military authority, a sequence of events that is generally referred to as a single “Mutiny.” The mutiny was not, as it has sometimes been depicted, an inclusive, simultaneous uprising across the entire Jewish Legion. Rather, it was two separate incidents each involving several dozen men—the first occurring in early July in the 38th battalion, and the second several weeks later in the 39th. In both cases, minor incidents sparked festering anger over broader issues—demobilization and perceived anti-Jewish prejudice—into open rejection of British authority.

The mutiny of soldiers during wartime is a powerful statement of discontent, an explosion of anger usually sparked by a particular incident, but often reflective of long-simmering tension and dissatisfaction. It is especially notable when the mutineers are volunteers, rather than conscripts, for it represents if not a rejection of an original objective, a statement of no-confidence in the manner in which it is pursued. Great War historians, most notably Leonard Smith, have therefore understood mutiny as genuine political expression, the negotiation of command and authority.735 The mutiny of minority or colonial military groups should also be understood in such terms, for while such men rarely have the rights of full citizenship, their action is a rejection of the governing system by those initially willing to fight on its behalf. The “turning” of the formerly loyal is then key to any founding post-imperial, national mythology—it marks the rejection of the old authority and, in some cases, the embrace of a new one. But mutiny must also be contextualized. Those that occur after the fighting has ended may signify something quite different, and perhaps less politically meaningful, than those that occur at the front-lines in the midst of battle. This was the case in Egypt and Palestine during the period between the Autumn armistices and the signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty.

Both Egypt and Palestine were extremely unstable throughout 1919, as the British attempted to balance international diplomacy, local politics, and a disgruntled army of occupation. In March, Egypt had erupted in discontent after more than three decades of “temporary” British rule, a rebellion that had been brought about, in part, by the EEF’s wartime demands on the Egyptian populace and economy. The scale and intensity of the revolt—encompassing rural and urban communities—frightened the British authorities, particularly after the deaths of eight British soldiers on March 18. For a brief period of time, it seemed that Egypt 1919 might become another India 1857.736

Before Egypt could truly develop into a sustained revolution against the Empire, however, Allenby deployed military units in late March and April to quash it. While this alleviated one major problem, it exacerbated another concern—the delay in demobilizing the men of the EEF. During the war, British EEF troops lacked the same opportunities for home leave as their peers in France; healthy, non-commissioned imperials rarely left the secondary

736 Fromkin, A Peace to end all peace, 419. See also Brugger, Australians and Egypt, Op. cit.
theaters, spending their leaves in places like Cairo and Alexandria. The result was that men who had often been in service for several years became desperate to get home not only to secure postwar employment, but for familial and personal reasons. However, in the first months of 1919, they were generally given lower priority for ships home while the British Government worked to legally stabilize its new mandate in Palestine and suppress Egyptian unrest. Part of this also stemmed from the War Council’s concern over similar dissatisfaction in France. Five thousand soldiers at Calais had mutinied in January over delays in demobilization, an incident that left Winston Churchill terrified of Bolshevism infiltrating the army in France and eliminating any British diplomatic leverage at Versailles.\footnote{Fromkin A Peace to end all peace, 385-6. On the broad disturbances across the British Army in early 1919, see the problematic, but still useful, Andrew Rothstein, The Soldiers’ Strikes of 1919 (London: Macmillan 1980). Rothstein had refused an order to fight against the Bolsheviks in 1919, and later became a very significant figure in British Communism (which influences his account).} Priority for demobilization in early 1919 was in France, not in the “sideshows.”

The EEF command was aware of this decision, and was already concerned with burgeoning unrest inside its army before the Egyptian revolt. One communiqué in February 1919 noted several recent disturbances over pay, bonuses, and demobilization, and a fear that dissatisfaction was beginning to intensify.\footnote{WO 33/960/10771 Commander in Chief Egypt to War Office, Feb 20, 1919. MFA 35260. This telegram noted “four cases of serious unrest” at Haifa, Kantara, Aleppo, and Damascus from different units over pay issues, service duties and conditions, and the speed of their return home.} The issue of demobilization—particularly of the Australian contingent, who had served far from home for several years—greatly concerned Allenby. In correspondence with the War Office, he noted that the Admiralty had failed to transport the 3,000 troops they had proposed to in February, and that he now had 5,000 men simply awaiting ship transport. More importantly, Allenby foreshadowed what was to come, noting “inability to provide shipping causes much disappointment and may lead to discontentment…. I urge most strongly that the question of repatriation of Australians be taken up as a matter of supreme urgency.”\footnote{WO 33/960/10783a. Commander in Chief Egypt to War Office, Feb 27, 1919, No QKT 5153.} The lack of ships for Middle Eastern demobilization, plus further delays in repatriation incurred by the situation in Egypt and negotiations over the Mandate in Palestine, created a combustible atmosphere. As soldiers concentrated for demobilization at massive, converted supply camps—the largest being Kantara in Egypt—individual concerns cohered into broader, organized unrest.

Given the immense—and obvious to all—human and economic cost of the war, it was not surprising that British soldiers, already encamped en masse and awaiting an uncertain economic climate at home, would organize. At Kantara, men formed “soldiers’ councils” that regulated the workings of the camp and agitated for quicker demobilization. Writing to Sir Henry Wilson, now the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Allenby remarked that a “Trade union microbe” had infiltrated the thousands of soldiers at Kantara Base Camp, but that he “can’t shoot them all for mutiny.”\footnote{Hughes, Allenby in Palestine, 243-4.} Dissatisfaction culminated in May 1919, when signs stating “Remember May 11” began to appear—reflecting soldiers’ belief that their legal obligations to serve ended six months from the November 11 armistice.\footnote{Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 146.} Patterson saw the phrase “chalked up everywhere—on the railway station, signal boxes, workshops, on the engines, trucks, and carriages” and actively lobbied his men to not participate.\footnote{Patterson, With the Judeans, 196.} When the date passed and no mass
demobilization occurred, Freulich claimed that “thousands of troops mutinied and rioted,” burning part of Kantara and resulting in courts-martial for many.\footnote{Freulich, \textit{Soldiers in Judea}, 146.} This appears to be something of an overstatement—there was tremendous unrest at Kantara, but no courts-martial for mutiny occurred, and Patterson remarked later that “the matter was hushed up…the mutineers were not punished.”\footnote{Patterson, \textit{With the Judeans}, 197.} There was, however, a general strike threatened at a mass meeting of EEF soldiers on May 13, and Kantara briefly developed an independent system of internal regulation and work slow-downs.\footnote{Hansard, HC Debates, June 5, 1919, vol 116 c2247w} This chronic unrest never developed into the level of revolutionary mutiny that took hold in Germany immediately after the war—mostly because demobilization defused some of the general appeal and diluted the base of support. Still, the urgency of the situation throughout the Spring and Summer of 1919 was clear from the communications between the British command in Egypt and the War Office.

The British Army and government were in constant communication over the unrest. One communique to the War Office from Egypt soon after the Kantara disturbances stated that the “desire to return continues strong especially among men with small busineses and married men who fear wives attribute delay to indiference of the men themselves.”\footnote{WO 33/981/11172. GHQ Egypt to War Office, May 30, 1919, No I8948.} As the May 11 deadline passed, the signing of the Treaty of Versailles in June became a new focal point for those awaiting demobilization. A different communique stated that the Treaty had “inspired belief that demobilization will be hastened… Eligible officers impatient, and ask that their release be expedited. Considerable dissatisfaction at difficulty of obtaining leave from this theatre.”\footnote{WO 33/981/11271 GHQ Egypt to War Office, July 11, 1919, No. I9409/D} These communiques were somewhat understated—had Allenby attempted to squelch the unrest with force, he may have completely lost control of his own army. Many of the factors that led to mutinies—“sheer boredom, meager or unpalatable food, resentment of oppressive superiors, and political soul-searching”—were precisely the sort of issues that plagued the EEF in 1919 as men waited to demobilized.\footnote{Leonard Guttridge, \textit{Mutiny: A History of Naval Insurrection} (New York: Berkeley Books, 1992) 157.} These symptoms were no less acute in the Jewish battalions.

Anger over the pace of demobilization intensified in the Jewish battalions because of two self-reinforcing issues—geography and Zionism. Many of the American members of the Jewish battalion had enlisted specifically to fight in Palestine—a territory that they hoped to demobilize into from the army. Zionist politicos like Ben Gurion were already active in the local political landscape, and their continued military duties—despite the war’s apparent conclusion—were an unwelcome hindrance. Additionally, the Jews who had previously lived in Ottoman Palestine and enlisted into the EEF were desperate to return home. A telegram to the War Office in early 1919 noted that many in the 40\textsuperscript{th} battalion “own farms or have definite employment in this country to which they are anxious to return; it is important that they should.”\footnote{WO 33/960/10749. GHQ Egypt to War Office, Feb 12, 1919. EA 2211.} The Jewish battalions stationed in Palestine felt cruelly taunted—British Territorials and ANZACs might demand immediate demobilization as well, but they were not in a position to simply walk several miles into their former home or a Jewish colony. Delays in demobilization also reinforced perceptions of British antisemitism—a situation badly exacerbated by the War Office’s decision to demobilize many American servicemen back to the United States, rather than into Palestine.
Dissatisfaction over demobilization ran high amongst many of the Americans Jews, who had enlisted for service in part to ensure demobilization into Palestine after the war. Local military authorities reported to the War Office that hundreds of the American Jewish contingent wanted “local demobilization instead of repatriation,” but London ruled in July that this was an exception that would only be allowed for those few who qualified under a particular Army Order. While the first outbreak of unrest occurred before troops were fully informed of this decision, the delay in the War Office decision and the signing of the Versailles Treaty was enough to spark a small group of American Jews into outright disobedience.

The first wave of unrest occurred near Gaza, at the small village of Deir el Belah where part of the 38th battalion was stationed at a British outpost and field hospital. A group of younger Americans—not under the immediate eye of Patterson—had demanded to be demobilized expeditiously. When their deadline passed, they refused to perform their duties. According to the testimony of the detachment commander, Lieutenant SV Barrett, a large number of the Belah men had congregated outside of his office on July 2, asking for a definitive date of demobilization. When none was given and they were ordered to “fall out,” the men refused to disperse. After a two minute standoff, the Lieutenant notified them of the potential consequences of their refusal to follow his order, and finally announced that he was reporting their behavior to Patterson. The mention of Patterson ended the stand-off and the men dispersed. The unrest abated for a brief period of time, as the detachment executed its duties and followed orders that evening and the next morning. The next day, however, the situation escalated.

That afternoon, a party of men was ordered to travel from Belah to Bir Salem for duty. Upset over the demobilization situation, nine of them refused to obey the order. After ignoring multiple orders to depart, several were detained by the Company Sergeant Major and escorted to the Guard House. Observing this, an unknown number of men from the rest of the detachment crowded around the jail to prevent the CSM from imprisoning their comrades. Around the same time, members of the 38th serving on nearby guard details at a well and field hospital left their posts and returned to camp to express solidarity with the rest of the detachment, probably over the demobilization issue from the night before. Faced with a very unstable situation, the Lieutenant attempted to regain control by calling for a 6pm parade.

Once the entire detachment was at the parade ground, Barrett warned them that those who disobeyed orders would be reported as “Bolsheviks and Undesirable Aliens,” and receive no character testimony from Patterson (at their likely court-martial). This was no insignificant

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750 WO 33/981/11308. GHQ Egypt to War Office, August 9, 1919, MFA 2157. The order in question was #55. Although somewhat unclear, it appears that this decision was not caused by any particular prejudice, but rather by bureaucratic constraints about returning enlistees to their “home” country. War Office officials were ignorant of how this limiting decision could badly affect the situation in the Jewish battalions.

751 Patterson, With the Judeans, 213. It seems very likely that their deadline was tied to the signing of the Treaty of Versailles.

752 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of Lt SV Barrett, pg 66.

753 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of Lt SV Barrett, pg 66.

754 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of Sgt A. Schlaferman, pg 68. They also apparently wrote a note to the Lieutenant expressing their refusal, which although entered into evidence, is now missing. It seems likely that the note explained their belief that they were being unjustly held in military service now that the Treaty of Versailles had been signed.

755 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of CSM NE Fineman, Sgt A. Schlaferman, and Cpl BT Cohen, pg 68-69. It is a little unclear how many of the nine were escorted to jail (Corporal Cohen says “one or two”, CSM Fineman says “several”), and the number of soldiers blocking the jail is unknown—although it was likely to be several dozen.

756 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of Lt SV Barrett, pg 67.
threat. A statement of character, particularly from a senior officer, could be the difference between life and death in a court-martial, and often resulted in substantially shorter sentences for those who had “good” character. Barrett’s threat was then twofold: the “mutineers” could not count on Patterson to protect them despite his past support, and second, that they would be tagged as the most dangerous type of rebel—a Bolshevik. Not only would they likely face severe penal sentences, but the tag of Bolshevik would undoubtedly bar them from ever officially settling in British Palestine. This was a particular problem for the accused, who were mostly American and Canadian, and were interested in demobilizing into Palestine.

In an attempt to sift out the resistors from the rest of the detachment, Barrett ordered those unwilling to continue their duties to “fall out” to the right. Seven of those who chose this option were on guard duty, and although reminded of this, refused the order and remained where they were. What happened next and during the night of July 3 is not documented, but the battalion officers were not prepared to accept the situation. The next morning at 8am, all soldiers who had refused orders or declared their future unwillingness to obey were arrested.

Who actually arrested the Jewish troops at Belah is unclear. Gilner provides two possible versions—one in which West Indian troops had an armed standoff with the Jewish troops, and another in which the several dozen members of the Irish Rifles did the arresting. The lack of clarity in who effected the British command’s orders is indicative of both rumor and conflation of memory. Jewish troops had been involved in tense situations with both the West Indians and the Irish Rifles previously—the former over gambling and the latter over a minor mutiny in their unit—and these incidents appear to have grafted onto the mutiny. More likely, however, was that other members of the 38th arrested their peers. Court-martial transcripts reveal that members of the 38th provided the armed guard after the arrests, apparently without any objections. In fact, despite the conforming solidarity that pervades the postwar accounts of the 38th’s disobedience, there were certainly members of the unit averse to the actions of their peers. The courts-martial of the Belah men are filled with the testimony of various low-level NCOs from the 38th, as well as two privates who refused to leave their guard posts when their peers returned to the camp.

Patterson’s sentiment towards the disobedient soldiers was critical—as their commanding officer, he was responsible for filing the initial set of courts-martial charges. Despite his view of the disobedient Americans at Belah as young and “a bit wild and difficult to handle” because of inadequate training, he felt that their actions warranted court-martialing. In his memoir, Patterson claimed that he had “framed the charge sheets most carefully” to teach “these foolish youths at Belah” a lesson, but not a deeply punitive one. Yet initially, the 54 men at Belah found themselves facing the very serious charge of mutiny—a charge that Patterson appears to have approved on July 23, 1919. He later claimed in his memoir that the mutiny charge had been

757 II, 31-1K. Testimony of Lt SJB Brannon, CSM NE Fineman, Sgt A. Schlaferman, 67-69.
759 JI 31-1K. Testimony of L/Cpl C. Asher, pg 70.
760 JI 31-1K. Testimony of Privates S. Rosenblatt and I. Katz, pg 69-70. Katz claimed that he did not know the reason why members of his detail departed their posts—a statement that indicates some degree of cover for the men. NCO’s like Sgt A. Schlaferman, and Corporals BT Cohen and A. Duze offered critical testimony for the prosecution. Fracture inside the units was nothing unique, given their size and diversity. Salaman himself noted disconnects inside his 39th battalion back in 1918, writing: “Lately our men have rather got on my nerves; we have so many who don’t care a damn about anything Jewish, English, military, or, indeed, their own comfort.” Redcliffe Salaman, pg 55 August 18, 1918
761 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 212.
762 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 214.
substituted in for his initial charges by his commander, and that he had only signed off on the change because he was a “very obedient soldier.” Whether Patterson chose to simply cover his actions in his memoir, or whether he lacked the political capital to challenge a charge of mutiny is not clear. The symbolic leader of the Jewish battalions—Jabotinsky—also claimed not to have sympathized with the actions of the mutineers. Yet he too found himself wrapped up in their trials, this time as their defense counsel.

Consequences

Several days after the parade ground incidents, the trials of the arrested men began at Kantara. Unlike many other men in their situation, the Jewish soldiers were represented by an intellectually formidable man, one whose persistence perhaps even rivaled his intellect. In his initial defense, Jabotinsky argued that in order to be tried for mutiny, men had to be warned that they would be “charged with mutiny” if they continued to disobey. Since this exact statement was never uttered, and since many of the disobeying soldiers had completed their duties before the incident, Jabotinsky argued the Belah men were not mutinying. Additionally, he pointed out that the names of those in question had not been written down anywhere—it was not entirely clear how many, or who, had failed to follow orders. This was a well-thought out defense, and one that the presiding officers of the court had little choice but to accept. But even though the mutiny charges were dropped, the incident was too grievous, at too sensitive of a time, for the men to completely escape punishment. Lesser, more specific charges (possibly the originals from Colonel Patterson) were now levied, and a new round of courts-martial began.

On August 11, the new trials began. The first was of the men who had refused guard duty at the July 3 parade, all of whom faced disobedience charges. Next was the court-martial of the men who had quit their posts in solidarity—the hospital guards tried on August 12, and the well guards the next day. On August 14, the men who sparked the entire affair—the Americans who had refused to travel to Bir Salem—were court-martialed on charges of disobedience and conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline (Section 40). The largest and most minor court-martial—the trial of the men who had “fallen out” to the right at the July 3 parade on Section 40 charges—was the last to occur. The following table outlines the new round of trials:

Table F:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name</th>
<th>Trial and Charge</th>
<th>Initial Sentence</th>
<th>Final Sentence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>August 11</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Dubin</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ginsberg</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kermerman</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kass</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pine</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Plonsky</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shaber</td>
<td>Disobedience</td>
<td>5 Yrs Penal Servitude</td>
<td>2 Yrs Imprisonment</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>August 12</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohen</td>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td>-</td>
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763 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 214-5.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levinsky</th>
<th>Quitting Post</th>
<th>7 yrs Penal Servitude</th>
<th>2 Yrs Imprisonment</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gutwrinowitz</td>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Krinsky</td>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
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<tr>
<td>Juditsky</td>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td>-</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lane</td>
<td>Quitting Post</td>
<td>Not Guilty</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**August 13**

| Stransman        | Quitting Post | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Novokovsky       | Quitting Post | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Chalem           | Quitting Post | Not Guilty            | -                 |
| Klapkin          | Quitting Post | Not Guilty            | -                 |

**August 14**

| Katzenelson      | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Kaaz             | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Sher             | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Lichtenfeld      | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Barr             | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Adleson          | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Streletzky       | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Chizikofsky      | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |
| Levene           | Disobedience, Sect. 40 | 5 Yrs Penal Servitude | 2 Yrs Imprisonment |

**August 16**

| Zichlinsky       | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Cadesky          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Weingold         | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Tuton            | Sect. 40 | 2 Yrs Imprisonment | - |
| Goldfarb         | Sect. 40 | 2 Yrs Imprisonment | - |
| Marcus           | Sect. 40 | 2 Yrs Imprisonment | - |
| Richman          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Haze             | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Barkan           | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Fishkin          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Heines           | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Indenbaum        | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Sherer           | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Jaffe            | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Schwartzbein     | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Beldfosky        | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Wolfson          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Kaplan           | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Winkler          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Parker           | Sect. 40 | 2 Yrs Imprisonment | - |
| Yarmofsky        | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Kovinsky         | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Melonchick       | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Poreles          | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Newstone         | Sect. 40 | 2 Yrs Imprisonment | - |
| Friehorn         | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
| Cohen            | Sect. 40 | Not Guilty | - |
The trials, on the whole, resulted in two bifurcated outcomes. Convicted soldiers initially faced terms of penal servitude far outstripping the normal punishments for their actual charges. Patterson thought that the court had “savagely sentenced” the offenders in the 38th, and openly speculated that “they would all have been shot” had the mutiny charge been allowed to stand. Execution was an unlikely sentence however—there had been no physical violence during the incidents, and the offenders were relatively isolated from both their battalion and the rest of the British army. Conversely, despite some initially severe punishments, the courts-martial had also resulted in a tremendous number of acquittals. Fifty-four men had been tried for the disturbances at Belah. Well over half—thirty total—had been acquitted, with the rest (with one exception) all subject to a universal punishment: five years of penal servitude, commuted down to two years of hard labor. The extraordinary rate of acquittals was not normal, and was probably a product of Jabotinsky’s vigorous defense.

Jabotinsky, a noted disciplinarian, had initially been unenthused about defending the accused members of the 38th. Patterson claimed that although Jabotinsky thought the men had a legitimate grievance, he felt that “they should have carried out their duties faithfully to the end.” Whether this is true is unclear, in part because Jabotinsky mounted a vigorous defense—getting the mutiny charges dismissed, and also pointing out that in the case of twenty-seven men tried on Section 40, the offender’s names had not been written down, nor could Lt Barrett remember the faces of those involved, only identifying five men (the five who were found guilty). Having already admitted to misremembering another detail while under cross-examination, Barrett’s failure to identify faces was extremely significant. A similar claim helped acquit two of the well-guard on trial for quitting their posts. Jabotinsky proved that one key witness had not actually seen the faces of the accused, and that another had never actually seen the men carrying their gear and leaving the well (just that he “saw two taking it off a donkey and two other[s] had it already dumped”). Without a competent and active defense, the court might have simply accepted the judgment of the lieutenant as to the participants.

Jabotinsky’s vigor was also on display after the trials; a few weeks after their conclusion, he penned a letter to the DJAG noting several technical points. His first point was that the initial FGCM had been for mutiny, and that it had then devolved into several, separate trials on lesser charges. This, in Jabotinsky’s interpretation, was not “legally justifiable” since no new evidence had been provided in the new trials. Jabotinsky’s second point was that the substitution of new charges took place after 33 days—a period that he felt eliminated any prospect of men establishing genuine alibis, and was unfair to the demobilization of well over 300 men who might have been available as witnesses. The rest of his long and substantive points revolved around a wide range of issues—his inability to inspect prior proceedings, the use of precedent in

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765 Patterson, With the Judeans, 216.
766 Lance-Corporal Levinsky initially received a 7 year sentence of penal servitude, but this was also commuted to 2 years of imprisonment.
767 Patterson, With the Judeans, 215.
768 JI, 31-1K. Jabotinsky Draft Letter of Oct 1, 1919, Pg 87
769 JI, 31-1K. Testimony of Lt SV Barrett, pg 67. Barrett had originally claimed that he had discussed Patterson’s plans to demobilize the men when they congregated outside the Orderly Room on July 2. When cross-examined, he admitted that he had actually not done this until the July 3 evening parade.
770 JI, 31-1K. Typed notes in Summary of Evidence, pg 73.
771 JI, 31-1K. Jabotinsky Draft Letter of Oct 1, 1919, Pg 83-84. Jabotinsky claimed there were at least six demobilized men whom he would have called for the defense.
courts-martial, the ability of prosecuting witnesses to correctly identify the accused after delays, and the specifics of individual cases.\textsuperscript{772}

But Jabotinsky was not content with simply lobbying the official mechanisms inside the justice system—he went well over the chain of command and began to lobby both Arthur Balfour and the King himself. In his ten-page petition to the King, a copy of which went to Balfour, Jabotinsky complained of “a distinctly anti-Jewish attitude” inside GHQ Egypt—albeit one that was only evident to the Jewish soldiers after the September 1918 offensives.\textsuperscript{773} Almost none of the petition deals with the actual events of the mutiny. Instead, Jabotinsky focused on what he argued was a prevailing climate of antisemitism fostered by both the military command and British subalterns. Railing against the decisions that prevented Jewish troops from openly garrisoning (and in some cases visiting) major areas in Palestine, as well as the obstacles to demobilization into Palestine, Jabotinsky closed his petition by arguing that “the moral responsibility” for the mutinous behavior lay with the British command in Egypt and Palestine.\textsuperscript{774}

This accusatory sentiment did not sit well in London, particularly in the Foreign Office, which received a copy of the petition as well. The mutiny was discussed in a circulated memo sheet, one with the general belief that the Jewish troops had performed poorly—one official going as far to note that “if they had proved their worth they would have lived down their unpopularity”—and that the matter was really within the purview of the War Office.\textsuperscript{775} Yet, due to the sensitive political nature of the situation, another official opined that the Foreign Office “might suggest an amnesty a little later on, when the mandate is given if not before.”\textsuperscript{776} A few days after the discussion, an appeal for clemency was made for the mutineers in Parliament by Colonel Wedgewood, basing his request on the grounds that the guilty were American volunteers.\textsuperscript{777} Ultimately, the imprisoned soldiers were released short of their already reduced sentences. According to Gilner, the convicted soldiers were released after eight months of imprisonment—a statement corroborated by DJAG notations of “quashed” convictions in February 1920.\textsuperscript{778} More importantly, Jabotinsky was also released, but in a different manner. His politicking in Palestine, as well as his willingness to detour around official channels of communication, had become a severe nuisance to the British command. He was officially demobilized on September 6, 1919 with the honorary rank of lieutenant, although that did little to halt his involvement in the Mandate.\textsuperscript{779}

\textsuperscript{772}JI, 31-1K. Jabotinsky Draft Letter of Oct 1, 1919, Pg 85-88. As it turns out, this was not the first time Jabotinsky had petitioned the DJAG. A typed letter from July 30, 1919 to Lt. Branstone, a Judge Advocate, complained about having to establish alibis well after the fact, and that the Presiding officer of the court had blocked two of his—in his view, acceptable—questions. See JI, 31-1K. Jabotinsky to Lt Branchsta, July 30, 1919, pg 113-4.
\textsuperscript{773}FO 371/4238/144798. Typed Petition for Mercy by V. Jabotinsky, pg 2.
\textsuperscript{774}FO 371/4238/144798. Typed Petition for Mercy by V. Jabotinsky, pg 11.
\textsuperscript{775}FO 371/4238/144798 Handwritten Memorandum by Major OG Scott, October 24, 1919.
\textsuperscript{776}FO 371/4238/144798 Handwritten Memorandum by ND Peterson, October 27, 1919.
\textsuperscript{777}Hansard, HC Debates, November 3, 1919 vol 120, c1142w.
\textsuperscript{778}Gilner, War and Hope, 314. The specific date indicated by the DJAG in the trial records is February 17, 1920. If pre-trial imprisonment is included in Gilner’s total, this would add up to roughly eight months.
\textsuperscript{779}WO 374/36592 Lt V. Jabotinsky. It should come as no surprise that Jabotinsky has an immense personnel file, filled with assessments and correspondence.
Beyond the 38th

But the actions of the 39th battalion are only half the story—for shortly after the disturbances in the 38th, members of the 39th battalion also disobeyed commands, but unlike their sister battalion, their mutiny charges stuck. More importantly, unlike the trials of the 38th—where portions of the court-martial proceedings were preserved in the Jabotinsky Institute, there is no transcript for the mutiny trials of the 39th, just the DJAG records. The broad conflation in both Freulich and Gilner of the incidents in the 38th and 39th as one “Mutiny” against British discrimination and prejudice has, therefore, made evaluating the separate incidents difficult.

Tensions in the 39th mirrored those of the 38th over the pace of demobilization and perceived anti-Jewish prejudice. Unrest, however, was sparked into open revolt not by an order, but by an instance of Field Punishment 1. According to Gilner, a relatively inexperienced soldier in the 39th’s transport division had mishandled his pack mule in a minor fashion. Yet rather than a pay stoppage, detention, or the lesser variant of field punishment, the officer in charge declared a summary punishment of Field Punishment 1. Stripped of much of his clothing and deprived of water, the young soldier—a Private Lipner—was tied to an artillery piece and left in the sun. While on parade on July 18, his peers protested such treatment, which to them was proof of prejudice, a sentiment only deepened by what Gilner claims was the apparent antisemitic language of the Major who first attempted to disperse the protesting Jews, and then decided to arrest them for mutiny when they refused to obey his orders.

The trials took place over two days in August at the camp in Sarafend, and all those prosecuted were privates—a significant difference from the 38th’s trials, where several of the men were low-level NCOs. Jabotinsky appears to have served as the “prisoners’ friend” again, and once again managed to protect some of the Jewish soldiers. The Summary of Evidence brought against the forty-four men of the Transport Section stated that when on morning “Stable Parade,” they had refused an order for a “right turn.” When the commanding Lieutenant inquired what the problem was, Private D. Tobin—apparently the chosen spokesperson for the group—stepped forward and stated that the men wanted the release of Lipner. They then quietly refused to follow orders until the issue was resolved, remaining at their places. The exact order of what happened next is unclear, but what is clear is that the protestors were imprisoned, but only after being addressed by Captain Smalley and warned of the consequences of continued refusal. Just as had occurred at the trials of the 38th, several Jewish NCO’s broke with their peers and provided evidence against them in court.

Forty-four men from the 39th were court-martialed for mutiny in August 1919, fourteen of whom were acquitted. As in the 38th’s trials, this was not an insignificant number of acquittals—it represented very nearly one-third of the total men on trial. Of the remaining

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780 Patterson, chose to simply ignore the 39th mutiny in his memoir.
782 Gilner, War and Hope, 313. According to multiple sources, Colonel Margolin was absent during the incident, causing the acting leadership of the 39th to fall to a Major Smolley—a man reviled by the Jewish soldiers for his deep prejudices. See Gilner 310-1 for more.
783 JI 34-1K, Summary of Evidence, July 21, 1919 pg 17.
784 JI 34-1K, Summary of Evidence, July 21, 1919 pg 18-19. It’s unclear whether the men demanded to be imprisoned, and whether they were supposed to be taken to Smalley after their protest, or simply detoured past him.
786 WO 213/31/23-25
thirty men, all but three initially received five years of penal servitude, the others receiving six years instead. But twenty-nine of these men had their sentences commuted to one year of imprisonment; the one exception was noted as having his initial sentence simply remitted. It seems, therefore, that even if the British were prejudiced against Jewish soldiers, the review mechanisms still performed adequately. More importantly, while some injustice could be felt that the May rioters at Kantara were never prosecuted, the starker reality was that the sentences meted out to the Jewish troops were roughly in line with similar cases across the British Army.

There was also a massive breach of discipline in the 40th battalion in July 1919, but one which resulted, surprisingly, in no mutiny trials. In fact, the British response to the incident seems to illustrate a relative flexibility and understanding of Jewish discontent. 165 members of the 40th had been ordered to take on Prisoner-of-War guard duties at six camps mostly in Egypt, but one in Cyprus.787 When they were due to depart three weeks later, the men refused, claiming that they would not serve outside of Palestine. After a warning, and a series of explanation of the severity of their actions, including personal discussions between Lt Colonel MF Scott and the men under his command, 110 still refused to depart, but continued their other duties.788 The rest of the battalion refused to arrest the men, presenting a tense situation.

Rather than use force—probably a neighboring unit—to suppress the dissent, Scott employed a surprisingly flexible approach. First, he allowed the visiting chairman of the Zionist Commission, Dr. David Eder, to speak with the men about their actions. Eder essentially informed them they were potentially jeopardizing British support for a Jewish Palestine. Secondly, Scott sent the three ringleaders of the protest away—not to jail—but to a different area in Palestine to perform other duties. Unlike what had happened in the 38th and 39th, there were no arrests, no open mutiny, and GHQ decided not to send any Jewish soldiers to Cyprus (nor hold prejudice against the dissenting troops).789 It was a remarkably even-keeled response to a potentially serious situation, and one that demonstrated the situational flexibility that British officers in Egypt and Palestine might use to prevent disturbances. Just as in the case of the 38th, a British officer had attempted, this time successfully, to talk the Jewish men under his command out of major disciplinary consequences. Surprisingly, it had happened before. Major Henry Myer had dealt with the 40th’s refusal to follow orders in a similar manner in December 1918, with similar results.790 Equally important, given the concurrence between this event and other disturbances in the 38th and 39th, was the British command’s surprisingly non-punitive attitude, not least in the rescinding of its original orders and not pursuing the court-martialing of offenders.

These conclusions, however, have not been the prevailing opinion in the few works to discuss the mutinies. The opinions expressed in the memoirs of those involved with the Jewish battalions—Patterson, Jabotinsky, Gilner, and Freulich—seem to have influenced the one historian, Martin Watts, who has grappled with the subject. In his generally excellent The Jewish Legion, Watts argued that the sentences meted out to the mutineers were excessive, and therefore reflective of prejudice:

787 WO 95/4470 40th Battalion War Diary July 4, 1919. The breakdown was 1 NCO and 21 privates to Cyprus; 2 privates to Kantara; 1 Private to Rafa; 1 NCO to Salhia; 5 NCOs and 35 privates to Tel-el-Kebir; 12 NCOs and 87 privates to Bel-Beis
788 WO 95/4470 40th Battalion War Diary July 28, 1919
789 WO 95/4470 40th Battalion War Diary August 1-5, 1919
790 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, December 28, 1918, p150.
What makes these prison terms (five to seven years) appear particularly severe is that earlier—post hostilities—cases of mutiny or disobedience, involving men of the Jewish Battalions, resulted in sentences of six months or one year only. It therefore seems clear that the Jewish soldiers were treated in a discriminatory manner by the military authorities that indicates, yet again, the presence of an underlying anti-Semitism within the OETA Southern command.

The problem, however, is that the sentences of the Jewish soldiers involved in these disturbances were almost all revised downwards from the initial prison term, and that the broader comparative context of the Legion’s courts-martial reveal not antisemitic prejudice, but panic over the spread of Bolshevism across Europe.

Despite the repeated disturbances rippling through the EEF in 1919, there’s little in the way of available comparison for the Jewish Mutiny. This, of course, could in itself suggest prejudice; soldiers striking at Kantara and refusing orders were not tried for mutiny, but Jewish troops were. More likely, however, is that as Allenby expressed in his letter to Wilson, there was simply no way he could punish the thousands of disobedient troops at Kantara without completely losing control of the situation. The result is that units that did not have the luxury of a duty assignment that afforded them strength in numbers were more vulnerable to mutiny courts-martial. For this reason, there are mostly only small-scale trials for mutiny in 1919 Egypt and Palestine—like the six men from the 2nd Royal Irish Fusiliers tried for mutiny in June 1919.

Perhaps most similar to the Jewish Mutiny was that of the 2nd battalion West India regiment (not the BWIR) who had thirty-two of its soldiers face mutiny charges for protesting their exclusion from a pay increase. Their trial was on May 11, 1919, and just as the case of the 39th battalion, the West Indians were initially sentenced to a hefty five to seven years penal servitude. Yet, in all cases, this was commuted to either one or two years of imprisonment with hard labor—fitting the same profile of punishment and commutation as the Legion mutineers. The major distinction between the two, however, was that a not insignificant number of the court-martialed soldiers of the 39th were not convicted.

Still, the sentences of the convicted Jewish and West Indian troops seem grossly disproportionate to that of British soldiers in Egypt and Palestine. For example, four privates attached to the 53rd Welsh Division only received three months of Field Punishment 2 after mutiny courts-martial. The incidents of July 1919 inside the Jewish battalions had been nothing more than a minor mutiny, and the heavy sentences of penal servitude that they received were generally reserved for more serious (and violent) affairs. However, when the comparative scope is broadened, their final sentences of one to two years imprisonment with hard labor was roughly equitable to the sentences passed on to a variety of other “mutineers” in other theaters in the Summer of 1919.

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791 Watts, Jewish Legion, 225
792 Putkoski, British Army Mutineers, 165. They received punishments ranging from “not guilty” to field punishment to shorter terms of imprisonment with hard labor. Incidentally, it seems the Jewish troops may have been involved with the Royal Irish’s mutiny—having been ordered to quell the disturbance, by force if necessary. According to the story, the Irish soldiers appealed to their “brothers” not to shoot—a decision that the Jewish soldiers respected by planning to fire into the air if ordered to disperse the Irish with force. See Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 147.
793 Putkoski, British Army Mutineers, 163-4.
794 Putkowski, British Army Mutineers, 159, 173.
795 See for example, the 30th Machine Gun Company (1 year HL), the Royal Engineers (1 year HL), and the 6th battalion of the 2nd Royal Warwickshires (2 years HL, with 1 year remitted. The 2nd Machine Gun Company had a similar sentencing profile—5 years penal servitude, commuted down in many cases to 2 years HL. See Putkowski, British Army Mutineers, 164-6.
In fact, the convicted Jewish soldiers received sentences generally in line with British Army standards. In his study of First World War mutinies in the British Army, Julian Putkowski noted that of the over 1500 men charged with mutiny while overseas, “half of those found guilty were jailed for more than three years, and almost 200 were sentenced to penal servitude for at least ten years.” Putkowski also identified an important phenomenon—sentencing increased in severity after the Armistice. The reasons for why mutiny intensified after the war—political dissatisfaction, desire for demobilization, and a general feeling that the war was “over”—also help to explain the British Army’s increased harshness in mutiny courts-martial. Not only did the British feel that they needed the diplomatic leverage at Paris provided by their Army, but they also had to react to the shifting global political climate, most notably the sudden and sustained rise of Bolshevism.

The success of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917 terrified British policy-makers and military commanders, many of whom developed a sustained paranoia of possible Bolshevism inside their own forces. The Jewish units were natural targets for this—many of their men were of Russian origin, and the prevalence of Jews inside the Russian Bolsheviks underscored British prejudices. In fact, no sooner had the 38th battalion arrived in Egypt than Allenby began conferring with the War Office about potential conflicts in loyalty. In a March 10 telegram to the Imperial General Staff, he noted that the Russian Jews “may now be an element of danger” and speculated further that the battalions might contain “Jews of other nationalities…who sympathize with our enemies.” The implications were twofold. First, Russian Jews were assumed to be inherently tied, or overly susceptible, to Bolshevism. Secondly, that non-British Jews on the whole were a possible 5th column inside the British Army—the rest of Allenby’s telegram suggested that German and Austrian Jews could infiltrate the battalion via recruitment in the United States or Egypt and Palestine.

The War Office’s response was illuminating. While agreeing that it was now “undesirable to enlist Russian Jews any further,” they felt that other recruitment was fine, since Colonel Patterson “should be able to ensure that undesirable characters do not remain undetected.” While following these instructions, Allenby also used a report from Patterson about Russian Jews asking to be released from service on account of Russia’s withdrawal from the conflict to recommend their demobilization—in essence, quietly purging the unit of men whom he considered potentially subversive. Several weeks later, Allenby directly conceded the entire issue of recruitment in Palestine, arguing that the combination of his intelligence branch and the Zionist Commission could weed out subversives, even though the “majority of candidates for enlistment are of Russian nationality.”

Paranoia, however, persisted into the Armistice period. Incidents amongst the American troops in the North Russia Expeditionary Force in 1919 and the refusal of French naval crews to fire on revolutionaries at both Odessa and Sevastopol underlined British fears, as did the revolt in Egypt. More locally, British concerns were exacerbated by blocs, often American, inside the

798 WO 33/946/9160 Telegram EA 946, CinC Egypt to Chief of the Imperial General Staff, March 10, 1918.
799 WO 33/946/9207 Telegram 54424, War Office to CinC Egypt, March 17, 1918.
800 WO 33/946/9237, Telegram EA 996, CinC Egypt to War Office, March 20, 1918.
801 WO 33/946/9536 CinC Egypt to War Office, May 10, 1918.
802 Guttridge, *Mutiny*, 168-9. The French refused orders to shell revolutionaries in Odessa, and many went ashore with workers at Sevastopol. As for the Egyptian revolt in March, the British speculated heavily that it had Bolshevist influence and tendencies. See Fromkin, *A Peace to end all Peace*, 419 for more.
Jewish battalions who rejected military authority in an organized manner, particularly when they declared that they were “on strike.” One soldier recalled how dissatisfaction with their rations led some to “strike” shortly after the Armistice, and little incidents—such as the formation of a picket line by New York City union members to protest the summary judgment of a Sergeant as “unfair to organized labor”—did nothing to assuage the military hierarchy’s fears. Nor did some attitudes towards the May 1919 protests at Kantara; Alex Linsk noted a few members of “‘A’ company calling themselves Bolsheviks [and] distributing pamphlets for a general strike to mark six months of the end of the war.” In addition, the large-scale disobedience in the 38th and 39th in July was perceived by some as an intensification of syndicalism—Lieutenant Barrett had, after all, warned the disobedient members of the 38th that they would be branded “Bolsheviks and Undesirable Aliens.” During the protests of the 39th battalion, Captain Smalley had expressly warned them that “soldiers committees” and unions—essentially any form of organized protest—was forbidden. This sentiment extended up the chain of command, as well. In a piece of confidential correspondence from July 11, 1919, the British Political Officer attached to the EEF referred to Jabotinsky as “both anti-British and Bolshevist,” recommending his immediate demobilization. The casual labeling of Jabotinsky and any other annoyances as Bolshevists may have been antisemitism masquerading as anti-Bolshevism—at the time roughly compatible with imperial patriotism—or may have simply reflected paranoia of political radicalization that lacked a suitable accompanying vocabulary.

Yet as earlier portions of this chapter have demonstrated, there is little evidence to support the idea that the functioning of the military justice system became compromised over fears of Bolshevism. If it had, it is likely that there would have been a far more punitive reaction to the broad unrest in July 1919. Rather, the persistent dialogue on Bolshevism and other political radicalism indicates that the British were hoping to both formally and informally blunt such ideologies during the Armistice period. Should anger over the pace of demobilization escalate, more men would become susceptible to political ideologies that could destabilize the Empire when brought back to the Dominions and colonies. It was these fears, completely encapsulated within the Jewish mutiny trial, that reveal a subtle process of imperial community-building that the British undertook in the Middle East inside their own army, and the counter-communities that developed in response.

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803 YIVO RG 1530, Diary of Private Joe Davidson, 119A (The story was reprinted by Freulich as well); Gilner, War and Hope, 287. According to the story, the New Yorkers marched up and down in front of the battalion guardhouse with a sign that read “Sergeant Brainin unfair to organized labor.”

804 YIVO 15/9604. Reprinted letter, Alex Linsk to Herman Lehman, April 20, 1919 in Bulletin Veterans Jewish Legion (Vol 1, No 5) May 1976 (Baltimore/Avichail) p 35. Linsk concluded, “I am absolutely against this Bolshevism. It is a foolish step to take at the present moment when the situation in Palestine is yet not clear and we don’t know where we stand.”

805 JI 34-1K, Summary of Evidence, July 21, 1919 pg 19.

806 YIVO US Territorial Collection RG 117 (Box 59), Folder 592, Letter of Major G. Walley (probably to Allenby), July 11, 1919. The story behind this piece of correspondence is important. A member of the 38th battalion, Jay Pearlstein, was working in GHQ and made a copy of the letter, which he passed on to Patterson in August 1922 because “this phase of the history needs to be told.”
Chapter 5
“Time Wasted in Waste Places”:
Athletics and Imperial Conditioning in the War for Empire

“Just a crowd of people killing time. Time wasted in waste places.” This was how the well-known soldier, writer, and pacifist Siegfried Sassoon described the massive EEF base at Kantara, Egypt.807 Sassoon was only stationed at Kantara briefly in 1918 and he left the Palestine theater before the Megiddo Offensive and subsequent armistice. However, his sentiments effectively described how many in the EEF felt about their time once the actual fighting had ended—the military duties that had once required so much energy dwindled in both scope and importance as they waited for formalized peace and to demobilize home. The war was over, they were just wasting time.

One of the many ways EEF soldiers spent their newly-acquired free time was to play sports. Organized athletics had steadily increased in popularity in Britain and its empire throughout the Victorian and Edwardian period, and by the First World War, the vast majority of the British Army had some experience with games.808 The result was that cricket, football, rugby, or hockey matches, as well as Olympic-style athletics, horse racing, and boxing competitions were commonplace wherever the British Army happened to be fighting. In the Palestine theater, athletic competition might take place against local clubs or in organized battalion and army competitions, while other contests were simply improvised on the spot.809 But athletic games were more than recreation during the First World War and the immediate postwar period; they also were a form of military training, as well as a process of imperial conditioning—a way for the British Army to defuse potential postwar tensions by inculcating British values into its soldiers, particularly minorities.

This chapter examines athletic competition inside the Palestine theater and argues that it represents part of a broader process, albeit somewhat diffuse and indirect in its application, of cultural and social training. This process involved forcing soldiers to compete athletically, as well as transitioning military education to vocational and civic education. The goal, in both cases, was to impart, transfer, and nurture a particular set of values and norms thought to be inherent in British identity. Athletic success, as this chapter shows, was an important corollary to perceived military ability, and thus to broader notions of belonging and importance. This attempt

807 Jean Moorcroft Wilson, Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet: A Biography (1886-1918) (New York: Routledge: 1998), 448. Located on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal, Kantara had evolved during the war to become the strategic nexus of British operations in Palestine. Adjoined to the British rail network that traversed newly occupied territory in the Sinai and Palestine, Kantara was the major transfer station between Cairo and points eastward. Far from the front lines by 1917, it had warehouses, a large hospital, and served as a major headquarters for the EEF. Kantara was also one of the principal points of demobilization from Egypt and Palestine—a critical supply and logistics base during the war, it became the focal point for soldiers departing the EEF and returning home. Almost every single soldier who fought in Palestine passed through Kantara at some point.

808 There are numerous works on the growth of sport in Britain, but good starting points include Tony Mason, Sport in Britain (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), Richard Holt, Sport and the British: A Modern History (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), and Derek Birley, Sport and the making of Britain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993) and Land of sport and glory: Sport and British Society, 1887-1910 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995).

809 Famously, two well-regarded amateur cricket players in the EEF constructed an “improvised pitch” at Kantara. See IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, April 5, 1919, p 180. The players were ER Wilson, who played for Yorkshire, and “Morgan,” who played for Glamorgan. For a description of popular sports in Palestine, see also JI 27-1K. “The Zionist Volunteers from America,” by Lt Col JH Patterson, pg 84. Undated.
at conditioning intensified after the armistices, suggesting that its intent was preserving the postwar stability of Britain’s empire; a partial response to the growing unrest inside the still-mobilized British forces and the newly released specter of Bolshevik revolution. This was of particular importance in the EEF, where slow demobilization, growing political unrest, and a wide swath of imperial, colonial, and minority soldiers could form a potentially combustible cocktail of anti-British sentiment. While the act of playing games supposedly made them more amenable to the existence of the Empire, imperial and minority troops could also contest their place in the Empire through these same games. Demonstrations of athletic ability coupled with shared understandings of military service to help form unique friendships and nascent community between minority troops and ANZACs. In the Palestine theater—the newest imperial acquisition for Britain and also the location of its most diverse, multi-imperial military force—sports were a critical component of enhancing imperial cohesion from both above and below.

The history of sports has begun to move into the mainstream in recent decades, as scholars—particularly those of Britain and its empire—begin to understand athletics as a broader cultural, social, economic, and political force. More than a distraction or leisure pursuit, sport, as Ross McKibbin and others have argued, “was one of the most powerful of England’s civil cultures.” Games like cricket, football, and rugby had become crucial to English understandings of self, society, and nation in the nineteenth century, and by the Victorian period, they had become a critical component of the public school curriculum. There they grafted smoothly onto a hierarchical and exceptionalist ethos to create a “games ethic” designed to promote a moral core centered on “Christian masculinity.” These concepts centered on developing “elite virtues of self-confidence, self-reliance, leadership, team spirit, and loyalty to comrades,” the latter of which translated to teammates, house, school, nation, and ultimately, empire. This curriculum, therefore, was designed in part to prepare pupils for careers in the colonial service, with the result that games and their ethic were carried out from Britain into the empire, where both were remodeled to fit frameworks of governance and Britain’s broader imperial mission. Thus, British games like cricket became, to some historians, part of the imperial “civilizing process”—a process of cultural imperialism that transmitted a particular set of ideals into the colonies. JA Mangan and others have continually argued that athletics


812 For perhaps the most well-known discussion of cricket as imperial transmitter, see CLR James, Beyond a Boundary 1963 Reprint (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). For a good introduction to sport and imperialism, see the collection alliteratively republished as JA Mangan, ‘Manufactured’ Masculinity: Making Imperial Manliness, Morality and Militarism (New York: Routledge 2012), especially the reprinting of Mangan’s “Britain’s Chief Spiritual Export: Imperial Sport as Moral Metaphor, Political Symbol and Cultural Bond.” On sport and cultural imperialism, see Patrick McDevitt, May the Best Man Win: Sport Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), Chapter 1 and the work of Brian
maintained a dual nature that made them a natural fit for the British Empire—they not only produced the supposed abilities to rule, but they also developed “the compulsion to follow,” essentially reflecting the duality of dominion and discipline present in empire. These discussions, however, tend to end by 1914 or bypass the war, creating a curious gap in the literature on sport and the British empire.

Despite the broad focus on athletics and imperialism, there has been little discussion of sports and minority soldiers in the British forces during the First World War. The white dominions—as is often the case in Great War studies—are the exception to the rule, and a number of diverse articles on sport and the war in both Canada and the Antipodes have emerged in the *International Journal of the History of Sport*. But sport in the British Army during the war has generally been treated as a leisure activity, albeit one that could improve unit morale, mood, and relationship. Football has earned notice for its role in the 1914 Christmas truce and as a symbolic “over-the-top” motivator—the famed kicking of footballs towards German trenches—while some focused scholarship has used the prism of athletics as a way to explore British society during the war, generally focusing on football or rugby on both the Western and home fronts. Recently, new work has suggested that athletic competition became codified as

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Mangan, *Games Ethic*. 18; Mangan, *Athleticism*, 32-5; and Mangan *Manufactured Masculinity*, 328-336. See also Stoddart, “Sport, Cultural Imperialism” 653, which points out that sports entailed a variety of cultural values key to the maintenance of imperial order—not least was obedience to a system of rules and regulations, as well as respect for the enforcing authority. These aforementioned arguments could be considered auxiliary to a range of Foucauldian, Gramscian, and neo-Marxist interpretations, which argue that games essentially allowed for a form of monitoring and social control by placing all participants in a contained and refereed area. For an introduction to these critiques, particularly related to the issue of postmodernity, see Patrick McDevitt, *May the Best Man Win*, 4-6. See also Tony Mason, *Sport in Britain*, for a critique of neo-Marxist interpretations. Although it recognizes elements of attempted institutional control, the interpretation provided throughout this chapter is not intended to cement these theories. Rather, it works to understand certain entrenched attitudes inside British society in the First World War through the context of minority soldiers, and to provide a fuller, empirical understanding of transformations, mitigations, and contestations of imperial rule in the First World War.


a form of military training in the latter stages of the war, tracing how army commanders sought
to enhance tactical and strategic ability through a supposed leisure activity. Yet, outside of the
links between sports and military training, much fertile ground lies uncovered.

Specifically, why were soldiers forced to play sports after the Armistices marked the end
of fighting, and why were games an area of focus in the EEF, especially in minority battalions
like the BWIR and Jewish battalions? Does the concurrent onset of various forms of educational
training—often shifting from purely military subjects into topics like civics and agriculture—
suggest a link between the two and, therefore, a broader process? The role of sports as an
important cultural, social, and even political identifier in the Empire did not disappear when
minority and empire men enlisted for military service. Rather, it may have intensified in
meaning, for military ability and athletic ability were conjoined in many British minds, and
athletic success was often a statement of values, norms, and belonging.

From Fair Play to Military Training

When war with Germany broke out, many of the underlying cornerstones of the games
ethic—a Christian masculinity, assumed British superiority in culture and morality, and broad
notions of loyalty—featured prominently in British language, motivations, and propaganda.
Much of this stemmed directly from the ideal of “playing the game,” the idea that the virtues of
the sporting ground should be recreated on the battlefield. Henry Newbolt had famously
codified this sentiment in his 1898 poem, *Vital Lampada*, which exhorted both a losing public
school cricket team and a nearly defeated regiment fighting in the empire to “Play up! play up!
and play the game!” as if the situations were parallel. Upholding the supposed ideals of “the
game” permeated many discussions of military service; Patterson, for example, lavished high
praise on his 38th battalion when he wrote that they “drilled, marched, fought, and generally
played the game, as well as any Battalion in the Army.” The ideal also physically manifested
itself in the general recruiting of volunteers to the British Army, as well as through the formation
of various sportsmen and footballer’s battalions earlier in the war.

817 For a focused discussion, see Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, ““Leather and the fighting spirit: sport in the British
Army in World War I” *Canadian Journal of History* 41 no. 3 (Winter 2006): 485-516. For the more broadly
contextualized argument, see Tony Mason and Eliza Riedi, *Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880-
out that Newbolt was a good friend of General Haig’s. The final stanza reads: “The sand of the desert is sodden red--
/Red with the wreck of a square that broke;/The Gatling’s jammed and the Colonel dead/
And the regiment blind
with dust and smoke;/ The river of death has brimmed his banks./ And England’s far, and Honor a name;/ But the
voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:/ Play up! play up! and play the game!”
819 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 15. The ideal could be used to enforce fairness as well. Patterson later wrote that he
had to ensure that officers prejudiced against the Jewish battalions “played the game.” See pg 160.
This type of recruitment reinforced the idea that sport was essentially a “metaphor for war,” which in and of itself played off decades of cultural and scholastic training about empire and the value of athletics. Deeply embedded within this was an assumed link between Britain’s imperial dominance and a sense of “Britishness” partially predicated on notions of “fair play”—a “universal commitment to the sporting spirit” in all things, including war. These ideas were critical to Britain’s understanding of its role in the Great War—it was the defender of “little Belgium” and the counterweight to imperial Germany, the committer of atrocity, and therefore the enforcer of geopolitical “fair play.” As the war progressed, the spirit of “playing the game” receded somewhat, but athletics became an increasingly tangible and institutionalized part of army service.

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The focus on games stemmed, in part, from an operational perspective; the assumption of senior military commanders that athletic techniques could be redirected as various tactical and martial skills. Any sport “that stressed competition and unit cohesion” (which, frankly, was most sports) was viewed as beneficial to both individual and unit development. Team games like rugby, hockey, and especially football were encouraged due to parallels with perceived unit training. Each participant had an independent role to play, but individual glory was less important than the victory of the whole. This confluence had been sketched out by Lord Robert Baden-Powell years before, but took firm and institutionalized root in the General Staff during the middle of the war. By 1916, games were “formally integrated into the military system” as both “recreational training” and as an officially sanctioned form of leisure. Two years later, the British General Staff ordered officers to utilize sport, particularly football, to train platoons for combat, arguing that those who “produce the best football team in the battalion…will have done a great deal to make it the best platoon in every way.” Games were no longer civilian preparation for war or a mere recruitment device, but now an omnipresent part of sustained service in the British forces during the war and military training by other means.

The explicit sanction of athletic competition inside the military affected the BWIR and Jewish battalions, who both played organized sport from their first days in service. Shortly after the first West Indian contingents arrival in England, the WICC immediately requested donations of “footballs, cricket sets, [and] boxing gloves”—in part as a (vainly optimistic) means of therapy for the cold and wet weather. Similarly, members of the Jewish battalions were involved in football matches early in their service, as the photos of football teams of the 38th and 40th demonstrate:

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825 Woodward, Forgotten Soldiers, 131.
826 Veitch, “Play Up,” 374. Baden-Powell achieved fame for the Siege of Mafeking during the Second Anglo-Boer War, as well as for his role in developing the boy scouts.
829 ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Meeting of Feb 9, 1916, Meeting of June 30, 1916, pg 3. As the WICC Secretary Algeron Aspinall informed the readers of Sporting Life: “Coming, as they do, from a tropical climate, the men naturally feel the cold acutely, and nothing would be better for them than an occasional game of football. In the West Indies, it may surprise your readers to know, the game is played in all the larger islands, even though the thermometer may be standing well over 85 degrees in the shade!” See Algeron Aspinall to Editor of Sporting Life, Nov 1, 1915, in WICC Scrap book, ICS 96/2/3, pg 6.
Figure 5.2 The football team of the 38th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, Plymouth 1918.

Figure 5.3 Members of the 40th Battalion outfitted for football, Date and Location unknown.

831 JML/1984.125/1984.125.1.p100. Online: www.movinghere.co.uk. [Accessed January 30, 2006]. It’s difficult to ascertain whether this photo was taken in England or the Middle East, but my guess would be the former.
As the photograph of the 38th depicts, battalion teams could take games quite seriously when they were allowed to, wearing matching uniforms and playing on real pitches with goals. Of course, once near the front lines, these formalities were usually immediately dispensed with, although competition continued.

Once on service abroad, athletic competition frequently took place inside individual battalions, but also against other units, particularly ones with a shared identity or a past relationship. These competitions supposedly enhanced *esprit de corps*, and were relatively common inside the EEF in Palestine, often pitting one imperial or minority battalion against a sister unit. When stationed near each other, the officers of the 39th and 40th Jewish battalions competed in field hockey, football, and equestrian sports. These occurrences were not uncommon. The first issue of the 39th battalion’s newspaper, *The Judean*, featured a full-page sports section, complete with illustrations and a detailed account of athletic competition against the 38th, including various foot and horse races, high-jumping, and a tug-of-war contest. Similar events took place inside the BWIR, with at least one occasion of games between all three battalions taking place at Mex in February 1919. These contests may have succeeded in their goal of battalion *espirit-de-corps* even in supposedly homogenous units like the Jewish Legion; the 39th closed their report by pointing out, cheekily, that even though junior in status, they had won the games.

In addition to encouraging broad cooperation inside units, there were also attempts to focus on the individual soldier, a result of the belief that certain individual skills mapped out immediately from the sporting field onto the battlefield. Football, for example, was believed to nurture a crafty individuality in British soldiers in addition to its team dimensions. While unit cohesion was the immediate tactical focus of athletic training, the army also wanted individual skills—and not merely physical ones—to be nurtured through games. Boxing improved hand-to-hand combat and agility, football and rugby promoted situational awareness and individual discipline, while cricket could parallel bomb throwing:

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832 IWM 79/17/1, *Memoir of Major HD Myer*, December 17, 1918, pg 148.
833 IWM MS/E/S, E.149 *The Judean*, 32. Interestingly, a fair amount of competitive and battalion pride seeped through the article. The games took place on May 22, 1918. One popular equestrian competition was a race between teams of battalion officers, be they from the 38th, 39th, or 40th, on either mules or horses. This competition, known as, “the Derby”, took place several times as the culmination of battalion games, and despite the rather limited involvement of most of the men, was quite popular for gambling purposes. Although it was not officially addressed, officers were aware that the American Jews of the 39th Battalion provided “an adequate supply of professional bookmakers,” and that soldiers frequently made wagers on inter and intra-regimental competitions. At one point, the odds for an upcoming Derby were posted every morning on the door of the 39th’s medical hut. For more, see IWM 79/17/1, *Memoir of Major HD Myer*, January 1, 1919, pg 153 and Salaman, 9-10. It is, frankly, a little unclear how these bookmakers, mostly from the Jewish Underworld of New York, ended up in the Jewish regiments. It was, apparently, equally puzzling to their fellow soldiers.
834 WO 95/4465 5th BWIR War Diary, Feb 8, 1919.
This satirical drawing by the New Zealand war artist, Geoffrey Stobie, depicted the supposed symmetry between the proper form of a cricket bowler and that of a soldier preparing to throw a bomb—suggesting that the successful cricket player would become a successful combatant. The immediate tactical parallels, as Stobie implies, were essentially imagined. Bowling “could hardly be said to be of much practical value” in terms of an extension onto a military setting, as it relied on a luxury of time and space unheard of to the average Great War infantryman. However, Stobie’s cartoon also illustrates a more important underlying emphasis—the idea that cricket encouraged the proper sportsmanship needed to be a good soldier.

More important than the transfer of physical abilities was the belief that the cultural and social norms embedded into games created the best soldiers. “Sport [was] the best preparation for battle” because it supposedly trained British men to compete, and fight, in a particular way. While the physical aspects of games enhanced martial techniques and physical abilities, the values believed inherent to games—fair play, humility, teamwork, and loyalty—were more important. Winning the right way in either athletic competition or in war was critical to the British worldview, for it enhanced their right to imperial rule.

Demonstrating these values was particularly important for minority soldiers—especially the West Indians, whose racial backgrounds visibly marked them as different. When they arrived in England in 1915, the Liverpool Courier noted that “there is plenty of sporting spirit in the West Indian Contingent”, reassuring their readers that the West Indian troops, despite being

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836 Archives New Zealand, National Collection of War Art. AAAC 898 / Box : 608 / N°: NCWA Q549, Online: http://warart.archives.govt.nz/node/1209. There is very little in the way of information on Stobie or his sketches. Many appear to be of gymnastics and drill instructions captioned onto images of daily trench activities, offering a deeply satirical take on military training.
837 Peter Parker, The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public School Ethos (London: Constable, 1987), 213. An emphasis on perfect form and stance while hurling a grenade was an open invitation to a gunshot wound.
838 Williams, Cricket and England, 6.
of African descent, were acceptable military representatives. Both the WICC and the JRC emphasized their units’ athletic success in reports, thus underlining the weight athletic prowess carried for minorities in demonstrating their imperial standing and broader acceptability. Later, a BWIR officer publicly stated that “The West Indians made splendid soldiers. They excelled also in games, at which they had simply cleared the board.” The pronouncement of athletic ability—nearly as important as whether or not the West Indians were effective soldiers—was an assurance that the BWIR embodied the correct spirit.

Athletic success was a barometer of imperial desirability because it reflected a willingness to internalize the embedded value structure of games, and therefore, Britain. This was particularly clear in the postwar applications of minority soldiers for imperial positions. In supporting the application of Sergeant FAC Clairmonte from the 5th BWIR for a position in the East Africa civil service, his commanding officer noted that he had performed acceptably in his duties in the orderly room, but critically had also “taken a prominent part in Regimental Games and Sports, being active, energetic and a good athlete.” The Colonial Office denied Clairmonte the post (likely on race-based criteria), but the implications of the letter could not have been clearer: athletic enthusiasm and success was a key qualification for acceptance within the imperial hierarchy.

Nor was Clairmonte’s case an anomaly in its presentation. David Killingray noted how a 20 year old West Indian was able to gain entry into an Officer Training Course despite his mixed-race background in part because he was “a good athlete.” These incidents not only reflected the extent of internalization of the games ethic, but also the result of the British “implicit assumption that the values associated with [athletic success] [we]re directly translatable.” As the previous examples have shown, some officers viewed black and “coloured” men as capable of this internalization, complicating ideas about who might be able to reflect the imperial mission, and suggesting a crack in the racial underpinnings of the colonial hierarchy. For minorities inside the EEF, the belief that values could transfer through games led to a particular unique aspect of military service—they were forced to play games.

### Forced to Play: Games as Imperial Conditioning

While post-Armistice sport (and its generally accompaniment gambling) was of enjoyment to many soldiers, it was not simply leisure inside the EEF. In fact, members of the EEF were forced to play sports after the Armistice; one soldier wrote in his diary of “‘Troops

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841 JI 21-1K, Report of the Jewish Regiment Committee, p5. ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, June 6, 1918.


844 Killingray, “All the King’s Men,” 174. He was also a “public school boy.” His social class, plus his demonstrated athletic ability, was enough to override racial assumptions.

845 Levene, “Going Against the Grain,” 85.
being forcibly fed with football, and *have* to play.”

Compelling soldiers to play sports when they might otherwise not, particularly after the armistice, suggests that athletics were more than another form of military training or mere recreation. Whereas military training was meant to develop martial characteristics, sports also had a secondary purpose—to acculturate troops to a particular set of values believed to be embedded within the game itself. When athletic competition is viewed as one aspect of a multi-faceted postwar educational program, its broader purpose becomes clearer.

What began during the war as a means of better-training soldiers for both combat and a variety of other military tasks took on a different function after the Armistices. No longer was generating combat-capable manpower the primary goal of the Armed forces; rather, its focus now turned to transforming its troops into Armies of Occupation or back into ordinary civilians. Athletics were a natural counter, in the mind of British officers, to the enticements of political radicalism. By participating, soldiers would internalize the British values embedded within games, essentially vaccinating themselves from a host of political infections. The relative isolation of the Palestine front from the homes of the EEF meant that in Palestine in particular, unrest would run high at the slow pace of demobilization.

Games and educational training intensified inside the EEF after the October 1918 armistice, the result of a decision from the British command that athletics promoted desirable characteristics in soldiers, but also a reflexive approach to dissent by EEF officers. Days after the November 11 armistice, the War Office created the Army Sport Control Board, which instructed the Commanders of all theaters to promote “the universal participation of all ranks in the National sports of the Country” as a way of keeping soldiers “occupied” during demobilization. The (redundant) emphasis on “National Sports of the Country” implied that particular values resided inside British games, as other games were less desirable. After all, if the goal was merely to distract and amuse, why would the type of game matter? Yet its unclear how specifically constructed these orders were, and officers in the EEF should also be understood as trying to contain dissenting communities via a means that they themselves understood as a conformity-enforcing mechanism. The similarities of the games ethic inside the British and Commonwealth education system, as well its past diffusion into imperial popular culture, helped ensure a semi-uniform response.

Most of the forced athletics in the EEF began after fighting ended in October 1918, and emerged similarly across different units. In the ANZAC forces, Chaytor instituted a routine that mandated at least a half-hour of games per day, educational instruction, and normal training. A similar program emerged in a totally different unit: the Bedfordshire Territorials maintained a constant daily cycle of military drill, educational activities, and sport (football, field hockey, running, and boxing) throughout the start of 1919, and while not exact in its parallel, it seems the BWIR were engaged in similarly scheduled processes. In the Jewish battalions not only were there language lessons and educational lectures, but “vigorous sports [were] encouraged” wrote Gershon Agronsky, proudly noting Jewish success at boxing without contemplating why there

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846 Quoted in Woodward, *Forgotten Soldiers*, 131. His italics. Despite the keen eye that caught this quote, Woodward does not go much further than referencing how this exhausted soldiers, as well as implicitly noting the bizarreness of its occurrence.

847 Quoted in Mason and Riedi, “Leather and the fighting spirit,” 512. Haig held a meeting on November 11, 1918 itself to make this point to his commanders (See pg 511).

848 Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 335.

was such a focus on athletics. In the 40th battalion of the Jewish Legion, the constant organization of athletic contests prompted the men to complain: “We know we have to guard the dumps, but why expect us to run and jump when we are off duty?” When interest in sports had predictably waned during the intense heat of summer, the 40th’s officers not only instituted “Recreational training” in football, cricket, and baseball as a means of maintaining unit functionality, but resorted to mandatory sports lessons. These emphases marked a significant shift in official attitudes; Haig, for example, had complained in 1915 about men falling asleep on sentry duty because they played football instead of resting. Now, with the war over, men were expected not to rest, but to compete. More importantly, he frequency of games and the intensity with which they were forced upon soldiers during the post-Armistice period suggests deeper fears and motivations.

The emphasis on sport inside Egypt and Palestine reflected an inherent solution to potential discord that had been internalized by the British officer corps via schooling and popular culture. The most prominent generals in the British Army—including Allenby and Murray—had been educated by public school systems that promoted the importance of athletics. This system had replicated itself throughout England and the empire, yielding a host of other institutions with similar methods and goals. Officers inside imperial and minority units were often drawn from the same groups that promoted athletics as a form of cultural instruction in empire, and public school ideals featured prominently in officer-training schools, ensuring a broad diffusion of the idea that athletic prowess reflected both military ability and character. While the exact pedigree of the BWIR officers is unclear, important officers in the Jewish battalions had attended schools like Sandhurst (Lt Colonel Patterson, 38th), the City of London School (Lt Colonel Samuel, 40th), Cambridge (Major Hopkin, 39th) and Westminster (Major Myer, 40th). There they had clearly internalized the discourse of athletics; Myer often described Hopkin, for example, in terms of his athletic focus and ability—Hopkin had “distinguished himself at University” in part “though excellence at games”. The question, of course, is what exactly EEF officers were reacting to?

The first motivation for conditioning was the most immediate: the pace of demobilization. Patterson assumed that the competitions in football, cricket, boxing, and other

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850 WO 95/4470, Unnumbered War Diary, June 24, 1919; JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 117. Agronsky noted that the sport “failed to attract the Palestinians.”


852 WO 95/4470, Unnumbered War Diary of the 40th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. July 1, 1919.

853 Fuller, Troop Morale, 87. See also Winter, Death’s Men, 156 for the observation of Captain JL Jack: “However tired the rascals may be for parades, they always have enough energy for football.”

854 Allenby had gone to Haileybury, and Murray had been at Cheltenham. Other particularly prominent figures educated at roughly the same time and in the same manner were Haig and Sir Henry Wilson. See Lawrence James, Imperial Warrior, 6-7.

855 For an overview on these developments, see the collection of essays in JA Mangan, ed. The Cultural Bond (1992). See also Colm Fintan Hickey, “‘A Potent and Pervasive Ideology’: Athleticism and the English Elementary School, The International Journal of the History of Sport 28, no 13 (September 2011): 1852-1890 and for a specific example from the colonies, see Keith AP Sandiford, Cricket Nurseries of Colonial Barbados: The Elite Schools, 1865-1966 (Barbados: Press University of the West Indies, 1998).

856 James, Imperial Warrior, 9; Stoddart, “Cultural Imperialism,” 653-4. Stoddart in Stoddart and Sandiford, eds., 82. For a wide-lens examination of this process throughout the empire, see the chapters in JA Mangan, ed. The Cultural Bond.

857 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, 95-6. According to Myer, this “aptitude at games fitted him well to organise all kinds of sporting fixtures.” The CO of Hopkin’s battalion, Margolin, had little experience with Britain’s athletic culture, so it’s likely Hopkin took the lead in the 39th about sports.
Sports were established to help combat the “great deal of unrest and unhealthy excitement during demobilization.” There was “serious unrest” that “cannot fail to become acute” in the BWIR in Palestine by the Spring of 1919, the result of priority for demobilization to the Caribbean going to their sister units in France and Italy—who, incidentally, were sent home hastily due to the emergence of organized, anti-imperial politics within the units. Other unrest plagued the entire EEF throughout 1919, marked in May by strikes at Kantara and mutinies in the Jewish Legion that summer. Particularly worrisome to the British were the emergence of soldiers’ councils at Kantara, as well as other types of political organization. Some potentially high risk imperial troops seem to have simply been sent out of the theater, as in case of some Muslim Indian troops who were sent on pilgrimage to Mecca. Thus, defusing disgruntlement over the pace of demobilization was merely the tip of the iceberg. In the wrong circumstances, initial dissatisfaction could transform into a more dangerous political force; soldiers were both organized and military-trained.

Well before the 1918 armistices and concerns over demobilization delays emerged, the British government and the army command had worried about the spread of illiberal politics amongst its soldiers. The Colonial Office expressed concern during the war over socialist organizations in the West Indies, inquiring in Summer 1917 about whether the International Workers of the World were generating unrest and undermining recruiting in the Bahamas. The British also maintained particular fears over Bolshevism infiltrating newly acquired Palestine, and often fixated on the Jewish Legion as a source of potential Bolshevik incubation. Allenby demobilized some Russians in the Jewish battalions in March 1918 over fears of Bolshevik tendencies, and it’s likely that protests and strikes over the pace of demobilization inside the EEF re-aggravated these fears. One letter from a female doctor forwarded to the Foreign Office claimed that the American Jews in Palestine were “practically Bolshevists to a man!” Such sentiments, although clearly exaggerated and decontextualized, were indicative of broader British fears about Jewish politics in Palestine in the post-Russian Revolution era. Later intelligence reports from the Admiralty reiterated these fears, one claiming that there was “a

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858 Patterson, With the Judeans, 190. The British were not the only ones looking to blunt demobilization anger through sports; there was an Inter-Allied Games held at Pershing Stadium in Paris from June 22 until July 6, 1919, although the British did not participate. See Major George Wythe, Captain Joseph Mills Hanson, Captain Carl V. Burger eds. The Inter-Allied Games: Paris 22nd June to 6th July 1919 (Paris: Société anonyme de publications périodiques, 1919); Mason and Riedi, Sport and the Military, 109.

859 WO 33/960/10898. GHQ Egypt to War Office, April 3, 1919, MFAB 36417. The immediate question would be why the more politically dangerous European BWIR battalions did not go through the games process, and the answer is twofold. First, their anger was far past the point of being resolved through athletic conditioning, and the best solution to the British was to break up the units. Second, the better socioeconomic class of the BWIR in Palestine meant that conditioning was more likely to “take,” because they had more interest in preserving their place in the system.

860 Hughes, Allenby in Palestine, 243-4.

861 Over 2000 Indian soldiers, along with 80 of their officers, went on a multi-week pilgrimage to Mecca as guests of the King of Hedjaz, with their transport paid for by the British Government. See WO 33/981/11379. GHQ Egypt to Commander in Chief, India; Sept 13, 1919, No. I 45/BX.

862 CO 23/280/36589 “Recruiting for Contingent” July 2, 1917.

863 WO 33/946/9237, Telegram EA 996, CinC Egypt to War Office, March 20, 1918.

864 FO 371/4237/133374 Situation in Palestine and Lebanon, Sept 25, 1919. The letter in question was forwarded to the Foreign Office by DR WJ Simpson in August 1919.
strong Bolshevist element” amongst Russians near Jaffa, and another that “the soldiers of the Jewish Battalions are said to be displaying Bolshevist tendencies.”

Importantly, officers inside the Jewish battalions were well aware of events in Russia and sought to ensure nothing similar developed on their watch. Shortly after the Armistice, Salaman wrote to his wife that he had heard “that the conditions in Russia transcend imagination, and that more people are executed in a month than the French Revolution swallowed throughout its course.” Critically, he noted that Lt Colonel Samuels of the 40th —perhaps the battalion most focused on games and educational training—was particularly anxious about the potential spread of Bolshevism inside England and the Empire.

A broad collection of notes, letters, and diary entries about athletics in the 40th battalion of the Jewish Legion, as well as the battalion’s confluence of assimilationist Anglo-Jewish officers and Zionists that needed to be amenable to British rule, reveal a clearer picture of the focus on games. First, there was the need to make the newest and rawest recruits to the Jewish battalions into a viable British Army unit—athletic pursuits that encouraged this were essentially secondary training. The War Diary for the 40th Battalion specifically noted that “amongst the sportsmen there is a strong feeling of Esprit de Corps. Every possible step is being taken to spread this feeling throughout the Battalion.” Perhaps more important, however, was that officers also wanted to instill, through sport, a set of values that would be shared with British citizens and conducive to British rule. This was particularly important, given the large contingents of Palestinian Jews and American Zionists inside the 40th, as well as a much smaller number of captured Jewish soldiers and officers from the Turkish Army who had been integrated into the unit. There is evidence that Anglo-Jewry viewed the Palestinians as particularly key inside the British Mandate; Salaman, for example, felt that after proper training, they could provide “a nucleus for a national militia.” A January 1919 letter from Leo Amery to General GMW Macdonogh indicated that from an official British perspective, such a thing might be desirable. Wondering about the role of Jewish soldiers in the post-war army, Amery argued that “linked battalions” of Jews in Palestine could be “a means of settling British minded and military trained Jews in Palestine.” There, they would ostensibly form a key bloc of support for the British mandate. The dual emphases of sport—physical prowess and a British state of mind—made it, therefore, a perfect training tool for the officers of the Jewish Battalions to wield.

Accompanying the push for athletics training were two educational initiatives, both of which suggest the importance of “conditioning” the American and Palestinian Jews inside the

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865 FO 371/4238/160110 “Situation in Egypt, Syria and Arabia” November 14, 1919 and 371/4238/169211 “Situation in Palestine, Syria, and Arabia” December 14, 1919. These summaries appear to be based on information in the weeks leading up to their transmittance by the Admiralty. These worries only intensified, as British newspapers panicked during the beginning of the Mandate over Bolshevism infiltrating Palestine, and rapidly spreading into other Arab communities. See Teveth, Ben Gurion, 284.

866 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 116.

867 WO 95/4470, Unnumbered War Diary of the 40th Battalion Royal Fusiliers. June 22, 1919. FD Samuel relinquished command and returned home in March 1919, but the new CO was Lt Col MF Scott of the 2nd London Regiment.

868 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 21, 1918, pg 122-3. The Ottoman Jews were from across the Ottoman Empire, but some who had lived in prewar Palestine knew, or were related to, some of the Palestinian Jews. Myer claimed that some of them had been drilled by the Germans and goose-stepped, much to the amusement of the soldiers, and, presumably, dislike of the British officers.

869 Salaman, Palestine Reclaimed, 155.

870 JI 8-1K. Letter from Leo Amery to Major-General Sir GMW Macdonagh, Jan 25, 1919. The original is located in WO 32/1539.
40th. By June 1919, the 40th Battalion was offering lectures in a variety of subjects, but most notably, classes in Hebrew and English (Elementary, Intermediate, or Advanced) and the officers of the 40th made “every effort” to enlarge the English classes as much as possible. The drive to enroll Palestinian Jews in English language classes coincided with the push to have them play sports, which both occurred as the Paris Peace Conference wound to its finish. The British, it seems, recognized that they were running out of time to pave the way for a smoother mandate by having a core of Jewish settlers that related to British values and spoke English. Similar processes occurred in the 39th battalion, which by December 1918 spent much of its time on “educational work,” in the form of lectures and courses of instruction. Already militarily trained, the key in 1919 was ensuring that the demobilized men were “British minded.” Given the necessity of cooperation between local elites and British officials to the imperial system, it was extremely important that future British officials be able to communicate easily with the discharged “Jewsiliers”.

Educational training in the EEF was actually quite common, and seems to have developed as a parallel attempt at preventing soldiers from radicalizing. The thrust was two-fold: to train troops for postwar employment, but also to instill a particular attachment to the Empire through civic engagement. As one Brigadier General opined, the goal was “‘to produce a scheme that would stimulate in each individual soldier ideas of good citizenship and assist to make him a useful member of society.’” While some education—namely lectures on a range of professional topics—were vocationally specific and optional, other topics were compulsory. The mounted ANZACs of Chaytor’s force could choose which vocational classes to attend after fighting ceased, but they had to attend lectures on economics and civics. Of the subjects taught, no others offered a clearer intellectual defense of the empire against Bolshevism—that they were compulsory suggests fears of postwar imperial destabilization.

More formal education was also offered through various schools of instruction inside Egypt and Palestine, many of which had been created during the war to provide courses for officers and specialists. The various components of Chaytor’s former force dispatched soldiers to these schools, and while some enrolled in courses of military instruction that had developed during the war, many more seem to have attended vocational training, especially for agriculture. One letter noted that “hundreds [of Jewish soldiers] are studying agriculture at the School of Agriculture in Mikve (sic) Israel; others are perfecting themselves in other necessary professions. (Of course, by the benevolent aid of the British Government.) In the near future, as soon as political conditions permit, the work will commence.” Implied throughout this letter

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871 WO 95/4470, Unnumbered War Diary, 40th Bn. Royal Fusiliers June 24 and 27, 1919.
872 WO 95/4456, 39th Battalion Royal Fusiliers, War Diary 9, December 1, 1918.
874 Kinloch, Devils on Horses, 334. They also had to attend hygiene lectures, possibly in response to the tremendous rates of illness following Megiddo.
875 Ten soldiers left on May 26, 1919 to attend the Imperial School of Instruction at Zeitoun, and the following day, fifty-three soldiers departed for Jaffa to take a course at the Agricultural School. The 40th Battalion also sent its soldiers off, dispatching them to both the General Course and Musketry & Bayonet Training Court at the Imperial School of Instruction, as well as some to the Agricultural school at Jaffa. See WO 95/4459, 38th RF War Diary, May 26-27, 1919 and WO 95/4470 40th RF War Diary, August 11 and September 7, 1919.
876 Reprinted letter Harry Frankel to Sol Rosenbloom, Ludd, March 20, 1919, Bulletin Veterans Jewish Legion 1, no 5 (May 1976) p 36. Salaman also noted the hundreds of Jewish troops at Mikveh in March. See pg 210-1. Letter of March 14, 1919. Other Jews attempted—often with the support of the Zionist Commission—to engage in work that
was a direct link between agricultural training and settlement into the British mandate, which was not surprising given Mikveh’s establishment as an agricultural training facility for Zionists several decades prior. However, the school was not limited to Jewish troops in this period; like all British training schools, there were other imperial troops there, including Australians and New Zealanders.

While Mikveh’s foundation was distinct from other imperial schools, its utilization in 1918 and 1919 appears to have been in line with the broader British mission. Nearby, other EEF troops studied a variety of agricultural subjects at Ismailia, as well as tractor and truck driving at Ramleh. The goal, it seems, was to ensure demobilized soldiers could work when they returned home, thus decreasing the possibility of unemployment and discontent.

Athletics and the various educational programs inside most of the EEF after the armistices appear to have worked hand-in-hand. While at face value, these activities merely kept soldiers occupied, the mandatory nature of both athletic training and particular educational

would immediately transfer into the postwar period. Roughly two dozen worked in sanitation for the American Zionist Medical Unit in the Jewish section of Jerusalem, with the idea that they would continue precisely this work after swapping khaki for civilian clothing. See JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 137.

JI 27-1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 133-4. Courses were not of insignificant length; they ran between one and two months

JI-PH 479. “Jewish Legion receiving lessons in agriculture” Online: http://www.jabotinsky.org/Site/modules/arc_card.asp?itemID=101641&thisPage=10&itemMT=1&sid=11&pid=349 &isT8=&basic=yes&isList= [Accessed August 14, 2013]

Gould, “Preparation for a Rural Future”, 385. Gould speculates that training in “orcharding and viticulture” was offered at Mikveh, and “agricultural science, fruit farming, and wool-classing” at Ismailia.
topics—civics and economics in the ANZACs, English in the 40th Royal Fusiliers, etc—suggests that there was an undercurrent of conditioning to them. This seems even more apparent after taking into account the outbursts inside the EEF throughout 1919—having armed, trained, and organized a large portion of their empire to fight on its behalf, Britain faced an extremely delicate postwar situation. Imparting a particular set of values, views, and vocational skills into these men was the immediate reaction of men who had been brought up to think that playing games might successfully defuse anger over promises, pay, and passage home.

Games on Holidays: Prewar assimilation revived?

The use of games as an acculturative tool could, however, mutate slightly to fit the political and social context of minority battalions. This occurred inside at least one of the Jewish battalions, where the linking of Jewish holidays with the act of playing sport became commonplace. This then reflected an additional layer of meaning to cultural conditioning, as the goal was not merely to defuse postwar anger, but to make Jews more British.

Athletic competition often occurred inside the EEF to mark holidays—the BWIR, for example, held regimental sports with the 1st East Riding Yeomanry to celebrate Christmas in 1916. After victory in Palestine, Allenby decreed that December 16th should be a day of “thanksgiving for victory,” and while marked by a wide range of religious services in the morning, had an afternoon entirely devoted to athletic contests. Celebration in the British military, then, reflected the public school amalgamation of Christianity and athletics to justify Britain’s world status. For the Jewish troops, however, the linking of sports and holidays reflected a related, but distinct, process.

While the 38th and 39th battalions spent many holidays on active duty, the 40th Battalion, mostly composed of Palestinian Jews and American volunteers (many originally from Eastern Europe), constantly intertwined athletics with religious celebration. As early as June 1918, holidays were celebrated by the playing of games—on that occasion, to celebrate Shavuot. That September, following the morning Rosh Hashanah services, the 40th Battalion played a series of intra-battalion football matches—an event made even more remarkable by the fact that the holiday coincided with the Sabbath. Nor was this a unique incident; Major Myer noted that sports were played on September 21st and October 12th 1918, both Saturdays, and it is fair to speculate that this transpired at other points. These occurrences cannot be explained as military training, since the battalions were exempt from non-essential military duties on the Sabbath and the actual ritual aspects of holidays were observed when possible. While Yom Kippur appears to have been celebrated traditionally, the 40th quickly reverted, deciding “to hold sports to celebrate Succoth” and, a few months later, Purim. Nor was this limited to Jewish holidays;

[880] ICS 1st BWIR Diary, December 1916, Vol 2, 12, pg 36.
[881] RMP Preston, Desert Mounted Corps, 294.
[882] IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, June 18, 1918, pg 104. Myer noted that he competed in a tug-of-war competition.
[883] IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 6, 1918, pg 118. There appears to have been a typing error here, as the letter is labeled September 6, but given that Rosh Hashanah was on September 7 in 1918, we should assume the letter was probably written on the September 8.
[884] IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 18, 1918, pg 121.
[885] IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, September 12, 1918, pg 119 Purim took place in March 1919. This was printed as a letter from January 17, 1919, but the correct date for this correspondence is March 17, 1919, pg 172.
equestrian competitions took place between the 39th and 40th on January 1st to celebrate the Christian New Year.\textsuperscript{886} Sports on holidays most likely represented more than a general British acculturative process, instead continuing an informal process of Jewish assimilation well-known to Jews in prewar England.

Before the war, Anglo-Jewry sought to recast unassimilated Jews into a more acceptable mold through a variety of institutions and processes, believing that anti-Jewish belief in Britain was congruent with foreign-born, Jewish immigrants.\textsuperscript{887} Jewish schools in Britain worked to “de-Yiddishize” new Jewish immigrants, the United Synagogue of London attempted to excise the informal enthusiasm of immigrant prayer services, and organizations like the Jewish Lads Brigade and Working Lads’ Clubs promoted sport as a means of assimilation.\textsuperscript{888} The latter was particularly key to becoming “British,” and as early as 1900, members of the Jewish Lads’ Brigade held informal sports matches on the Sabbath. By 1920, Lads teams were holding not infrequent, formal competitions with non-Jewish clubs on Saturdays.\textsuperscript{889} This essentially promoted their British citizenship over their Jewish identity, since the Saturday game was an increasingly key part of Britain’s social fabric during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Given the resurgence in Britain of anti-Jewish violence in 1917, it is not fantastic to speculate that Anglo-Jewish officers used the nature of the military hierarchy to essentially continue these projects upon certain groups in the Jewish battalions.

Yet while these activities inside the EEF promoted assimilation for Jews who would return to England—specifically the Russian “East Enders”—they can also be read as more imperial in nature. Rather than encouraging assimilation into Britain for the Palestinian and American volunteers—almost none of whom had an interest in living in England—this was explicit acculturation with the goal of aiding imperial Britain’s Mandate in Palestine, a goal that Anglo-Jewry, as British citizens, would have desired.\textsuperscript{890} The focus on playing games on Jewish holidays stripped games of their Christian undertones, but still allowed the maintenance of connections between forms of religious masculinity and embedded imperial values.\textsuperscript{891} The linkage of religious holidays with sports was a de facto attempt to subsume faith-based identity within the broader tapestry of British imperial culture.

Given the role of games an acculturative British project, as well as an Anglo-Jewish assimilating process, it’s worth asking why the actively Zionist contingent of the Jewish

\textsuperscript{886} IWM 79/17/1, \textit{Memoir of Major HD Myer}, January 1, 1919, pg 153.
\textsuperscript{887} In particular, unassimilated Jewish immigrants were viewed as the root cause of the 1911 anti-Jewish riots in Wales. For discussions of this, see Levene, \textit{Lucien Wolf}, 23 and Todd Endleman, \textit{The Jews of Britain}, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{888} Lipman, \textit{History of the Jews}, 96; Levene, \textit{Lucien Wolf}, 219; IWM 79/17/1, \textit{Memoir of Major HD Myer}, 99; David Dee “‘The Sunshine of Manly Sports and Pastimes’: Sport and the Integration of Jewish Refugees in Britain, 1895-1914,” \textit{Immigrants & Minorities} 30, no. 2/3 (July/November 2012): 318-342. The United Synagogue’s plan, known as the “East End Scheme,” lasted thirteen years and sought to counter informality and enthusiasm (confused at the time with a lack of decorum) of immigrant prayer services by providing a controlled prayer space and preacher intent on lifting the social position of immigrants through moral lessons. As Todd Endleman has put it, the overall goal of all these programs was “character-building, the molding of their members according to the values and traditions of respectable, native, middle-class Anglo-Jewry.” See Endleman, \textit{Jews of Britain}, 206-7.
\textsuperscript{889} Kadish, \textit{A Good Jew}, 98-9. See also David Dee, \textit{Jews and British Sport: Integration, Ethnicity and anti-Semitism, c1880-c1960} (PhD Diss., DeMontfort University, 2011), 149-162, for a broad overview of this phenomenon in British society.
\textsuperscript{890} See the conclusions reached about Anglo-Jewry in the war by Kadish, \textit{A Good Jew}, 58.
\textsuperscript{891} This process may not have been as novel to the Jewish troops as one might think. One of the principal exhibitions at the memorial service for Herzl at the 11th Zionist Congress in 1913 was 2000 Jews performing gymnastics. See Michael Berkowitz, \textit{Zionist Culture and West European Jewry Before the First World War} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993), 109.
battalions accepted the force-feeding of athletics. One possible answer is that many Jews were just accustomed to this sort of process. One Jewish immigrant to the United States who later enlisted in the Legion, William Braiterman, explained that he and his peers had played sports in prewar Baltimore simply because they “wanted to become part of the community.” Another possibility was familiarity with Max Nordau’s idea of Muskeljudentum, which viewed athletics (specifically gymnastics) as a means of publicly claiming respect for Jews. Demonstrating ability through feats of strength—like boxing—underpinned the tradition of prewar Zionists who:

employed Hebrew in exercise drills, and sang Hebrew songs as a sign of their distinctiveness. Jewish gymnasts also liked to show themselves as operating with a Jewish tradition; their heroes were Judah Maccabee and Bar Kochba, and they also adopted the Star of David and Lion of Judah as their symbols.

These traditions—the fixation on distinctiveness through Hebrew and the historical modeling of Jewish soldiers—were all key components of the Jewish battalions’ existence. It would, therefore, be likely that athletic competition would also graft naturally, since the Zionists could essentially appropriate it for their own goals and ideology—something that occurred during the Mandate period.

The Meaning of Games from Below

The role of athletics as a broader force inside the EEF was not monolithic, as soldiers, especially minorities, could use the playing of games to state their own broad claims and to refute notions of ethno-racial inferiority. In the decades preceding the outbreak of the Great War, minorities like Jews and blacks had increasingly been able to demonstrate their equivalence, and sometimes superiority, of ability to “British” whites via sporting contests. Thus, the West Indians of the BWIR used success at cricket, perhaps the most “English” of all games, to proclaim their perceived socio-racial class and acculturation, and thus underscore their claims to better military and social treatment. In the Jewish battalions, boxing provided a means to counter the belief that Jews were physically weak and poor soldiers, stereotypes that the battalions’ short stint on active service had not fully discounted. In addition, Anglo-Jewish members of the battalions played significant amounts of cricket and football, perhaps a further demonstration of the dominance of their “English” identity. Sporting success, then, could reflect martial ability—as in the case of Jewish troops—or an inherent understanding of British values, as in the case of the West Indian troops.

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892 AJHS I-429, Transcript of Interview of William Braiterman, April 22, 1974, pg 7. Braiterman’s parents had emigrated from Podoyor when he was a child.
893 Berkowitz, Zionist Culture, 107-108, 112. Berkowitz appears to be mostly focused on German Jews here, but the synchronicity is too significant not to note, not least because the Gymnasium developed into “one of the most glorious manifestations of Zionist Culture” from 1907-1914. It’s worth noting that Jabotinsky and Nordau came to loggerheads over the latter’s opposition to the planned Jewish Legion. For more on the nature of that relationship, see Stanislawski, 240.
895 As Richard Smith notes, games provided an opportunity to “contest the marks of racial inferiority.” See Smith, Jamaican Volunteers, 104 and Holmes, John Bull’s Island, 84.
More than most military units, there was a link between individual identity in the Jewish battalions and what success at games meant. The heavier Anglo-Jewish presence in the 38th meant the presence of men who either naturally or deliberately strove to demonstrate their Englishness over their Jewish identity, and thus gravitated to quintessentially English games. Cricket, for example, was by far the most popular in the 38th, which played a series of matches of “that essentially English game” at Bir Salem, and the 38th appear to have also been the most focused on football, finishing runners-up in the regional Palestine championship. In the 39th, which developed an increasingly large American presence by the end of 1918, baseball was quite common and frequently attracted a great many curious onlookers.896 Lastly, in the 40th, which did not fight at all during the war, the focus was on the most martial of sports and the one that all the Jewish battalions competed feverishly in—boxing.

Since the success of the Jewish fighter Daniel Mendoza in the late eighteenth century, boxing had been of great importance to British Jews.897 This intertwining accelerated in the late nineteenth century, as Victorian commentators derided Jews as inherently weak and pacifistic, and therefore incapable of martial activity. In direct response to the idea of the weak Jew was Anglo-Jewry’s embrace of a “muscular Judaism” (the cousin of “muscular Christianity), the goal of which was a “new Jewish male” who pursued goyim nakhes, “the games gentiles play,” as a means of proving their masculinity and martial ability.898 The most direct and obvious means of demonstrating this was the boxing ring, which as Elliot Horowitz has argued, “provided an arena in which traditional images of Jewish weakness and timidity, whether internally generated or externally imposed, could be challenged (if not quite undermined).”899 Even Patterson seemed aware of this, noting that a boxing competition was a “grand opportunity” for conclusively and publicly proving the martial value of the Jewish soldier.900

While games identified as English (cricket and football) were key as a demonstration of assimilated Britishness for some—evidenced by the 38th’s desire to play them in Palestine—the principal athletic avenue for disputing myths of martial apathy was through boxing, especially in theater-wide tournaments.

The opportunity to fight in tournaments against other soldiers was, for all Jews—whether assimilationist or Zionist—a way of conclusively stating their bravery, courage, and physical ability to the rest of Allenby’s force. In the 40th battalion, which had no opportunity to fight at the front, there had been nearly two hundred entries for one intra-army boxing competition in late November 1918.901 The significance of victory in an EEF-wide tournament was not lost on

896 Patterson, With the Judeans, 193. Patterson recalled that the 38th’s cricket team was trained by Captain Pape, and beat everyone but the Flying Corps team in the series. In baseball, one member of the 39th, Kiyi Abrams, was a former professional player, but also an ill-disciplined soldier. Accordingly, the team from the 39th usually “refused to play until their star pitcher was released from the guardhouse” and “when the game was over, Abrams would be returned to jail to wait for the next game.” See Freulich, Soldiers in Judea, 155.


900 Patterson, With the Judeans, 190-2.

901 These were almost certainly all American or British soldiers, as local Jews had little interest in the sport until 1919. IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, June 19, 21, 1918 pg 104 and November 20, 1918, pg 141. JI 27-
Patterson, who dispatched the best boxers in the 38th to the Mediterranean coast to train with the battalion’s boxing instructor instead of soldiering. This translated into results—the 38th’s boxers won all five classifications at the regional Army tournament and earned the right to represent all units in Palestine at the EEF Championship Tournament in Cairo on March 13, 1919. In the finals of that tournament, the 38th ended up tying for the championship with an Australian team, and only on a technicality over an entrant—one which the Jews found unfair and deliberately discriminatory—was the competition awarded to the ANZACs.

Despite what some felt was a deliberate attempt to prevent Jewish soldiers from being the champions of a British force, the Jewish success helped make broader points. Boxers from the Jewish battalions were praised for “their alertness and agility, but above all for their clean way of fighting.” The first two characteristics were decidedly physical and martial, but the latter was most important—it reflected an internalization of the idea of “fair play,” which was central to most configurations of British identity. The importance of these dual attributes—martial ability and sporting attitudes—was such that the Palestinian volunteers in the 40th, who “kn[e]w little” about boxing, were taught how to box in a series of classes in March 1919. Jews were, therefore, able to use boxing as a way to demonstrate their martial capability and amenability to British value structures.

Contesting stereotypes could place minority soldiers in vulnerable public positions and expose them to explicit prejudice. Lance-Corporal Goldfarb complained that when he boxed at the General Sports Meeting at Kantara, members of the audience continually insulted him during his fight, actions that one Anglo-Jewish officer attributed to either “lack of sporting instinct or anti-semitism.” Goldfarb, however, had the ultimate rebuttal. He won the fight.

Jews were not the only minority soldiers in Palestine to use success in athletic competition to demonstrate physical and social belonging—the West Indians of the BWIR did so as well, but through the game of cricket. Perhaps the most important display of minority athletic ability during the war in the Middle East was the BWIR’s domination of the cricket pitch. In 1917 a BWIR cricket team played in a league of military and local civilian teams at the Alexandria Cricket Club, winning an impressive 28 out of 31 matches. Their dominance continued the next year, winning 31 out of 34 matches in the same league. Importantly, the

1K Gershon Agronsky, “A Survey of the Jewish Battalions” June 1919, pg 117. Agronsky noted that the sport “failed to attract the Palestinians.”

902 Patterson, With the Judeans, 191-2. Patterson names the instructor as Sergeant Goldberg, although Major Myer recalled that Sergeant-Major Chick Bitton was also involved. See Henry Myer, “A Brief Glance in a Spring Mirror,” in Bulletin Veterans Jewish Legion 1, no 5 (May 1976) p 6

903 Patterson, With the Judeans, 192-3. The Jews had not entered an officer into the competition that was an official enlistee into the 38th Royal Fusiliers—rather they only had officers who were technically “attached” from other units. At the Palestine championship, one of four feeder contests into the EEF Grand Championship—the Jewish boxers won in five different weight classes (bantam, feather, light, welter, and heavy). The four feeder championships were Egypt, Palestine, Syria, and one solely for ANZAC units. The Jewish champions were, from lightest to heaviest weight class, Private Burack, Private Tankinoff, Private Cohen, Private Franks, Private Goldfarb.


905 IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, November 22, 1918, pg 141. WO 95/4470, 40th RF War Diary, March 6, 1919.

906 FO 371/4238/144798. Typed Petition for Mercy by V. Jabotinsky, pg 6; IWM 79/17/1, Memoir of Major HD Myer, Feb 4, 1919, pg 163.

907 Howe, Race, War, and Nationalism, 153. At least in 1918, it seems likely that the team drew heavily from the 5th battalion, given the 1st and 2nd’s military duties in Palestine proper. Incidentally, compiling a team of players from battalions drawn from across the Caribbean was precisely the inter-island interaction that the BWIR was designed to promote.
BWIR team frequently played without their white officers (despite the fact that that the rest of the league was probably predominantly white), and three of the West Indian players were chosen as “representative players” for inter-unit teams.\(^908\) There were some precedents for this—colonial figures inside the British West Indies had played in or against multi-racial teams, and West Indian teams featuring both black and white players had toured England in 1900 and 1906 to compete against white, British clubs, as had Indian teams since 1886.\(^909\) Nor were competitions between EEF units and civilian clubs uncommon—a unit of the East Lancashire RAMC had played football against a civilian club of French, Italian, and “Soudanese” players while at Ismailia in December 1914.\(^910\) Whether these contests were of deep significance to English civilians is unclear. Suzanne Brugger has argued that at least with Australian troops, they simply represented a way for the British to fulfill “minimal social obligations” without actually working across divisive class and metropolitan hierarchies.\(^911\) However, the consistent involvement of West Indians inside these leagues, especially in light of their superior abilities, had particularly deep resonance. While any display of athletic ability was of great import for colonial men to earn acceptance inside British imperial society, success at cricket was particularly significant.

From the military’s perspective, football was the most important game, but cricket was far more significant from a cultural standpoint, especially to men from the British Empire. As Keith Sandiford and others have argued, cricket came to embody the supposed inner values of England because it was “an exclusively English creation unsullied by oriental or European influences” and capable of resisting non-English influences.\(^912\) Even if “non-European” colonials like West Indians and Parsees played the game, the game’s internal value structure—particularly its perceived focus on sportsmanship, broader loyalty, and respect for authority (the umpires)—remained not only intact, but could supposedly convert colonials to the moral core of the game. Cricket, therefore, was one of the primary means for “transferring the appropriate British moral code” into the colonies during the late nineteenth century—and some have argued that cricket and imperialism became “mutually supportive ideologies.”\(^913\) By the time black men volunteered to join the British West Indies Regiment, cricket was an integral part of life inside the Anglophone Caribbean, and while the game would later become a key component of what

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\(^908\) And of these three, “it is quite safe to say [they] won the matches for the side they were playing for.” ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of June 6, 1918 Meeting; Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers*, 107. The racial heritage of the selected players is not definitively clear; it’s possible that only players able to “pass for white” were selected.

\(^909\) See Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, 154-5 and Jack Williams, *Cricket and Race* (Oxford: Berg 2001) 18-26. Sandiford argues the black players were subject to prejudice and were often token, while Williams points out the social niceties afforded to them, particularly that their “amateur” status, confirming their higher social class, could result in fair treatment. One black player from the 1900 team, CA Ollivierre, remained in England from 1901-1907 and played 110 matches as an amateur for Derbyshire. Parsee teams toured England in 1886 and 1888, while an All-India Team of Hindus, Muslims, and Parsees toured in 1911. See Prashant Kidambi, “All-India’s visit to Britain in 1911: The most extraordinary cricket tour,” in Scyl Berry ed., *Wisden Cricketers’ Almanack 2011* (John Wisden and Co., London, 2011), p 74-84

\(^910\) Mason and Riedi, *Sport and the Military*, 86. The RAMC team won 7-0, and the match was attended by “a large number of Indian soldiers.”

\(^911\) Brugger, *Australians and Egypt*, 58.


\(^913\) Stoddart, “Cultural Imperialism,” 658; Jack Williams *Cricket and Race*, 1. Sandiford makes a similar argument to Stoddart, claiming that the Victorians equated civilization with “the other three C’s—Cricket, Classics and Christianity.” Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, 145.
one historian has called “black political assertiveness” in the interwar Caribbean, during and before the Great War. West Indians who demonstrably excelled at cricket often were viewed as key cogs in the imperial hierarchy—the middle groups between white and black. Thus, excellence at cricket served an important purpose for the men of the BWIR, demonstrating that their internalized value structure was British, and that, therefore, they deserved treatment as British imperials. This, in turn, underlined claims to a place in the front line during the lulls between their front-line activities, as well as equality of treatment during the 1918 pay dispute. After the war, their record in games underscored their bravery and effectiveness as fighters: they had exhibited internalization of “fair play” when charging a bridge with bayonets and on the cricket grounds.

Competition with other imperial groups was all the more important, since many historians assume that prewar prohibitions on physical contact meant there was little sporting interaction between black and white soldiers during the First World War. While stricter prohibitions may have been enforced in Europe, outside of the refusal of South African troops to compete with the West Indians, the BWIR in Palestine encountered a different situation. In addition to their time in the cricket league, the 1st BWIR held regimental sports with the 1st East Riding Yeomanry, a white British unit, at Christmas 1916 and competed with other imperial units while a member of the Composite Force near Gaza in September 1917. While later stationed along the Jordan River Valley in August and September 1918, the BWIR enjoyed a semi-regular series of football matches with soldiers from the Jewish Battalions, which continued off and on into 1919. Major Myer, in fact, was familiar enough with the West Indians to answer a query from his wife about the BWIR in terms of their athletic ability—“The men are good athletes and have distinguished themselves in the Sports recently held out here and open to all troops in Palestine.”

Competition also took place at an individual level: the BWIR

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914 On the fixation of Caribbean schools with cricket, see Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, 150; Keith AP Sandiford *Cricket Nurseries of Colonial Barbados: The Elite Schools, 1865-1966* (Barbados: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998). Non-whites had not been readily accepted into the game during the 19th century in the British West Indies, and it was only close to the fin-de-siecle that institutionalized barriers began to erode (although racism and race-based constructions of competition continued). In reaction to the race barriers thrown up by colonial society, a mixed-race lawyer named Sir Conrad Reeves had created the Spartan Cricket Club in Barbados in 1893 for middle-class blacks, and other clubs tailored to the intricate racial-economic hierarchy of the Caribbean rapidly emerged. See Sandiford, *Cricket and the Victorians*, 157 on Reeves; Hilary McD. Beckles *The Development of West Indies Cricket: The Age of Nationalism* Vol 1 (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies 1998) on institutionalization; Williams, *Cricket and Race*, 32, 49. Williams has suggested prewar players became “apologists for the imperial ideal,” but that phrase indicates that they knew that their actions were somehow wrong, which I am unconvinced of.

915 Smith, *Jamaican Volunteers*, 107; Howe, *Race, War, and Nationalism*, 153. Using an example from Basra, Howe has argued that sports like cricket were acceptable, but any games with physical contact, including football, were not. However, these prohibitions had been ignored by British troops as early as the late 19th century, when British soldiers played casual football matches with Gurkhas in India. See Mason and Riedi, *Sport and the Military*, 35-6.

916 ICS 1st BWIR Diary, December 1916, Vol 2, 12, pg 36; WO 95/4731, Composite Force War Diary, Vol 1, Sept 13, 18, 20, 22 1917

917 IWM 79/17/1, *Memoir of Major HD Myer*, September 25, 1918, pg 125 and January 22, 1919, pg 161. It’s not clear who competed in these matches, but with the high likelihood of NCO involvement and the high percentage of “coloured” BWIR NCO’s, it seems very likely that, at the least, some non-white West Indians competed.

participated in a series of open swim meets, and one private from Barbados won two races and finished runner-up in another at the championship level.\textsuperscript{919}

Despite the frequency of competition between West Indians and white EEF troops, this athletic egalitarianism disappeared outside of Palestine. When the BWIR battalions from Palestine passed through Taranto, Italy in 1919 for demobilization home, they were blocked from engaging in sporting competitions with the other troops on the base. Their refusal to abide the decision—one white officer reportedly replied to the order that “the men will not take part in sports except on equal terms with the others”—indicates that these battalions were accustomed to, and expected to, take part in open competition with other troops.\textsuperscript{920} By demonstrably succeeding at British games—particularly cricket—the BWIR were laying claim to a mantle of values. In conjunction with their willingness to serve the Empire—they were, after all, volunteers—their competitive successes demonstrated their rightful inclusion as British imperials.

After the war, small shifts in attitude regarding black-white athletic competition emerged, in part a byproduct of military and athletic contact between the two groups. While the Home Office had routinely blocked interracial fights before the war with limited protest, when it did so after the war on the grounds of imperial interest, the reaction was different. The \textit{Daily Express} referred to the Home Office prohibition of a 1922 fight between Joe Beckett and the Sengalese “Battling Siki” as “fractious and old womanish interference,” and the fight’s promoter, Major James Arnold Wilson, noted in a letter to the Home Office that “the war happened…and has altered many things and ideas…Boxing has become a sport of the People and was and is encouraged by the authorities as the sport of the Soldier.”\textsuperscript{921} Since black men had fought as courageously as white men during the war, the enforcement of prewar racial boundaries appeared particularly foolish. The combination of the martial displays of black West Indians during the war, coupled with their admittance into athletic contests, had begun to reshape the parameters of imperial rule.

\textbf{Imperial Exemplar? The Minority-ANZAC relationship}

Throughout their service in the Palestine theater, the BWIR and Jewish battalions maintained a great admiration for, and apparently genuine friendship, with the Australian and New Zealanders in the EEF. Earlier chapters have detailed the close connections between these groups from a military perspective, when they served and fought together as part of Chaytor’s force in 1918. Chaytor had relayed to the BWIR that his ANZAC troops “report that they like to

\textsuperscript{919} ICS 97/1/6/1 WICC Minute Book, June 6, 1918. According to the WICC, Private Jordan “won 3 silver cups for swimming, two firsts and one second. The two firsts were won at the Naval and Military Swimming Sports at 66 and 133 yards for the Championships of those distances, and the 2\textsuperscript{nd} prize for the 2,000 yards District Championship, open to all comers.”

\textsuperscript{920} The Taranto base was notorious for racist abuse of black soldiers—other battalions of the BWIR had mutinied there in December 1918, and the Palestine battalions were generally shocked by the treatment they received there. CLR James, \textit{Cipriani}, 34. According to James, the BWIR were initially ordered to play sports by themselves, which they refused to do on account of the embedded prejudice in the decision. This was not merely the case of different rules between the Palestinian and European theaters; four Indians serving in the EEF dominated the cross-country running portion of the Inter-Theatre of War games that took place in April 1919 in England. All placed inside the top six runners while running barefoot. See Mason and Riedi, “Leather and the fighting spirit,” 513.

\textsuperscript{921} HO 45/11880 Major Wilson to Home Office, November 1, 1922; “The ‘Colour’ Folly, \textit{Daily Express}, November 10, 1922. See this file as well for prewar correspondence between the Earl of Lonsdale and Reginald McKenna over the Home Office’s desire to block any interracial boxing matches.
fight with you, in fact, could never wish for anybody better...”922 The feelings were mutual. Patterson claimed that when the Jewish battalions were “severed from the Anzacs our feeling was one of regret, for every individual in the Battalion had...a feeling of real comradeship for every officer and man in the Anzac Mounted Division.”923 Similarly, Wood-Hill noted that the BWIR “received the utmost consideration and kindness [from the ANZACs]...and real good fellowship and friendship existed between them and the West Indians,” leaving some historians to concede that there is “limited evidence” of an “amicable” West Indian-ANZAC relationship.924 In fact, this was confirmed by a postwar report on the grievances of rioting West Indian ex-soldiers in Belize, when the Governor, Sir Eyre Hutson, revealed that “the men liked the Australians, New Zealanders and Canadians with whom they had been brought in contact because of their treatment, but they had been snubbed and treated as ‘n*ggers’ by the English troops.”925 This was not all the result of military comradeship, but also the result of familiarity through games.

One of the byproducts of athletic competition was that it helped reinforce a sense of community between minority soldiers and other imperial troops. While to some these sports represented a progression of martial training and a means of post-combat decompression, to the practitioners they helped solidify feelings of imperial fellowship and community. Australians stationed in the Middle East assumed “that playing together would be the prelude to greater familiarity” between them and the British.926 While this does not seem to have been the case between those groups, Australians did “ unbend” to other imperial, colonial, and minority-national groups—especially those in Chaytor’s Force—as the result of military service and athletic competition.

As early as 1917, a report on the BWIR battalions in Palestine included mention of athletic competition between the West Indians and ANZACs, drawing very clear links between imperial friendship and athletic competition:

One of the most gratifying features of the presence of West Indians in EGYPT is the bond of good fellowship which exists between West Indians, Australians, New Zealanders, and men from all parts of the Empire. In the early training stages at Alexandria and Ismailia, there were opportunities for the men to show their prowess at cricket and sports, and at two athletic meetings they carried all before them.927

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922 WO 95/4732, 1st BWIR War Diary, Copy of Chaytor’s Speech, located in November 1918, Vol 33
923 Patterson, With the Judeans, 157.
924 Wood-Hill, A Few Notes, 10. “them”, in this case, refers to the 52nd Scottish Division and ANZAC forces.
925 This assessment was something of a generalization—some British troops had treated West Indian servicemen positively—but it underlined an imperially communal differentiation from the British. CO 123/295/48750. Belize Riots, Undated Memorandum. Most interestingly, Hutson revealed his surprise at this relationship, noting that during his past service in the Pacific, he had found Australians extremely hostile to “natives.” Two other points of note. First, in their statement of grievances, the rioting West Indians noted discrimination in Mesopotamia during communion and in their military status, as well as abuses at Taranto—but nothing specifically about their role in Palestine. Second, at least some demobilized BWIR soldiers “remained loyal and undertook to maintain order” during the riot, being sworn in as special constables and making most of the arrests.
926 Brugger, Australians and Egypt, 59. Brugger argues that this did not take place inside Egypt, but rather there was a form of “ritualized mingling” that annoyed and offended many Australians.
927 WO 95/4427, WJ Murray, C in C EEF to Secretary of WO, June 24 1917, Report entitled “A Short History of the British West Indies Regiment in Egypt.” CLR James argued that the BWIR were so successful in athletic competition that they ended up inflaming prejudices against them from units they beat—a difficult assessment to trace, since really prejudiced units (such as South Africans) refused to compete with the West Indians. It’s possible James’ reference is to the cricket league at Alexandria. See James, Cipriani, 30.
The implication of the report was that athletic competition, and specifically the demonstrated ability of West Indians in games like cricket, helped to underscore a friendly relationship with white troops from Oceania. Similar interactions occurred between the Jewish battalions and ANZACs. In the period immediately following the September offensive, the 38th battalion camped in Rafa next to Australian units and spent their time boxing and playing cricket against each other. These contests clearly helped solidify the bond created by shared military service in the Jordan Valley.

The result was that the Australians and New Zealanders, in particular, became an imperial exemplar to both the West Indians and the Jews. Writing about the ANZACs, Salaman wrote that they were “a grand body of men. One has seen a lot of them out here, and they are physically sublime and undoubtedly have more character than any other troops… how proud I should be if we could turn out soldiers like them….”

BWIR members took to calling themselves “black ANZACs” and imitating the troopers, while the ANZACs good-naturedly called the Jewish troops the “Jordan Highlanders,” an identifier the Jewish soldiers proudly utilized themselves.

This relationship did not stem from humanistic egalitarianism—the ANZAC troops brutally abused Egyptians, Bedouins, and local Arabs. They were also attuned to racial difference; one trooper from New Zealand, Jim McMillan, although impressed by the West Indians (who he preferred to the French North African cavalry), had described them as “almost coal-black.” Rather, these relationships grew out of the realization that they had all volunteered to fight on behalf of the empire, and continued to do so despite uneven treatment from the British. Athletic competition provided another arena for close and sustained contact.

Assessing the ANZACs, Patterson argued that

> their minds were as broad as the wide space from whence they had come and in their strong souls there was no room for petty spite or discrimination. If we acquitted ourselves like men and performed our duties like good soldiers, then it did not matter, even if we were Jews.

A different Jewish soldier went so far as to claim that there was a shared “community of interests” between the units, perhaps explaining why the Jewish troops had experienced deep misgivings over an order to squelch an ANZAC riot. The underlying assumption in both of these assessments, of course, was that this attitude and sense of community did not exist between non Anglo-Jewry and the British.

It seems possible that a sense of community did exist between the ANZACs, Jews, and West Indians. This community could center on a shared narrative of voluntary imperial service—the idea that the Empire had volunteered to save Britain, and not simply been conscripted into service. This, as earlier chapters have pointed out, was one of the ways in which minority soldiers understood and projected their wartime service. Both minority battalions had worked closely with veteran troops while they trained in the trenches, and also interacted closely with their dominion classmates, as well as instructors from across the Empire, when they attended the

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928 Salaman, *Palestine Reclaimed*, March 14, 1919, p 211.
929 Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 394 ff.
928 Kinloch, *Devils on Horses*, 306. He had been particularly struck by their “splendid physique,” an insight that Richard Smith has unpacked in terms of masculinity, gender, and race in Smith, 100-121. The North African cavalry had “uniforms [that] were much too pretty” for fighting.
931 Patterson, *With the Judeans*, 101.
932 Freulich, *Soldiers in Judea*, 121-122, 147. Freulich recalled the Australians as “very friendly.”
various Imperial Schools of Instruction. Stationed together in the dangerous Jordan Valley, they had coordinated their decoy efforts, patrols, and skirmishes, before succeeding in their own offensive operations. It was clear to all involved in Chaytor’s Force that all battalions present could, and would, fight effectively on Britain’s behalf, no matter their classification within imperial society. The interactions provided by various conditioning schemes only enhanced the bonds formed between Jews, West Indians, and other imperial forces. Athletic competition could prompt friendship and respect, either substituting for or underlining the mutual respect gained in combat.

Katharine Moore has traced how sport was promoted throughout the early twentieth century as both a means of establishing and strengthening formal links between imperial constituents, as well as eventually becoming a substitute for formal British governance. From the failed scheme in the 1890s for a pan-Britanic festival to the 1930 British Empire Games—the precursor to the Commonwealth Games—the belief was that games could forge imperial friendship. The idea, therefore, that imperial groups inside the EEF would form relationships based on shared military service and athletic competition is not surprising. What is, of course, are the groups that did so.

The First World War marked the military codification in Britain of the long-standing idea that “the best sportsman is the best soldier.” Yet the imperial nature of Britain’s war effort also inverted this belief in the immediate postwar period, repositing it as the soldier trained to be the best sportsman would be the best imperial subject. What had been used during the war as a means of exercise, military training, and distraction transformed in the Armistice-era into a means with which to blunt the appeal of Bolshevism and other political ideologies that threatened the stability of the postwar Empire as soldiers demobilized. This seems to have been particularly acute inside the EEF, likely because it was the most diverse force of imperial, colonial, and minority-national men, and also because demobilization appears to have moved more slowly there. In a way, British officers were replicating the public school system’s emphasis on education and athletics inside the Palestine theater—using the authority of the military hierarchy to force, or at least attempt to force, imperial conformity. Athletics, along with other educational schemes, all reflected the desire to inculcate EEF soldiers with tactics, techniques, and mindsets all of which were conducive with imperial citizenship.

Yet minority and imperial soldiers were not empty vessels for the enaction of policy; they too saw the value in athletic contests, and used it to state claims of ability and imperial belonging. Brought up to believe in natural linkages between athletic performance and martial ability, marginalized soldiers could attempt to transform perception through dominating athletic performances, especially in open leagues and tournaments. Whether this had the desired impact is difficult to trace, but what is clear is that athletics helped lead to the formation of unique relationships, perhaps even creating a community, between non-British groups founded on

imperial volunteerism, military ability, and athletic competition. The soldiers of the EEF would return to the corners of the British Empire with a particular view of the empire, although perhaps not the one that British officialdom had hoped for.
Conclusion

One day after the Paris Peace Conference ended on January 21, 1919, a member of the British government addressed a gathering of former colonial officials in London. The speaker was Leopold Amery, then a Conservative MP and British under-secretary of state for the colonies, but also a future Lord of the Admiralty and Secretary of State for both the Colonies and India. Long a proponent of British Empire and imperial preference, Amery had been intimately involved during the Great War with the search for new reservoirs of military manpower—encouraging the formation of the Jewish Legion and supporting the military employment of the men who made up the British West Indies Regiment. Although the specific focus of Amery’s speech that day was the BWIR, the sentiment he projected also encompassed the Jewish battalions. Describing West Indian service as a “remarkable chapter in the military history of the British Empire,” he opined that the “the historian of the future might possibly assign greater importance than could have been done by the public.” Ever-prescient, Amery was correct. But he might have been surprised to learn just what importance was assigned.

At its start, this project argued that juxtaposing minority units not only enabled a more nuanced understanding of the minority units themselves, but also opened a new window to view the mechanics of the British Empire at war. The focus, in many ways, has been on disrupting broad and unified narratives to demonstrate the often contradictory complexities of the British Empire as it struggled to maintain its prewar structure while also fighting a war that required manpower on an unimaginable scale. How did imperial Britain handle, as one historian put it, that “[b]efore December 1916 Britain was at war, assisted by her Empire; subsequently the Empire was at war, orchestrated by Britain”? The answer was a slow process of erosion; barriers that prevented minorities from military service fell away in response to military needs, and as a result, the structural underpinnings of the empire began to weaken.

The First World War had created a unique context in Britain, one in which political lobbying could fuse onto an exigent need for manpower to create self-enclosed, minority units inside the British Army. In the West Indian case, the goal of colonial officials had been to promote political federation, while the West Indians who were the first to volunteer saw an opportunity to demonstrate their imperial value through military service. In the Jewish case, a small, committed group of men saw an opportunity to harness the manpower issue to the goal of a national Jewish home in Palestine, working against the wishes of many in the broader Anglo-Jewish community. The result was that many thousands of men—who might have had little in common at the war’s commencement—found themselves occupying a similar hierarchical space inside the EEF in 1918, just as they occupied the same physical space in the Jordan River Valley.

How they arrived to Palestine was relatively different. The West Indians had struggled to be able to volunteer for service, while at least a portion of the Jewish troops had enlisted only on threat of deportation from England. Others in the Jewish battalions, however, had already been fighting for Britain, and their desire to demonstrate their worth to Britain, despite their supposed

935 Amery’s imperial views are relatively well known to historians, particularly his involvement in writing the Balfour Declaration and his belief in the continued evolution of self-rule in the Dominions. He is also famous however, for his “In the name of God, go!” outburst at Neville Chamberlain in the House of Commons in 1940. For more on both Amery himself and this individual incident, see William Roger Louis, In the Name of God, Go!: Leo Amery and the British Empire in the Age of Churchill, (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1992).
936 ICS 97/1/6/1 “Contingent Committee Meeting: Col. Amery Praises West Indian Troops”, WICC Minute Book, Newspaper Report of Jan 22, 1920 meeting. There were 397 officers and 15,204 ordinary ranks in the BWIR.
difference, was not dissimilar from West Indian motivations. Other parallels between these groups exist. Members of the BWIR in Palestine supposedly reflected the middle class of the Anglophone Caribbean, and they recoiled at attempts to group them with anyone they perceived to be of lower class or lesser imperial standing. Similarly, much of Anglo-Jewry reacted negatively to the prospect of Russian Jews fighting on Britain’s behalf in an explicitly Jewish unit, with many Jewish officers joining the battalions specifically to make sure the immigrants did not discredit Anglo-Jewry’s broader wartime contributions. Ultimately, an array of self-reinforcing understandings of culture, class, and race governed the various perceptions of minority soldiers—both from outside, but also within.

While British West Indians did maintain some insular island identities, on the whole, the Palestine battalions shared a broader geographic and cultural bond. The various underpinnings of British imperial rule—the English language, imperial loyalty generated inside the education system, customary mannerisms, etc—had fused onto a broader regional identity. In contrast, Jewish identity was heterogeneous—some viewed Judaism only as a religion, others saw it as part of their political identity, and still others afforded it deeper cultural meaning. These views influenced debates over language in the Jewish battalions—what role should Hebrew or Yiddish have, for example—and also provided the foundations for the skirmishes between assimilationists and Zionists inside the unit. Thus, differentiation did not occur similarly across minority units. The BWIR battalions focused on crafting distinctions between themselves and other units of lower-class, “uncultured” black men (like the West India Regiment), while the Jewish battalions focused their distinctions inward.

Throughout their formation and deployment, both units found themselves actively struggling against a host of assumptions and prejudice, but also supported in their endeavors by other entities. The War Office’s attitude towards the West Indian battalions was consistently rooted in racism, but it is clear that the WICC and, perhaps more contentiously, the Colonial Office, attempted to blunt its effect. This was unlikely to be for altruistic or egalitarian reasons, but rather a combination of a desire for stability, postwar political goals, and subscription to a hierarchy of governance that differentiated between types of black men, albeit not placing them on equal terms with whites. Although members of the Jewish battalions allege antisemitism on the part of EEF commanders and officers, this is more difficult to confirm. What is clear, however, is that figures like Patterson were able to shelter Jews from prejudicial abuses at times, like when he saved a young soldier from the firing squad. Wood-Hill also supported his battalions—although in a different way from Patterson—and it seems clear that to surmount obstacles, minority battalions needed their commanders to advocate for them.

Part of what enabled these localized form of advocacy was the apparent flexibility of the EEF after 1917. The treatment of minority battalions by the EEF command—at least during Allenby’s tenure—reflected a willingness to put minority men into combat positions. Both units wanted to fight at the front, and at least after Allenby’s arrival in the Summer of 1917, this occurred to the extent that other mitigating factors allowed. Whether this reflected a martial egalitarianism on the part of Allenby and his command is not the point; most likely, it merely reflected a numbers game brought on by the rotation of other troops back to Europe. Still, the BWIR played important roles at, and in the periods before, both Gaza and Megiddo (not to mention in a number of smaller raids), and the Jewish troops were at the front for the only major operation during their tenure. Nor were the secondary military duties minorities performed in between front-line postings of unimportance, for they still reflected the fact that Britain relied on previously undesirable men to prosecute its war. Overall, whether minorities received their
preferred combat responsibilities is less important than the fact that the decision to put these minority men on the front lines created important precedents, albeit ones that appear to have diminished with the end of the war.

Within the EEF, the BWIR battalions appear to have been very effective soldiers, consistently demonstrating tactical ability and courage. While the Jewish battalions seem to have performed reasonably well in their only action, they had significantly less opportunity to demonstrate their martial ability by virtue of their late arrival to Palestine. These combat records affected the minority reaction to the athletic conditioning that took place during and after the war. West Indians competed to demonstrate their place within the imperial hierarchy, utilizing prowess at games like cricket to underscore their martial ability. For them, being a good soldier and a good sportsman surely confirmed being a good imperial. In contrast, the Jewish troops fixated on the most martial of British sports—boxing—as a way of refuting stereotypes that they had not had the opportunity to do during the war in Palestine itself. They felt that by excelling at boxing, they countered perceptions of martial inadequacy. One significant point of difference was that while the West Indians fought to express political and imperial loyalty, where they did so had little bearing on them. In significant contrast, the Jewish troops were fighting in Palestine, allowing the projection of a narrative of fighting for Palestine, especially after the pronouncement of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.

However, even as it felt that it needed these men to win the war, Britain feared them. Minorities were viewed as susceptible to the political ideologies catalyzed into the mainstream by the war, and the idea that their demobilization into the empire would, like a virus, infect greater Britain with Bolshevism and pan-nationalisms terrified many. As portions of this work have detailed, the British attempted to avoid these issues by only allowing the most acculturated West Indians be combat troops, as well as rooting out some undesirable Russian Jews after the success of Lenin’s coup. More diffuse methods—such as forced athletic competition and a host of educational programs—were another reaction that British officialdom hoped would inculcate soldiers—but especially minorities—with the British values they thought necessary to resist destabilizing politics. Ultimately, this process of imperial conditioning was a somewhat organic response to the immediate context of the Palestine theater in 1919, where unrest ran rampant amongst soldiers awaiting demobilization.

A more codified avenue of governance, military justice, was at times surprisingly flexible towards collective disturbance in Palestine, at least by Spring 1919. Commanding officers inside the Jewish battalions worked to defuse tensions over demobilization, rather than immediately arrest and court-martial the disobedient. Those that did find themselves court-martialed were not always convicted, and those that were could find their sentences reduced. This was a marked contrast to military justice during the war, at least for the British West Indians. Inescapably marked for stereotype and prejudice by their race, BWIR men in the EEF found themselves punitively sentenced in disproportionate numbers. This, at first glance, supports assumptions about unmitigated prejudice made from the military executions of two West Indians in Palestine. But as this work’s broader analysis of sentencing reveals, BWIR men were partially protected by the same systems of judicial review as other British soldiers. The racial structure of the empire could lead to their prosecution, but that same empire put forth some legal protections.

Ultimately, both the British Caribbean and Mandate in Palestine were rocked by instability in the interwar period, events which can, in part, be traced back to the Great War. But as this project has pointed out repeatedly, military service was not experienced in the same way by virtue of a unit’s minority identity. In fact, there is enough heterogeneity of service to argue
that there is no clear and defining West Indian or Jewish experience in the British Army during the First World War. West Indians from the same, general unit could be laborers in one theater and combat troops in another. Some Jews fought in Palestine, while others merely observed vicariously from Egypt. This could mean a significant divergence in how the war influenced postwar actions. Buried in a report on rioting ex-BWIR servicemen in Belize, in fact, was the detail that some former BWIR soldiers “remained loyal” during the riot, were sworn in as special constables, and arrested their peers. 938 Similarly, while Jabotinsky and a number of ex-Legionnaires agitated against perceived British abuses in Mandatory Palestine, plenty of others from the Jewish battalions simply returned home to England.

While this project has strove to return minority soldiers to the context of the British conflict in Palestine, there is still work to be done to integrate their complex history with that of the broader British Empire. Throughout, this work has attempted to tease out the connections between minority battalions and larger imperial groups, such as Australians and New Zealanders, demonstrating how their shared service and social interactions created baselines for their own conceptions of communities of imperial volunteers. In many ways, the ANZAC became role models to minority units—demonstrating a mix of imperial service and bravery, but also of disregard for staid British rules and hierarchies. It is little wonder, then, that some West Indians chose to nickname themselves “Black ANZACS” or that Zionists hoped Jewish settlers to postwar British Palestine would develop similarly. Further work is needed to understand how political sentiment flowed between these groups, and back into the empire at large.

There are other avenues to continue, and to further, the initial discussions raised in this work. New transnational discussions would add much—putting units from the Russian army like the Women’s Battalion of Death and the Czech Legion into dialogue with British and French units would offer an even broader baseline to consider how imperial Europe viewed its constituents. More obvious parallels exist with similarly-constituted units in the Second World War—Britain again utilized British West Indian volunteers, as well as forming a Jewish Brigade. Minority soldiers deserve to be fully reclaimed from the fringes of history. The approaching centenary of the Great War seems as good a time to start as any.

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