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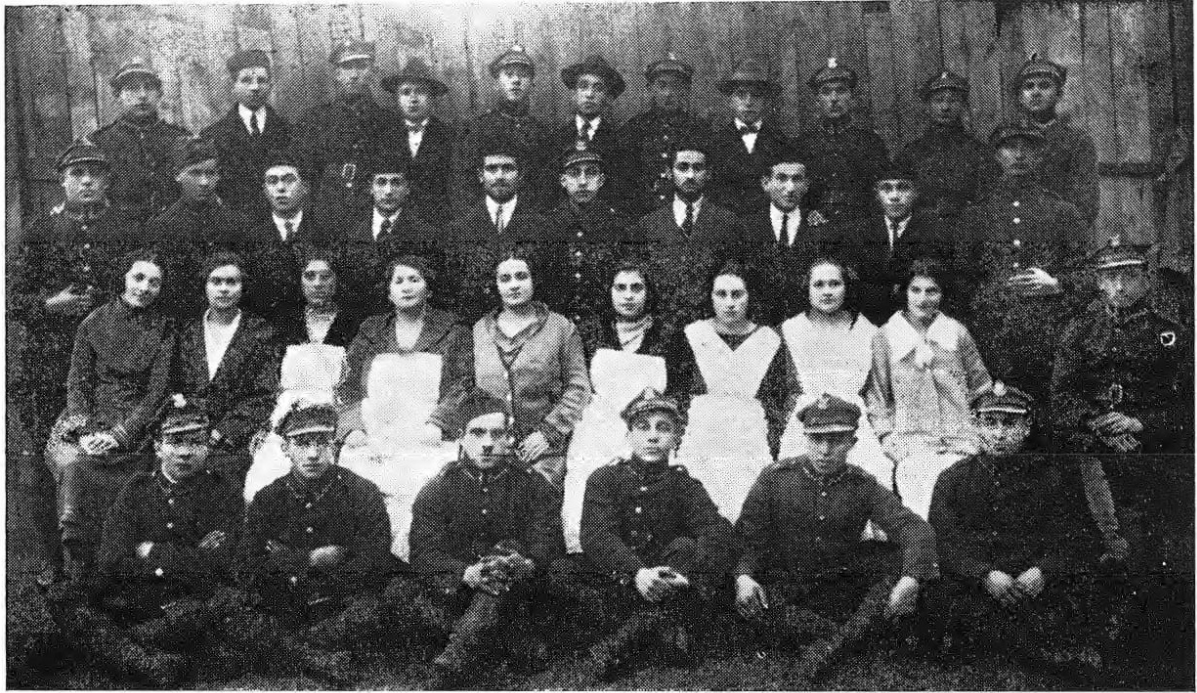
## A Kitchen for Jewish Soldiers in the Polish army

I wish to chronicle, for everlasting memory, one of our townspeople's welcome activities.

At the end of 1918, when the First World War had ended, when Poland had freed itself from the yoke of its enslavers and fought for its independence, it needed the strength of young warriors. Hundreds of Jews, mainly from the border-towns, were also drafted into the 17<sup>th</sup> infantry unit, which was stationed in Częstochowa. It was very difficult for these Jewish soldiers to become accustomed to their new situation, but the Częstochowa Jews took an interest in their plight and made an effort to alleviate them as far as possible. The concern was especially great approaching holidays. In order for them to be able to enjoy the festive atmosphere, they were invited as guests to Jewish homes in the city. I was also in the army then and, together with them, I felt that their happiness was not complete. Despite being kindly received in every home, they nevertheless remained depressed. The vast majority were sons of good and charitable people towards all the poor and oppressed and, suddenly, they were exiled from their parents' tables and were forced to enjoy the charity of others. I then met with my friend Józef Edelist and we conceived a plan on how to change the situation.

We decided to set up a kitchen for the Jewish soldiers, where they would feel as if in their own homes. We were also joined by M. Ch. Tiberg and, together, we went into intensive action to carry the matter through. Fortune favoured us. The Jewish *Kehilla* council, headed by Reb Szmul Goldsztajn, a renowned industrialist and one of the central pillars of "*Ha'Mizrachi*", who represented the Jews in the City Council, Reb Chaim Weksler, also a dear and respected Jew and, with them, also Reb Izrail Mendel Zilberberg and the rest of the *Kehilla* council, helped to us willingly. We appealed to the authorities and the writer of these lines, as a military man fluent in Polish and also known to the army officers, was able to procure many things for the kitchen. The army leadership saw me as responsible on the part of the soldiers and as their spokesman. Together with Mojsze Lewkowicz, an army veteran, we turned to the commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, General Pogorzelski, who was truly one of the *Righteous among Nations* and commander of our unit. The guards posted at his lodgings, at "Hotel Polski", stared at us and wondered - Jewish soldiers turn to a Polish general and he receives them at once and amiably? We presented him with the mission we had taken upon ourselves and requested that he give orders regarding the conveyance of the meals intended for the Jewish soldiers on holidays to our kitchen.

General Pogorzelski agreed and promised us that he would give the proper orders to the military authorities. And indeed, the victuals were conveyed to the *Kehilla* council. The best of our youth rallied to the operation and, among them were Józef Edelist, Mojsze Lewkowicz, M. Ch. Tiberg, Leon Plawner, K. Guterman, Abisz Fogel, Abram Danziger, Zilberszac, Mmes. Goldminc, Zajtman, Hajman, Wajnsztok and B. Plawner. Preparations and cooking were supervised by Mmes. Abramowicz and Kromołowski. It was not easy for these ladies to carry this out with the help of girls inexperienced in kitchen work. But, due to their commitment and sense of responsibility, they managed all that was required. The women and girls did not shrink from any task. They peeled potatoes, carried heavy pots and cauldrons [and] washed the dishes and floors. The eagerness to aid the soldiers, who were far from their homes, and to make the holiday pleasant for them, invigorated and intensified them and they forgot the world and all in it. The spiritual pleasure was, to them, recompense enough for their heavy work.



*The public kitchen for Jewish soldiers in the Polish army in Częstochowa*

*In the picture are seen the public activists (besides the soldiers) in the following order:*

*In the first row (at the top and from right to left): Mojsze Zajdman, Abram Danziger, L. Plawner [and] K. Guterman.*

*In the second row (as above): M. Ch. Tiberg, A. Fogel, D. Kaminski, Józef Edelist, M. Baumberg, [and] T. Altman.*

*In the third row (as above): the first lady I do not remember, and after her, Mmes. Zajtman, Hajman, Wajnsztok, Abramowicz, Kromolowski, H. Edelist, B. Plawner and Mrs Goldminc.*

The first holiday, on which the Jewish soldiers felt as if in their own homes, was *Rosh Hashanah*. Their joy was great and a mighty song burst from their throats when they realised that, were it not for their special kitchen, they would have remained on this great and sacred holiday in their barracks, amongst the gentiles. Through our intercession, all the Jewish soldiers were given leave, even from guard duty, on *Yom Kippur* and they all came into the city with plenty of time before the last meal [on *Yom Kippur* Eve]. They spread amongst the different synagogues in the city, each according to his liking, and at the end of *Yom Kippur*, they again regrouped at tastefully set tables, all happy and content. For the festival of *Sukkos*, we provided a sizable *sukkah* [Heb.; a thatched pavilion]. We turned to the timber merchants in the city for the loan of the wood necessary to erect the *sukkah* for hundreds of soldiers. We brought our young men together, in order to save expenses in building the *sukkah*, and we constructed a gigantic *sukkah* with our own hands. It was then that Mr Edelist came to us, before dawn, with unhappy news: the *sukkah* no longer stood. It had almost fallen apart and collapsed. We hurried to the *sukkah*'s location and saw it destroyed.

By coincidence, non-Jewish workers were working nearby on the pipes of the central drains of that courtyard, under the supervision of Reb Fiszal Karp (now in Israel – in Holon). Upon seeing our plight, he ordered his workers to rebuild the *sukkah*. He also called in electricians and they installed very impressive electric lighting. The night of *Sukkos* arrived and our soldiers' holiday meal commenced, and I may note that, without any exaggeration, whoever has not seen this festive event, has never once seen holiday cheer.

A large crowd of the city's worthies participated as guests. Everything was prepared abundantly and the holiday meal continued until a late night hour. All those present at the celebration heaped praises and unending compliments on us.

On the night of *Simchas Torah*, the holiday meal was held at the magnificent "*Sala Harmonia*" hall. Guests were invited to its large stage for the closing of the holiday season. We invited the City Rabbi, the rabbi and prodigy Reb Nachum Asz ztz''l\*, members of the *Kehilla* and the army authorities. We appointed ushers and entry was permitted only by invitation. We implemented true military discipline and our comrades' adherence was exemplary.

A special table was arranged for the illustrious guests, at which sat the Rabbi, the heads of the community and the representatives of the military authorities of the three battalions which were stationed in the city. Rabbi Asz addressed the soldiers and explained to them their obligation to fulfil the words of the prophet "*And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to be carried away captives*" [Jeremiah 29:7] and stressed that they were required to be a model both as soldiers and as Jews. He also delivered a brilliant speech in Polish in honour of the army representatives on the subject "*The Jews as a Light for the Gentiles*".

He was followed by the commander of the Fourth Battalion of the Artillery Corps. Our joy knew no bounds.

A decision was made - to double the effort and to also continue with this fine and beneficial work in the years to come.

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\* [Translator's note: Ztz''l is an acronym for the Heb. "zecher tzadik lebroche", i.e., "righteous man of blessed memory".]