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The Jewish Chaplaincy

By Don Canaan

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On Feb. 3, 1943, the S.S. Dorchester was ferrying American troops to Europe. The young soldiers on board, fresh from school and their families, did not have any idea a U-boat was tailing them until the German torpedoes struck the ship broadside.

The men were ordered over the side, but there weren't enough life jackets to go around. The four chaplains on board voluntarily gave up their life preservers and lives so that some others might live.

The four chaplains were a Catholic priest, Methodist and Baptist ministers and Rabbi Alexander D. Goode of Cincinnati. They stood on the deck, hand in hand, as the Dorchester tilted and sank beneath the waves of the turbulent mid-Atlantic.

Jews have been a part of every American Army since the Revolutionary War, but Jewish chaplains were not allowed to serve them until the end of World War I.

Fifty percent of West Point's first graduating class of 1802 was Jewish, but the class consisted of only two graduates.

More than 8,000 Jewish soldiers, including eight generals, 21 colonels, 40 majors, 205 captains, 325 lieutenants, 48 adjutants and 25 surgeons served in the Union Army. Seven Jews won the Congressional Medal of Honor during the fraternal conflict.

One Jew, Michael Allen, was appointed a chaplain in the 5th Pennsylvania Cavalry during the Civil War, but he was forced to resign under pressure. The Volunteer Bill specifically required chaplains to

be "regularly ordained clergymen of some Christian denomination."

By the end of 1917 the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) was asked to recruit rabbis to serve in the Chaplain Corps. Many Jewish doughboys had complained they had not seen one Jewish chaplain during their entire military career. Jewish volunteers accounted for 20 percent of all American land and sea forces.

The War Department had authorized one rabbi for every 1,200 men, but it was estimated recruitment only amounted to one per 10,000 Jews. In order to expand this coverage, the JWB furnished a Ford automobile for each rabbi, making them, as one chaplain said, the envy of all of France."

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Don Canaan is managing editor of Israel News Faxx, located at www.israelfaxx.com, a leading, free, daily Internet publication containing news from Israel. Israelfaxx.com also contains more than 1,750 links of interest to Jewish, Christian and Muslim readers, as well as a subscription-based searchable archive of Israel News Faxx articles dating to April 1993.
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Pitigliano : Farmhouse, Hotel, B&B Pitigliano Terme Di Pitigliano Maremma

By Giulio Detti

Located north of Rome, in Tuscany, Pitigliano is known for its Etruscan cave-tombs and fine wine. Noted tourist sites include the 16th century aqueduct and the narrow streets of the old Jewish ghetto.

Jews settled in Pitigliano in the 15th century. The Jewish population continued to grow as Jews sought refuge there when they were forced out of the Papal State. Protected by the Medici family, the Jewish community flourished and the city became known as "Little Jerusalem" (La Piccola Gerusalemme).

The synagogue was constructed in 1598. A school was built during this period and a plot of land was allotted for a Jewish cemetery.

When Pitigliano became part of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany in 1608, Jewish prosperity and freedom were threatened. Discussions took place on whether the Jews would have to move to the ghettos in Florence or Siena, but, instead, a ghetto was built in Pitigliano.

The Jewish Chaplaincy

Similar to other Jews in Tuscany, Jews were forced to wear a specific items of clothing that marked them as a Jew, a red hat for men and a red badge worn on the shirt sleeves for women. Jews, occasionally, had to pay special taxes for various projects, such as the building of a guard house and a fountain.

Despite the restrictions, the Jewish community continued to flourish and prosper. In 1773, Pitigliano had a Jewish population of 200. Jews were involved in all sorts of trades and owned shops selling crafts, cloth and spices.

Napoleon's conquest of Italy in 1799 dramatically changed the situation of the Jews of Pitigliano. Jews felt the repercussions of the Viva Maria riots in Arezzo, when houses in the ghetto were ransacked and fourteen members of the community were arrested.

Soon after this incident, life returned to normal for the Jews of Pitigliano. In 1825, Jews owned 94 houses, 20 warehouses, 11 shops and 10 stables in the town. In 1833, a school and a charity organization were started. Friction arose between the Jewish and Christian communities over the issue of forced conversions of Jewish children. Despite the friction, the Jewish population grew and reached 359 by 1841. At this time, the Jewish community had one rabbi, two vice rabbis and several teachers.

In 1859, the 423 Jews of Pitigliano were emancipated and were granted equal rights. This marked the beginning of the decline of the Jewish population of Pitigliano. Many Jews decided to leave Pitigliano and move to larger cities in Tuscany, while others converted to Christianity.

In 1865, a huge library was built, which housed more than 600 books written in Hebrew.

By 1931, the Jewish population had declined to 70. A massive anti-Semitic campaign began in 1936. Racial laws were instituted in 1938. More Jews left Pitigliano and immigrated, while others were deported.

During the Holocaust, efforts were made to hide the Jews and thwart Nazi effort to kill them. All of the

Jews of Pitigliano survived the war.

Today, only three members of the Jewish community are left; nevertheless, the Jewish cultural heritage has been preserved. The synagogue was restored and cultural events take place there; a kosher bakery was also reopened. A kosher version of Pitigliano's famous wine is also being manufactured.

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