

The Participation of Yanniot Jews in the War

The Epirote Struggle: October 28, 2005

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Research on the events relating to the Greek-Italian War of 1940-1941 [Greece's into World War II: translator's note] has been extensive and has revealed many meaningful and shocking things of which we could speak. There are still many aspects of this conflict that need investigation. One of these that would deserve our attention is the participation of Greek Jews who served their country in the Greek Army. The sacrifice and the blood shed by the Jewish community for their country were heavy. We are all aware of the hero of the conflict on the Albanian Front, Colonel Mordechai Frizis, who was killed in an air attack at Premeti on December 4, 1940.

At the time of World War II, the population of the Jewish Community of Ioannina was about 2,000. They also suffered losses during the Greek-Italian conflict: 6 Yanniot Jews died in battle and one, who had suffered severe injuries leading to amputation, was among those deported on March 25, 1944. To locate their names and other facts regarding their identity, we have engaged in an intense and exhausting research through the few books on this topic. A major source of information was the picture-filled book put out by the Greek Ministry of War, "Battles and Dead of the Greek Military in the Second World war 1940-1945." There was also the list of names of those who fought on the Albanian front, the injured and those who died, both officers and soldiers, including the reason of their injury and death. These names were cross-referenced in lists provided by the Greek Military and the Director of the Historical Section of the Military. Parallel sources regarding Yanniot Jews were found in Siobotis book "The Romaniote Jews of Ioannina," which mentioned the interesting testimony of Salvator Bakolas on this subject, along with the book published by the Yanniot Jewish Community in New York, "In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ioannina."

From the information available up to now, we are about to ascertain that the six dead [Jews] were enlisted in the 15th Infantry Regiment led by Major General Charalambou Katsimitrou, headquartered in Ioannina and responsible for all of Epirus.

The Commandant of the 15th Infantry Regiment was Colonel Vassilis Rigas, assisted by Lieutenant Colonel Kiriazis Yiorgos. There were three infantry battalions in the regiment. All of those who were members of the regiment were enlistees from the same area, a factor that led to friendly relationships between them. In 1935, the term of enlistment was 21 months. From 1938, the first draft

was begun and a reservist force was established. By 1939, the reserves included 5 classes of armed reservists. For 19 months preceding the threatened Italian invasion, and up to the 27th of October when the final invasion would be attempted, the Albanian border was guarded in anticipation of an invasion. Regarding the 15th Infantry Regiment, the extent of their involvement is verified by the list of those who fought as part of the 7th Division of the 15th Infantry Regiment. Included in this list are the 6 Yanniotte Jews who were among those who put up a harsh resistance to the Italian invasion on the second day of the engagement, and who took part in the continued stubborn resistance throughout the Epirote war theater [Soudena, Grabala, Kalpaki, Negrades, Xani Delvinakiou Pondikates Kakavia] from October 29th through the end of November. Some of the harshest engagements of this battle were fought by the 7th Division of the 15th Infantry Regiment, which took place during the first 40 days of the war.

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Honoring the heroic dead of the Greek-Italian War [1940-1941], let us at least mention the names of those 6 Yanniotte Jews who died in battle, breathing their last breaths in defense of their country.

ATTAS, Semos [Shemos] son of Ilias [also called Shemos Bochor Attas; Shemos ben Ilias Attas]

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1910

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Private

Place where he was killed: hill #1216 [Progkonati] found 23 kilometers northwest of Argyrokastro

Date of death: January 11, 1941

Age at time of death: 31

NEGRIN, Davijon son of Samuel [also called Davijon Samuel Negrin; Davijon ben Samuel Negrin]

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1913

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Private

Place where he was killed: at the neck of Nivitsas, plateau of Kourvelesiou, 12 kilometers southwest of Tepeleniou

Date of death: February 14, 1941

Age at time of death: 28

PITSIRILOS, Iousas son of David [also called Jeuda ben David Pitsirilos]

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1916

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Private

Place where he was killed: at the neck of Nivitsas, plateau of Kourvelesiou, 12 kilometers southwest of Tepeleniou

Date of death: February 4, 1941

Age at time of death: 25

SABOS, Moises son of Avraam [also called Moises ben Avraam Shemos]

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1916

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Private

Place where he was killed: Pondikates at the crossing of Kakavias, 10 kilometers from Delvinakiou

Date of death: November 26, 1940

Age at time of death: 24

NEGRIN, Oriel son of Solomon [also called Oriel Solomon Negrin or Oriel ben Solomon Negrin]

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1919

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Corporal

Reported missing in action at Vissani Pogoniou 6 kilometers northeast of Delvinakiou on November 19, 1940

Age: 21

HAHAM, Raphael son of Angelos [Andzelos] or Joseph ben Andelos Raphael

Place of birth: Ioannina

Year of birth: 1917

Unit: 15th Infantry Regiment

Rank: Private

Place where he was killed: on the hill of Grambalas 15 kilometers southwest of Konitsas

Date of death: November 5, 1940

Age at time of death: 26

We should also mention Nissim ben Iakov Attas [Politis], 28 years old, a private who was severely wounded in the Greek-Italian War. In spite of the fact that he was an amputee due to injuries incurred in battle, he was also arrested by the Germans, along with other Jews from Ioannina on that fateful day, March 25, 1944, and sent to Auschwitz-Birkenau from where he never returned.

We are grateful to Alekos Raptis and the "Epirote Struggle" of Ioannina for this article and their continued sensitive coverage of the fate of the Yanniotte Jews during the Occupation of Ioannina and the Holocaust.

We would like to add the following information, cross-referenced from our research on the demise of the Jewish Community of Ioannina and printed in our memorial book, "In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ioannina."

Shemos Attas [age 31] was the middle son in a family of merchants taking care of aging parents. His parents, brothers and two married sisters and their families would all perish in the concentration camps.

Davijon ben Samuel Negrin [age 28] was one of nine children of Samuel and Mazalto Negrin. Mazalto was widowed at the time of the Occupation. She and her family [seven surviving children and seven young grandchildren] would all perish in the camps. The family were merchants involved in textiles.

Jeuda ben David Pitsirilos [25] was one of five siblings. His brothers and father were butchers. All would perish in the concentration camps.

Moisis ben Avraam Shemos [24], although born in Ioannina, was from a family with strong ties to Arta.

Oriel Solomon Negrin [21] was the oldest son of Solomon and Rozina Negrin. His father and uncles were established merchants in the city. All would perish in the Holocaust.

Joseph ben Andelos Raphael's father sold vegetables. Andzelos Raphael was 61 when he and his wife Rachil were led to the gas chambers with their daughter-in-law and 11 year old grandchild. They had survived the death of their second son Joseph [age 26] on the Albanian Front. Their oldest son Andzelos [Angelos], a professor, would return from the camps.

As mentioned by Alekos Raptis in his sensitive article, Nissim ben Iakov Attas [Politis] [age 28] represented one of the most senseless losses, and in many ways exemplifies the barbarity of the Germans. An amputee due to injuries incurred in battle, cared for by his widowed mother, a member of a poor family who subsisted on selling of yarn and thread, he was dragged off in the early morning hours of March 25, 1944 and sent to the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

"The tragedy that was to unfold in Ioannina in the spring of 1944 had its antecedents in the winter of 1940/41. Along with other Jewish men throughout Greece who joined their fellow Greeks to fight off the fascist invasion, young

men from Ioannina rallied on the Albanian Front." ["In Memory of the Jewish Community of Ioannina," published by Kehila Kedosha Janina Synagogue and Museum.

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