

# Jewish Allies and Survivors in Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945

→ Veerle Vanden Daelen

**E**ighty years after the liberation, this contribution sheds light on the encounters of Jews entering Antwerp with the Allied forces and local Jews, who had survived the war in hiding or returned to the city from a safe haven or as camp survivors. Largely based on the correspondence of Allied Jews in Antwerp, this article delves into ad-hoc established aid systems and the revival of community and religious life, and provides an account of Antwerp's Jewish life immediately after the liberation. It also sheds light on the relationships between "local" and "Allied" Jewish populations in the city and how both "local" and "Allied" Jews played crucial roles in the challenging times after the liberation and how they mutually assisted each other.

## FIRST LIBERATION ENCOUNTERS

British Allied forces liberated Antwerp on 4 September 1944. American, Canadian and Polish troops followed in their wake, engaging in a battle to defend this strategic Western European port city, which fell under severe bombings from October 1944 through March 1945.<sup>1</sup> As the Allies entered the city, they were welcomed by the local population.<sup>2</sup> In Antwerp and elsewhere, Jews were among the liberating forces. In the US army, for example, the number of rabbi chaplains had grown from 29 at the outbreak of the Second World War to 329, with 147 liberal, 96 conservative and 86 orthodox rabbi chaplains.<sup>3</sup> The Canadian army included almost 17,000 Jews and nine chaplains, including Chaplain Samuel Cass, a Toronto-born Conservative rabbi who arrived in Belgium on 23 October 1944 and would also be in Antwerp.<sup>4</sup> According to *Ofipresse*, an estimated 1,278,000 Jews served in the Allied armies, including Belgian Jews and Jews who had lived in Belgium at the eve of the war.<sup>5</sup> As of July 1945, the Jewish Brigade came to Belgium and had a section stationed in Antwerp.<sup>6</sup>

Upon the liberation of Antwerp, a few hundred Jews who had survived the war in hiding in the city – the small remnant of the estimated 35,500 at the eve of the war – left their hiding places. The impact of the liberation and their meeting their liberators cannot be underestimated. Myriam Nebenzahl, a 13-year-old Jewish girl,

collected signatures of five military men of the liberating forces in her poetry album and wrote above them, in Dutch, “in memory of the Tommies at the liberation of 4 September 1944”.<sup>7</sup> Other survivors, such as resistance leader Jozef Sterngold, were immediately in touch with the Allied forces to negotiate support for the Jewish survivors, trying to secure goods and buildings.<sup>8</sup>

While Sterngold was in touch with the Allied forces in general and young Myriam collected signatures of the liberators, the guestbook at the Tachkemoni school starts with five pages of signatures from at least 65 Allied Jews (over 25 from the UK and the US, nine Canadian, one Dutch, one Polish and two unknown nationalities). Most Americans are on the last page, dated 1 November 1944 and entitled “American forces visiting”.<sup>9</sup> Clearly, Jewish life, which had been officially erased from the city by the Nazi regime and its collaborators, had immediately (re-)organized itself. In this transition period from war to peace, it was very often the Jewish soldiers from the Allied forces who assisted local Jewish communities. They were – often to their own surprise – much earlier and faster in contact with the survivors than were the organized overseas welfare, organized by the JDC and others.<sup>10</sup>

Especially those speaking Yiddish had a high chance of having a common language with the local Jewish population. Whereas communication between the Allies and the local population was not always easy, a considerable number of Jews indeed had a common language, Yiddish. Interestingly, this was essentially a given for Eastern European Jews who either had held on to their mother tongue after their migration or who had recently migrated. It meant that the “integrated” Jews from the Allied armies had less chance to find a common language than the recent immigrants or the Orthodox who had kept Yiddish as a language among themselves. Deborah Dash Moore notes the difficulties of the French Jews to speak with the Jews of the Allied forces because of their lack of a common language (the former not speaking English, the latter not speaking French), and Laura Hobson Faure observes a reversing of roles and hierarchies due to languages in France, where the French Jews saw themselves in the position to ask for translation to the “foreign” local Jews in France for what the Allied Jews said in Yiddish.<sup>11</sup> As Moore mentions, “conversations flourished in a babel of languages”.<sup>12</sup> However, in a general meeting of Jews – both civilian and military – in Antwerp on 3 December 1944, Chaplain Sandhaus “spoke very well in Yiddish on the subject of unity.”<sup>13</sup> Daniel Isaacman (born in Philadelphia on 8 October 1924, who arrived in Belgium, presumably Antwerp, in the second half of November 1944, coming from France) wrote on 6 December 1944 from Antwerp, describing how he, a 20-year-old American GI, could speak to an 18-year-old Jewish survivor girl in Antwerp in Yiddish: “I can now most certainly see the point of view held by the extreme Yiddishists – Yiddish truly is the international language”.<sup>14</sup> For Orthodox Jews, this remains the case, and this was also true for Communist Jews in the immediate post-war period.<sup>15</sup> A large number of Jews in Belgium still had Yiddish as their main language and as a central part of their identity. In certain

situations, Yiddish was even used as the vehicular language to identify fellow Jews<sup>16</sup>, and would also be a language to circumvent censorship (see later).

### ALLIED JEWS REPORTING ABOUT THE SURVIVORS AND THE DIRE NEED FOR NEWS FROM RELATIVES

As Allied soldiers wrote home, they mention multiple survivor accounts. Not all are entirely accurate, but some are spot-on, or a mix of both.<sup>17</sup> David Heaps' letter to his father about the Jews of Antwerp, for example, mixed facts and fiction: "Apparently they are practically exterminated. The men and women were taken out and tortured and shot – and many others who escaped this were thrown into the water and drowned. A few escaped by remaining indoors, hidden for almost the entire time since 1940. Children were snatched from their mothers and shipped away with no traces left."<sup>18</sup> While much of what Heaps wrote is not mentioned in other sources, it is a source of what information possibly was being said, and how this information and the situation the Allies were confronted with led to strong feelings of hatred and revenge against the perpetrators, as Heaps also wrote to his father: "I would have no mercy on these swine and would kill them all. They are sub-human brutes and sadists. [...] as soon as possible they must be completely ferreted out and punished."<sup>19</sup>

It is important to keep in mind the time-gap between the liberation of Antwerp and the liberation of the camps: these accounts and feelings are not yet "corroborated" by their later framing into the larger picture (after the liberation of the concentration camps and annihilation centers). And they report not only about what they heard about the war years, but also about the situation as they witnessed it. David (Doov) Stein, who spent eight months (from 9 November 1944 until 10 June 1945) in Antwerp with the US Allied forces, wrote on 15 November 1944: "I went into the building of the Jewish Committee. A group of people were standing in line, waiting for the distribution of a hot meal. It was obvious that these people had not lived like this in earlier years. I went into the office with the secretary, who told me of the terrible problems they face. The people have no homes, no clothes, no food and no money."<sup>20</sup> Apart from the hardships, he also reports about the community-building activities, and the contacts of the Jews among the Allied forces and the local Jewish population. As such the Allied Jews provide information on Jewish life during the war (from the witness accounts they heard) and describe what they had witnessed themselves. Both Daniel Isaacman and David Stein – who left extensive correspondence – do this, but they mostly report on their own worlds of interest, Isaacman about left-wing Zionist life, the Mizrachi children's home and the diamond business, and Stein, former vice-president of Young Israel in Manhattan, about Orthodox life in all its aspects.<sup>21</sup>

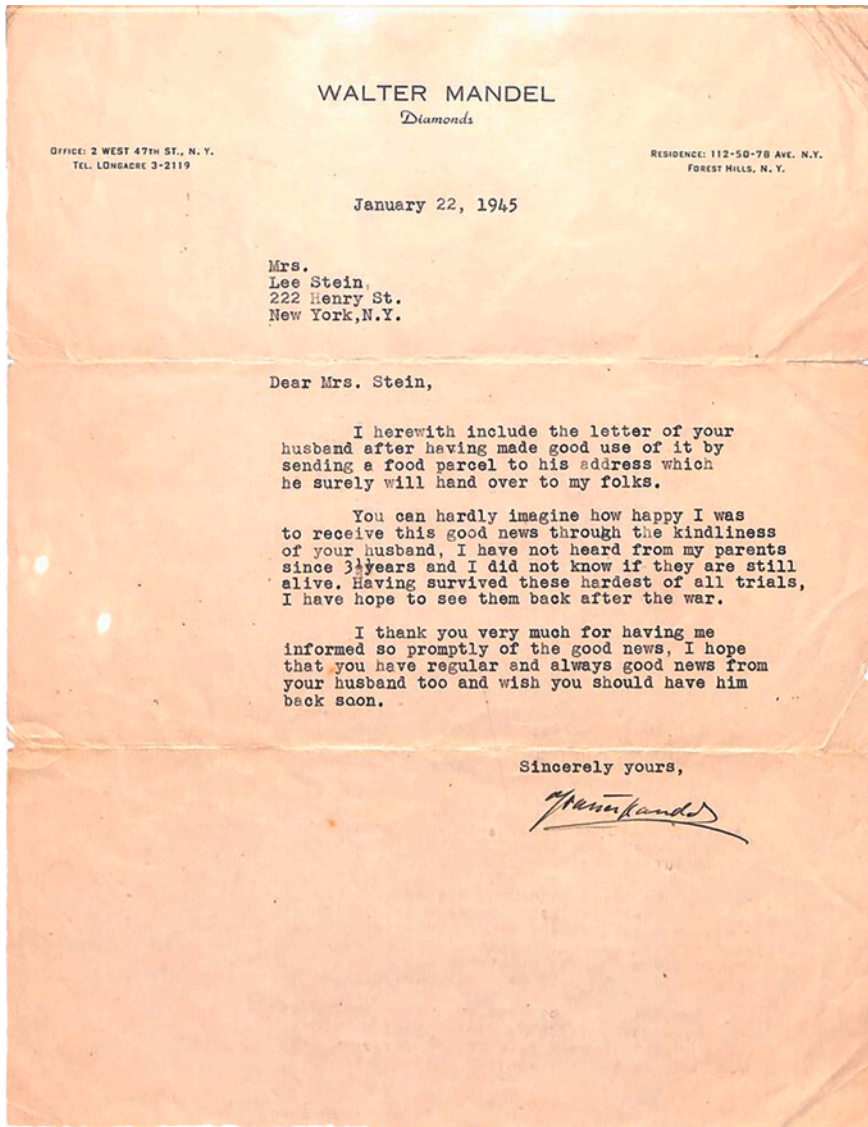
Similar reports could be found by early "returnees", Jews from Antwerp coming back from a safe haven abroad. However, I am only aware of Romi Goldmuntz's

account of his late 1944 visit.<sup>22</sup> In the meantime, Allied Jewish personnel encouraged the survivors to keep and spread evidence about the war years of persecution, and the publication of Stein's letters in the *Forwards*, for example, was also a source of hope for the survivors.<sup>23</sup>

Letters and communication networks were used to help Jewish survivors, many of whom had been left without news of relatives for months and years, reconnect with their families and launch further searches, which was especially difficult because of censorship. So far, this aspect seems to have received little to no attention by those who studied the Jewish encounters in liberated Europe. The first time I saw this explicitly addressed was in Shifra Stahl's work on her father, the previously quoted David Stein. From her father's correspondence it is clear how desperate survivors were to receive information, but also how difficult it was to transmit this crucial information because of censorship, which was mainly in place for military reasons.<sup>24</sup> In an interview in December 1973, Stein stated that "because there was an army regulation against giving names, I thought of the idea of writing in Yiddish. I assumed that the Yiddish censor, realizing that I'm not betraying any army secrets, would allow this mail to go through. [...] It worked very effectively."<sup>25</sup> Further in the interview, he returns to this topic and says: "the company censors were very busy and any mention of a name let alone a place they would cut out or call me in and tell me to cut down the letter. [...] if you write in Yiddish it goes to the base censors. I assumed that the Yiddish censors would be sympathetic to the cause, and it seemed to have worked, and every [Yiddish] letter I wrote went through."<sup>26</sup> The censorship is very visible in the letters of Daniel Isaacman from Philadelphia. He wrote in English and many of his 1944 letters had fragments literally cut from them.<sup>27</sup>

Some of Stein's letters – it is not clear in which languages, but surely English, among others – went lost, as we learn from his letter of 16 November 1944: "When I came to my boss, the Captain, I saw immediately that this wasn't going to turn out well. He was holding a stack of letters I had written. Shouting furiously, he gave me a proper *mi-shebeirach* [literally "to request a blessing from God", here used very ironically], saying that I had no right doing any of the things I had reported in my letter. 'This is not a charity institution, it's a military organization!' he told me, and refused to return my letters. He confiscated not only the letters that I had written to relatives of the living Jews, but also the very important letter to Young Israel in which I had asked them to send me a guarantee from a well-known American bank so that the money that had been collected from American Jews for the Belgian Jewish Committee would be released".<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, Stein continued and his family in the US became engaged in helping spread the news and contact the right people: "I don't think I need tell you how thrilled some of these people were to get news of their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, etc., especially so since this was the first word they had had in several years."<sup>29</sup>

Richard Menkis also refers to Chaplain Samuel Cass in regards to what Cass called “the great hunt”, meaning “the overwhelming desire of liberated Jews to find relatives”: “Soldiers who met survivors were inundated with desperate requests to help find relatives.”<sup>30</sup> David Stein wrote on 13 November, in his account of the first legal meeting of the local liberated Jews in Antwerp: “The Canadian Chaplain Cass and I were bombarded with names and addresses of relatives from abroad.”<sup>31</sup> The gratitude of those receiving good news after all years of uncertainty and fear was



— Letter from Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, 22 January, 1945, thanking her for informing him that his parents were alive in Antwerp

KD\_Stein Coll., KD\_00945

enormous. “You can hardly imagine how happy I was to receive this good news”, wrote Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, David’s sister, on 22 January 1945, after having received news that his parents were alive.<sup>32</sup> Like so many others, Mandel had been without any news about his parents for years. At an occasion in Antwerp where a Polish Jewish doctor, a member of the Polish forces, had assured people that they would be reunited with deported family members, Cass wished to stick to “facts and news” instead of “raising hopes which ultimately for most of them will not come true”, which he considered “adding insult to injury”.<sup>33</sup>

Whereas in the first months after the liberation there was no or very little news, this slowly changed over the coming months, when the few repatriates from the East arrived. On 26 April 1945, Reb Rottenberg wrote to Stein: “I wrote him in my last letter about my two nieces who are reported to have been put into either a convent or with non-Jewish families. In case he didn’t receive my first letter I’ll repeat the details here. The older girl, Ruth (Ruthie) was born June 30, 1930, and the second Lucie (Leah), was born in 1933, I believe in September. The father’s name was David Klug, and the mother, my sister, was Eva. Their last address was Van Leentstraat 32, but it’s possible that more recently they lived in our house at Milisstraat 49. You can check that out at the neighbors. Is it possible that they are with Goyim [non-Jews] in Heide or Kalmthout? In any case, I ask you, *lemaan Hashem* [for G-d’s sake] to see to it that everything possible is done to find the children. I can’t beg you enough to do this. It would at least be a small-scale rescue!”<sup>34</sup> However, David Stein had received the first letter in good order and had already answered on 18 April: “Tell [Rabbi Shlomo Rottenberg] that the two children that he inquired about, Ruth and Lucie Klug, are written down as deported, and are not found on the other lists which I studied all day yesterday”.<sup>35</sup> David Klug, a diamond cleaver, was 37 years old when he was deported on transport XVII, on 31 October 1942. His wife, Chana Chava (Eva Anna Rottenberg), Rabbi Shlomo Rottenberg’s sister, was 35 years old when she was deported with their two daughters, Ruth (13 years old) and Lucie (10 years old), on transport 22B on 20 September 1943. They were taken from Mechelen to Auschwitz, where they were murdered.<sup>36</sup>

To retrieve this kind of information Stein went to Brussels, as he “got tired of waiting for the lists and addresses that they promised to send me, and I decided to go and wake up the sleepy community leaders. First I went to the General Committee [in Brussels] and asked for some addresses. There they allowed me to search through all the records by myself. They have a special filing cabinet with all the deported Jews. If someone returns home his card is immediately removed. If the card is still there, it’s not a good sign.”<sup>37</sup>

The first stories from survivors returning to Antwerp appeared by the end of April in Stein’s letters. On 30 April 1945, we read: “One of those present at the gathering was Shlomo Schick, who returned from a labor camp in Auschwitz, Poland,

this week. When the Russians were approaching the camp, the Germans took all healthy slave laborers with them. He and 22 others succeeded in jumping from the train. He told about the barbarity of the Nazis which we have all heard so much about, but which is all the more horrible when it is heard from someone who has suffered so much for so long a time and witnessed it himself. He patiently answered the thousands of questions everyone asked about family members. He looks quite normal, but his eyes are always damp. He came without anything and he still has nothing.”<sup>38</sup>

Stein further testified: “People coming from Poland tell such horrible stories that you shake with grief and can’t possibly carry on a normal conversation with them.”<sup>39</sup> He adds a story on the still-contested stories about soap being made of the victims’ remains, and news on murdered Antwerpians: “Among those who have just returned are three women. One of them brought a piece of soap, which the Nazis gave them to wash themselves. She swears that she knew the people from whom the soap was made. She says that she herself saw Einhorn’s wife being thrown into the crematorium, but nobody has the heart to tell him.”<sup>40</sup> In his letter of 17 May 1945, David writes about “a Mr. Fleischer who just arrived from Auschwitz”, whom he met at Einhorn’s house and who told him that he had worked at the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau, “where he witnessed the incineration of four and a half million people, most of them Jews. Those who were ill were thrown in alive. The others were partially asphyxiated by gas, but were still quivering.”<sup>41</sup> Both the numbers – historians today estimate that 1.1 million people perished in Auschwitz – and the procedures are incorrect, but it is important to be aware that this was information passed along by the returnees (see also the earlier letter by Heaps).<sup>42</sup>

In his letter of 21 May 1945, Stein reports: “Generally speaking, rather than improving, the situation in Antwerp is getting worse. Many people are now returning. However, they return ill, poor, and alone. They must be provided with the best and most appropriate medical care as well as all vital necessities. The funding for the others will therefore have to be decreased. The news that they bring from the various camps of the thousands who will never return is creating such despair in town that you can’t look anyone in the face. Everyone remembers their own loved ones, and can’t decide whether or not they should hold on to empty hopes that they will return. So [their] beds stand there, still empty. The warmth of just such a home would do so much to revive those who arrive without homes, yet they must sleep on the straw sacks at the Committee and eat in its community kitchen.”<sup>43</sup> He further reports that the problems in Belgium were greater because of “the constant influx of survivors from concentration camps. Belgium is supposed to be the least antisemitic of all liberated countries, so many make their way here even though they’re total strangers. They come with nothing more than striped rags or a German overcoat over a bare back. I can supply *some* men’s underwear. No one, it seems, takes care of the women.”<sup>44</sup>



KD, Give Them a Face portrait collection



KD, Give Them a Face portrait collection

– Ruth (top) and Lucie Klug

Jewish Allies and Survivors in  
Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945  
(continuation)

Herbert Weiner, an American Jewish officer, described in a letter to a friend his experiences at the relief center on the Lange Leemstraat in June 1945: “Yesterday, I sat on a little cot, one of the many set up for those who have just returned from the death camps, while a young woman wandered through with a hopeless look in her eyes, asking everyone if any children have yet come back. As you know, almost all the little Jewish children have been taken away and have been gassed. Little children, just like your son, Sachki, and your little girl, Sid, all were taken away and none of them are coming back. I know you have read all this, but you haven’t seen this mother wandering through and asking if any children have yet come back. And the worst part of it all is the way they answered her. As we would tell each other that it will rain tomorrow, so did they tell her that none had yet returned. Every day a new creature resembling a human being wanders into the shelter dressed in some rags he has torn off the body of a dead German dog, but no children come back. No one comforted the mother. There was no heart to feel with her because every single heart there was broken [...]. Last night I was sitting in a circle while a man told a woman that he had last seen her husband in a hospital in the concentration camp. He visited him one day and when he came the next, they told him he had been taken away; he was ill and could not work and became a ‘Muselmensch’ [Muselmann is more often used as a term], that is, he was killed. Remember that word ‘Muselmensch’. It is an integral part of our language now. All but a faint remnant of our people here became ‘Muselmenschen’. The woman heard what she had already suspected, went into a corner and cried quietly. Nobody went to her. Nobody looked, for she had three small children alive with her. Imagine that, three small children! Few were as fortunate as that”<sup>45</sup>

### SETTING UP AID SYSTEMS

Since their arrival, Jews within the Allied forces tried to provide ad-hoc support, not only to distribute information, but also to provide food, clothing, etc. As individual initiatives, they could not rely on steady funding or an organized network for information and supplies. Several Jewish welfare organizations, with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee<sup>46</sup> as the largest, next to the World Jewish Congress and other initiatives, such as the Orthodox Vaad Hatzalah and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), soon followed the Allied forces to organize humanitarian aid. However, the modest Allied individual initiatives also played an important role, especially – but not only – in the beginning.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the Allied Jews were in touch with the organizations and in Stein’s letters we often see that he is in touch with HIAS, Vaad Hatzalah or other initiatives.<sup>48</sup>

For David Stein, it was key to try to receive as much help as he could get, also by asking his family to send him packages with supplies. His letters are full of the “magic words” “SEND ME A PACKAGE”, which would allow his family to send him things. As an Orthodox Jewish GI, he could understand certain Orthodox needs that



others could not, and he tried to address them as much as possible. He answered the 1973 interview question “What kind of supplies did you bring?” with: “Well, for example, one liberty ship soldier sailor gave me a box of candles. Now, there were no candles whatsoever in the city of Antwerp at the time. They were plumber’s candles. Nevertheless, it was a godsend to the people to receive candles. Especially to the Orthodox to whom candles meant so much. And also there were blackouts [...] when I brought those candles I was like an angel.”<sup>49</sup>

Stein also often reports on how he tried to collect money from his fellow GIs – Jews and non-Jews – but often to no avail. It is also clearly evidenced in Daniel Isaacman’s letters that Allied Jews tried to help, also alarming the US homeland about lack of means for Jewish needs.<sup>50</sup> This did result in support being sent overseas. As such, Jewish military personnel acted as a pressure group, trying to secure funding and other things for specific needs they witnessed first-hand. By the Spring of 1945, the connection between the Allied Jews and the local Jewish aid committees seemed to have diminished somewhat. Stein wrote on 30 April 1945: “No chaplain comes to the Sunday meetings at the Committee anymore, but the Jewish soldiers still all come and wander around like sheep without a shepherd”.<sup>51</sup> However, both David Stein and Daniel Isaacman, and probably others too, continued providing news and support.

### JEWISH HOLIDAYS AND RELIGIOUS SERVICES

Since the liberation, the Allied Jewish personnel had helped provide the most urgent basic care and were a source of information and documentation; they were also present at and helped organize the first observances of Jewish holidays after liberation.<sup>52</sup> Menkis states that “celebrating Jewish holidays and overseeing the repair and rededication of synagogues became important moments of renewal.”<sup>53</sup> This was the same in Antwerp, where the first services were organized by the local Jewish community together with Allied Jews. The first services were held by Chaplain Jaffo from Manchester, who had arrived in Antwerp with the Allied forces. The general services were held in the intact Eisenman Synagogue. Services were also organized in the Beth Hamidrash of the Terliststraat, albeit only on the first floor, as the ground floor had been plundered.<sup>54</sup> For Yom Kippur 1944 (26-27 September), a service was organized in the synagogue of Oostenstraat 43.<sup>55</sup>

A Shabbat service was a common and important first type of religious experience after the war. It was part of the marking of being liberated.<sup>56</sup> It also contributed to Jews feeling connected to each other: local Jews and Allied Jews felt part of world Jewry, of something surpassing their own local group.<sup>57</sup> It all had something ritual, something surpassing religion or different religious or political convictions. Chaplain Samuel Cass of the Canadian Army was the first chairman during Mincha (afternoon prayer) on 13 November 1944: “Everyone crowded into the hall: women and

children; old and young, men with bearded faces and men with bare heads: soldiers from all nations. Altogether there were about 300 civilians and 100 soldiers, mostly from England and Canada.”<sup>58</sup> Cass also introduced a young chaplain from the Polish Army, Rabbi Heshel Klepfish, who spoke an eloquent Yiddish.<sup>59</sup> The gathering also saw a Poale Zion member unexpectedly rise and make an announcement; this was “protested bitterly” by a young man from another Zionist group, upon which “Chaplain Cass called for order and for the singing of ‘Hatikvah’. Everybody sang – even the Agudists.”<sup>60</sup>

While Stein in his first month reported on the heated debate among his fellow Orthodox Jews about whether or not to cooperate with the “not-so-religious Jewish Committee”, he equally reminded the local Jews of “the importance of unity”, something which was hoped and strived for by many after the Shoah.<sup>61</sup> The call for unity sounded all the stronger in witnessing the amount of destruction: “Yesterday [14 November 1944] I actually did go into a *shul* [synagogue]. Apparently, no one had yet been in this *shul* since the Nazi hoodlums had wreaked their devastation [the “Antwerp pogrom”, on 14 April 1941]. They had taken everything of any value whatsoever. Not a bench or lamp was left. The *Aron Kodesh* [Torah shrine] was burnt and the windows were smashed. Strewn about on the floor were torn remnants of prayer books [...], etc. The memorabilia I took were two pieces of a burnt *Sefer Torah* [Torah scroll], [and other religious items]. I’m sending all of the above home.”<sup>62</sup>

The local Jewish Committee also organized services in the reception center of the Lange Leemstraat, for example between 10 and 18 December 1944: “a Chanukah Service was organized to which Jewish Officers and men of the British and American Forces were invited. This was very successful and had a good effect on the morale of the unfortunate victims of Nazi oppression.”<sup>63</sup> Canadian forces were also present, as we know from the letters of David Stein, and the fact that Chaplain Cass had written in the Chanukah 1944 newsletter to the Jewish soldiers of the First Canadian Army to bring chocolates and sweets for parties with civilians in Antwerp, Ghent and Breda.<sup>64</sup> Interactions with children around Chanukah were captured by official photographers.<sup>65</sup>

Interestingly, the date of the liberation also mattered in the sense that for French and Belgian liberated Jews in the autumn and winter of 1944, the first high holidays were Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur and Chanukah, whereas the liberation of the concentration camps and annihilation centers took place only later, and the first Jewish holiday celebrated was Purim.<sup>66</sup> This led to totally different characteristics marking the first Jewish holidays after liberation, as these are very different holidays. Most likely, these first Purim celebrations after the liberation had the most “Hitler”-presence ever, even in the Orthodox children’s home (Tiefenbrunner) in Brussels in March 1945. Stein writes: “A professional photographer came to the

children's home and took pictures of the costumed children. I dressed up as a [civilian] man, and Yoina Tiefenbrunner became a soldier. 'Hitler' was there too, but his name is Itche Broner, about 19 years old, who teaches the children and can do just about anything. He directed their Purim carnival and was also the main actor in Sunday's Purim play."<sup>67</sup>

These religious services, especially on Jewish holidays, were also, as Menkis states, the most common moments for contacts between Jewish soldiers and survivors.<sup>68</sup> The high holidays and other religious services were attended by both local and Allied Jews. Being in the male world of the army, the possibility to socialize with the local Jewish population also meant meeting young Jewish women. And so, indeed, some encounters led to romance and quite a few couples were formed. This was the case for Felicia Ramet in Antwerp. She met Ben Otis, a Canadian Jewish soldier who served in the air force, during the high holidays, on Yom Kippur of 1944 in the Antwerp synagogue of the Oostenstraat. They fell in love, it was a *coup de foudre*, and they stayed in touch when he moved to other places with his army unit.<sup>69</sup> Together with her mother Sura, Felicia was hoping for the return of her father Judka and her brother Nathan. Since the liberation on 4 September, they had waited for months to receive news of their deported loved ones. As time went by and with the terrible reports from the few returned survivors since early April, hope was scarce. Not knowing whether Judka and Nathan would ever return and if so, when, Felicia and Ben Otis married on 15 May 1945<sup>70</sup>. Just one week later, on 23 May 1945, Natan returned to Antwerp, having survived multiple camps and death marches. He had to bring the terrible news that his father had perished in the camps. The couple moved to Canada on 5 June 1946, on Natan's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. Daniel (Danny) Isaacman similarly found the love of his life during his time in Antwerp. He describes in his letters home how he had fallen in love with Clara Heller, and tells his parents he is going to marry her.<sup>71</sup> This was hardly unusual; in Paris, at least ten Jewish marriages included an American spouse in 1945, which represented at least five percent of the Jewish weddings in the city that year.<sup>72</sup> Robin Judd's *Between Two Worlds. Jewish War Brides after the Holocaust* provides a record of these romances in times of liberation, grief and the start of a new life.<sup>73</sup>



Congregation Shaar Hashomayim Museum and Archives

– Chanukah party, 17 December 1944, Antwerp, Belgium. This photo, taken by Canadian military, shows the Chanukah, Canadian soldiers and local Jewish child survivors, among them Regina Slusznay and her oldest brother Marcel (Max Bernard), the two children on the left

Jewish Allies and Survivors in  
Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945  
(continuation)

### AN INSIGHT INTO ANTWERP'S JEWISH LIFE

The Allied Jewish accounts also provide descriptions of Jewish life in the city. In his 17 June 1945 letter, the previously mentioned Herbert Weiner wrote about the shelter to Jewish institutions in the United States: “But, Gentlemen of J.I.R. [Jewish Institute of Religion], you should have seen the richness of a Jewish Sabbath here. You should have seen these people, some of whom kept Kashrut throughout their captivity, praying. There is more Hebrew spoken here than in any of our seminaries. There is more pride in their Jewishness locked up in this shelter than in all of New York City”.<sup>74</sup>

However, the letters from Daniel Isaacman also give proof of vibrant Zionist life, both religious but certainly also left-wing non-religious (Gordonia, Hashomer Hatzair, Poale Zion, etc.). On 4 December 1944 he wrote:

That which I experienced last night can hardly be written down to express the feelings and emotions that accompanied them. The surge of emotions, the pride and the wonder of it all. Last night I sang Hatikva for the first time since I have been away from home, sang it with some 40 odd chaverim. I heard it sung, sang it myself, with

– Antwerp (after  
23 May 1945 and  
before 6 June 1946). From  
left to right: Ben Otis,  
Felicia Otis-Ramet, Nathan  
Ramet



KD, Natan Ramet, Coll.

more expression, more warmth than ever before in my life. The true meaning, and understanding of Tikva, of hope, was evident. I could see it in their faces, hear it in their voices, a marked trust and hope in Eretz. Here were 40 chaverim who knew what this hymn of ours contained and meant. Yes, last night I met the remnants of the Jewish population here, heard their stories of agony, of suffering, saw and came to understand their situation as of to-day, and most important, met the Jewish youth here, a youth devotedly Zionist.<sup>75</sup>

In the same letter he describes a social gathering for soldiers at the local Jewish community center. In fact, as written in the record description of his archival collection, it was during his time in Belgium “that Isaacman developed his strong ties to the cause of Zionism”.<sup>76</sup>

Most information we hear about, though, concerns Orthodox life, partly because of the very active writings of David Stein – by far the most active letter writer. Stein always kept kosher and tried to organize a minyan wherever he was, such as for Yom Kipur in Normandy in 1944: “I organized a minyan. We had 9 definite Jews and one half-Jew – he said his mother was Jewish, and we included him in the minyan.”<sup>77</sup> Stein’s reports point to topics considered of utmost importance and urgency for Orthodox Jews. One of these was the return of Jewish children to a Jewish environment. In April 1945, Stein went to Brussels to “to see if anyone is doing something to carry out the request for a list of names of children in *Goyishe* hands”, but found that nobody was.<sup>78</sup> However, in the same letter he also reported about the hardships of the Orthodox homes: “I went to Tiefenbrunner in the Children’s Home, and arrived just as they were eating lunch. I ate with the children, who all recognized me from Purim. Then their clothes were very funny, as it was Purim. Today, however, it was tragic. Boys wear girls’ clothing because they have no other clothes to wear. Not one of them is dressed properly. Anything that can be called ‘clothes’ is needed.”<sup>79</sup> The dire lack of means to receive the children within the Jewish community was indeed one of the key reasons why JDC and other organizations were reluctant to retrieve Jewish children from non-Jewish homes, an argument the Orthodox did not agree with.<sup>80</sup> Stein was very engaged in the “children’s question”, as we also read from letters in May 1945 concerning, among other things his attempts to have the Hudes brothers moved from a priest and into an Orthodox setting, and giving overviews of the number of Jewish children in non-Jewish environments, as well as the attempts and contacts with international aid organizations and individuals to organize Orthodox homes or foster families for them. The Jewish Brigade would be likewise involved in recovering Jewish war orphans from non-Jewish families and institutions. The Brigade also helped with paperwork for residency in Belgium, as well as training for and migration to Palestine.<sup>81</sup>

Another issue concerned the Orthodox education of the children, especially the boys. Orthodox Allied Jews engaged in organizing as much as they could for

teaching and learning: “Because of the situation in the city there is no cheider [traditional Jewish primary school] or public school for children. Two refugee soldiers of the British army, Pvt. Purley and Chaim Moishe Rosenthal, have undertaken to teach a class every day. Chaim Moishe is very very *frum*.”<sup>82</sup> On 1 March 1945, Stein wrote: “Of all the recommendations that [Mr. Tiefenbrunner] and Mr. Bamberger gave me, I decided that the most important for our purpose is to have teachers and principals who would be able to fill positions in all the [Jewish children’s] homes and bring at least a bit of *Yiddishkayt* to them. I’m sure the big organizations won’t allow the over-three-thousand children to remain in the Catholic institutions and will eventually open homes for them. They would then have to come to us for teachers – if we’re ready.”<sup>83</sup> On 29 April 1945, he further informed about discussions within Antwerp Orthodoxy and that the two pre-war Jewish day-schools would restart.<sup>84</sup> Indeed, after a short-lived “united Jewish school” in October 1944 which had to close, like all schools in Antwerp, because of the V-bombs, two Jewish day schools, supported by the Belgian government, reopened in May 1945.<sup>85</sup> *Jesode Hatorah*, the most Orthodox one, which Stein supported, had, according to Stein, 21 teachers, but only 20 students at its start on 1 May. The first pupils included Mrs. Ringer’s daughters, whom she sent there “with a heavy heart”, as she knew her daughters were fine in non-Jewish schools and that the situation would be difficult in the Jewish school (both psychologically and materially), but Orthodoxy took priority.<sup>86</sup> They had no idea how exceptional it was to have two Jewish day schools (re-)open so shortly after the liberation in the chaos and devastation of Jewish life throughout Europe at that time.

Stein fully strived for an Orthodox education for Jewish children. When asked in the 1973 interview about the spirit of the boys and girls from the concentration camps, he responded: “They were ready to start life over again, and they were very cooperative. Except that there weren’t enough of the Orthodox persuasion.”<sup>87</sup> He also alerted the homefront about Jewish children’s homes in Brussels being anti-religious, seeking to ensure that Orthodox homes were organized with the money collected for this purpose in the US, for example.<sup>88</sup> As Stein wrote home about a Bar Mitzvah on Shabbat of 26 May 1945, in a letter that shows not only the reviving Orthodox life, but also the various war experiences and mix of people among the about 300 attendees: “Many of them have just recently returned from Switzerland, France, Poland and Germany. You can imagine that it wasn’t very quiet. The *Bar Mitzva* boy read [his portion] very nicely, and *Chazan* [cantor] Rabinovitch called him up. The *Chazan* just returned from Poland, where he was in various concentration camps together with the father of Rabbi Meyer Karlin of Yeshiva Yitzchak Elchanan. Rabbi Karlin’s father is now in France. The *Chazan* is alone and sleeps at the Committee building.”<sup>89</sup>

Another key element for Orthodoxy concerned kosher food. The key person Stein refers to on this topic was Yaakov Landau, a local survivor whom he had met

within his first week upon arrival in Antwerp on 9 November. He wrote about their acquaintance: “I introduced myself to a sad regal Jew named Yaakov Landau, with a little girl [Anna]. His life was saved by the fact that he was ill and was hospitalized for two years. With forlorn tears he pointed to his little daughter and to his old coat – all that the murderers had left him. His parents, [... three sons and one daughter] were taken away. He showed me their pictures, which pierced my heart. I tried my best to console him, and promised to write to his brother in Bridgeport, Connecticut.”<sup>90</sup> Landau protested “about the Chilul Hashem [blasphemy] by the Jewish Committee, which distributes non-kosher food to the poor Jews while kosher food is not yet available, and he asked why they’ve stopped maintaining the mikveh.”<sup>91</sup> Ten days later, on 25 November, Stein had gone to speak with the president of the Jewish Committee about “providing kosher meals instead of the *treif* [non-kosher] they serve for the poor [...] and other important issues that so urgently concern the newly reborn Jewish community.”<sup>92</sup> Stein reported that Landau went to Brussels on 22 December 1944 to buy kosher meat supplies<sup>93</sup> and on Tuesday 30 January 1945 he reported on the first kosher Shabbos meal served in the Committee building the Shabbat before that Tuesday.<sup>94</sup> Knowing that having kosher food supplies was crucial for Orthodox Jews, the successful provision of such was crucial for Antwerp’s Orthodox life.

During Purim 1945, Stein had asked Mr. Tiefenbrunner, the director of an Orthodox orphanage, to advise him as to what to request of the Jewish organizations: “He rattled off a list of various important matters that ought to be brought up, among them, transferring to a Jewish grave the bodies of the many Jews who lie buried with Gentiles.”<sup>95</sup> This is something Stein did not engage in, to my knowledge, but which was clearly important to the local Jewish population and a matter of attention and priority for the local “United Jewish communities”, already before the end of 1944.<sup>96</sup>

Daniel Isaacman, who was also a religious Jew, but not as Orthodox as Stein, reported in his letters on “an American soldier who is fanatically religious” and who “has been quite influential with some of the kids”, further evidence of the effects of the interactions between Allied and local Jews.<sup>97</sup> The fact that when part of their company returned to the US, Isaacman asked Stein to telephone his parents to give them his regards, also gives evidence of the bonds within the army units.<sup>98</sup>

### A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The contacts with local Antwerp Orthodox Jewish religious life were like a real “home-coming” for the religious Jewish soldiers. For the Orthodox Jews in the military, finding an Orthodox Jewish community was something they had been longing for, something that created a home-like feeling they had been deprived of for such a long time. As David Stein noted in 1973, he was “always looking for a synagogue, and being invited to different homes [...] and becoming very well acquainted with quite

a number of people.”<sup>99</sup> His letters and photos bear witness to the feeling of “being among one’s own”, of belonging. He often described Mincha (the afternoon prayer): “Jews who come to a regular weekday Mincha belong to a unique class that to me is more beloved and homelike than any other. The Jews with beards and gartels I met in the small shul are identical to our Shinaver Shtiebel members.”<sup>100</sup> He also noted that he made his contacts by going to local synagogues.<sup>101</sup>

It is highly likely that Chaplain Samuel Cass felt more connection to the Orthodox and Eastern European Jewish population of Antwerp than to the very integrated Dutch Jews he later encountered in liberated Europe, or as Richard Menkis puts it: “There were times when he was at a loss to comprehend the behavior of Dutch Jewry. This is not altogether surprising, given the differences between Cass, who, like most Canadian Jews, was the Yiddish-speaking child of eastern European Jews, and more acculturated Dutch Jews.”<sup>102</sup> The remnants of Jewish life in Europe afforded a feeling of community and belonging to the mobilized Jewish soldiers. Laura Hobson Faure also mentions this in her study on American Jewish military personnel and their contacts with the Jewish survivors in France.<sup>103</sup>

Especially around the holidays, when family and home are most missed, Allied Jewish soldiers found a “home” in Antwerp’s Jewish community which they had not found in the army or anywhere else during their military service. Daniel Isaacman wrote home in March 1945 about how he would celebrate his first Passover away from home with a Jewish family.<sup>104</sup> David Stein mentions that the gatherings after the Shabbat service and the celebration of Chanukah “were too great to describe, and I must confess that it was hard for me to remember that I wasn’t at home [...]. Yesterday there was a *Chanuka* party at the Jewish Committee, given by the Jewish people for the Jewish Allied soldiers. It was exactly like a *Chanuka* concert at home in every detail: there was a *chazan*, a choir (the youth organization), a play by Sholem Aleichem – ‘Teveye the Milkman’, a violin player, a pianist, a speaker, noise, an overcrowded hall, *Hatikva*, and a *Hora* dance. In addition, there was cake and liquor to eat and drink – almost enough for everyone.”<sup>105</sup>

Stein explicitly mentions more than once how he would sneak out on Friday evening to have a proper Shabbat service and dinner and how these local Jewish Shabbat meals were so much nicer for him than “Shulman’s services [at the army base] with the crosses in the chaplain’s office. So I again took a chance and slipped out to town and the shul.”<sup>106</sup> But also, less Orthodox Jews wrote about their Friday evening dinners at family houses, and the *gefillte fish* they were eating there: “An evening in a Jewish home – what more can one ask for on a Friday night”, wrote Daniel Isaacman about his Shabbat meal with the Horowitz family in Antwerp on 15 December 1944.<sup>107</sup> Stein’s favorite address was with Mrs. Ringer and her family, where he often was not the only Allied soldier as the house guest. On 4 March 1945 he wrote in his letters: “Who would believe that one could lead such a home-like



life and still be in the army? I conduct myself in *shul* exactly as I did my whole life in the *Shinaver Chevra* [...]. I'm just as familiar and at home with the local Yidn [Jews] as I am with the *Shinaver Yidn*. They don't regard me as a soldier, but as one of the members; they even offered to make me the *Gabbai* [organizer of religious services]. For meals these days I go quite regularly to the Ringer home, where the *yiddishkayt* and warm hospitality are exactly as at home. The noise, tumult, work, and the number of people constantly coming and going are also almost the same as home. I sing *zmiros* [religious songs] just as loud and 'flat' as I always did and they laugh at me like at home, only harder. But here the others are all musical, and they all sing the same song at the same time. It's actually nice! *Shabbos*, after lunch, here too I go to 'my boys' in 'the building' and learn with them."<sup>108</sup> By referring to the group of young people here in Antwerp as "my boys", as he always called his group in Young Israel back home, and the Committee building as "the building", Shifra Stahl notes that he was continuing his analogy of Antwerp as his current, familiar "home".

There were also connections between different armies' soldiers via their being Orthodox in Antwerp's Jewish community: "After the meal I again went to Madame Ringer's home where a soldier in British uniform was waiting to sing *zmiros* with me. His name is Gershon Katz, a refugee from Tzeilem, Austria, and is related to the Tzelimer Rov. He's religious and sings very well."<sup>109</sup> But it was not all home-like, and there are also notes – although these are much fewer than the positive ones – that show Stein's homesickness and a longing for the Orthodox community from home: "I have much more success with the youth group since they split from the non-religious. I play the role of leader here just as I do with the Young Israel youth. [...] but *davening* with the old *Chassidische minyan* has become impossible. It's more like a marketplace than a *Beis Midrash* [room used for prayer services and for religious learning]."<sup>110</sup> He wished he could make the singing sound "exactly like Young Israel. If I had records, we would be able to teach them *nusach*. Chaim Moishe *davened* with a German *nusach* [mode], and it's not my style. Send me over Naftali [Nat<sup>111</sup>] Karper! You need him there?"<sup>112</sup>

On 11 June 1945, Stein spent his last Shabbat meal in Antwerp: "The Friday evening meal at Ringers was by far the most stirring occasion I experienced since my first coming there. Not because it was my last supper, but because of the four other guests present. The three women and 13-year-old girl were observing their first

– Photo of Eli Ringer, the youngest of the Ringer children, with David Stein



KD, Eli Ringer Collection

Jewish Allies and Survivors in  
Liberated Antwerp, 1944-1945  
(continuation)

*Shabbos* since enslavement in concentration camps years ago. They didn't cry. I doubt if any of them still have any tears left. But it was very evident that every *Shabbat-like* object, action, and mouthful of food, prayer or song, cut deep into their emotional depths. They were thrilled by everything that took place, especially by the sight and sound of the tiny tots taking so active and nonchalant a part in the rituals, and most of all, they were amazed that an American too was part of this international party. Ethel Ringer Hirsch is from Poland; Mrs. Schwartz and her 20-year-old daughter from Hungary; and the 13-year-old is from Holland, but the language of *Shabbos* was understood by all of us. The food was typically Jewish, the songs were familiar and the *bentshing* was said by heart from the heart of all."<sup>113</sup>

The relationship between the Ringer and Stein families remained; it was a mutually interesting and beneficial one which certainly puts into perspective how important the Jewishness and community connection had been for those in the Allied forces, certainly as much so as for the survivors they encountered.<sup>114</sup> The archives of the Ringer family contain photographs with David Stein during his time in Antwerp as well as correspondence, birth announcements and Jewish New Year's wishes from him for years after.<sup>115</sup> The marriages of local survivors with Allied Jews created connections for generations.

## CONCLUSIONS

While the Allies' liberations of concentration camps and annihilation centers were covered by media worldwide, including reports from Allied Jewish soldiers, chaplains and other witnesses from among the Allied troops, the accounts of Jews in the Allied forces about the liberation of other places in Europe and their reports about the Jewish communities (or their remnants) they found upon their arrival are far less known. However, their writings and personal letters give very personal and human witness reports on the transition period after the liberation – in the case of this article, on Antwerp. These witness accounts are of crucial value, both for testimonies about the contemporary situations as well as about how the war period was reported on (not yet shaped by the information from the East which would follow only months later). The Allied Jewish accounts form a kind



KD, El Ringer Collection

– Jewish New Year's  
greetings from the Stein  
family to the Ringer family,  
1953

of outsider as well as insider view on Jewish life in the immediate post-liberation period. Indeed, having been disconnected from the hardships, persecutions, plunder and genocidal regime to which fellow Jews fell victim to in Europe, their reactions were ones of shock and horror, especially when their reports preceded the liberation of the camps in the East. At the same time, Jewish members of the Allied forces were often the first to understand the needs of Jewish survivors concerning their religious and cultural traditions and were able to establish connections between the isolated survivors and the international Jewish community. Their accounts provide information not only on the dire situation of the surviving Jews, their hardships and urgent needs, but also on survivors' resilience and actions to reorganize Jewish life (see the shelter, orphanages, Jewish schools, provision of kosher food or the ritual reburial of Jews buried without them), the characteristics of Jewish life, the mixture of local and non-local religious and community leaders as well as on the longing for home and belonging of all. The Allied Jews were a source of information, provided humanitarian aid, helped organize religious services and found a home-like feeling within the small surviving Jewish community. The relationships between the local Jews and those entering the city with the liberating armies was a very special one, which recently has received more attention in Jewish Studies.<sup>116</sup> The impact of these encounters for all involved (not just unilaterally from the liberators to the victims, but also evidencing agency and resilience of the local Jewish survivors) is an interesting domain for further research and for integration into the larger historiography of the Second World War and the liberation. ■



© All rights reserved

**Veerle Vanden Daelen** is Curator and Coordinator Collections & Research at Kazerne Dossin. She holds a PhD from the University of Antwerp, where her research focused on the return of Jews to Antwerp and the reconstruction of daily life after World War II (period 1944-1960). She has held fellowships at the University of Michigan and at the University of Pennsylvania. She coordinates the work package 'Data Identification and Integration' and is a member of the Project

Management Board of the European Holocaust Research Infrastructure (EHRI). Veerle is also affiliated to the University of Antwerp, where she has taught Migration History, Jewish History and other subjects. Since 2011, she has organized the annual 'Contact Day Jewish Studies on the Low Countries' at the university's Institute of Jewish Studies. She is part of the Belgian delegation within the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA).

- (1) Numbers on the deadly casualties among the liberating armies in Antwerp are not yet known (see research project city of Antwerp, <https://namenproject.antwerpenherdenkt.be/EN/faq.php>, consulted 8/2/2024).
- (2) Kazerne Dossin (further abbreviated as KD), "Photo series Liberation of Antwerp", KD\_00345.
- (3) Hobson Faure, Laura, *Un "Plan Marshall juif". La présence américaine en France après la Shoah, 1944-1954*, Paris: Armand Colin, 2013, 74.
- (4) Menkis, Richard, "But You Can't See the Fear That People Lived Through': Canadian Jewish Chaplains and Canadian Encounters with Dutch Survivors, 1944-1945", *American Jewish Archives Journal*, 60(1-2), 2008, 24-50 (here p. 26); Menkis, Richard, "'There were cries of joy, some of sorrow': Canadian Jewish Soldiers and Early Encounters with Survivors", *Canadian Jewish Studies*, 27, 2019, 125-138.
- (5) S.n., "Les Juifs dans les armées alliées", *Ofipresse*, Nr. 4, 25 May 1945, 4. See for example Bloch Baron, Jean, *Epreuves et combats, 1940-1945. Histoires d'hommes et de femmes issus de la collectivité juive de Belgique*. Bruxelles: Didier Devillez Editeur/Institut d'Etudes du Judaïsme, 2002.
- (6) Gelber, Yoav, "The Jewish Brigade in Belgium", in Dan Michman (ed.), *Belgium and the Holocaust: Jews, Belgians, Germans*, Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1998, 478-479.
- (7) KD, Collection Myriam Nebenzahl, KD\_00304. She was born on 20 June 1931, so had just turned 13 in September 1944.
- (8) Sterngold, Jozef, *Geleefd en beleefd*. KD, Library collection 7320, 55, 61 and 72; *Ibid.*, KD, Library collection 7319, 53-54 and 63.
- (9) KD, School archives Tachkemoni, Antwerp, Guldenboek (KD-01016).
- (10) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", p. 30-31.
- (11) Dash Moore, Deborah, *GI Jews. How World War II Changed a Generation*, Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004, 202; Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
- (12) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, p. 212.
- (13) Stein Stahl, Shifra, *Dear Everybahda. The World War II Letters of Private David "Doov" Stein. Volume 3: Antwerp*. Unpublished manuscript; KD, U.S. Private David ("Doov") Stein World War II Letters from Antwerp Collection (KD\_00943, further abbreviated as KD, Stein Coll.), sub-collection Museum of Jewish Heritage, KD\_00943\_0002 (further abbreviated as MJH), 5238.82ab), letter 4/12/1944 (all letters, except when differently mentioned are from David Stein to his family). I would like to thank Shifra Stahl wholeheartedly for putting her manuscript at our disposal. All translations from Yiddish letters into English are to the credit of Shifra Stahl.
- (14) University of Pennsylvania, The University Archives and Records Center, Daniel Isaacman Papers 1940-1958 (bulk 1940-1947), UPT 50 I73, (further abbreviated as UPenn, Isaacman Papers), box 1, file 17, letter from Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 6/12/1944.
- (15) Bozzini, Arnaud, "Yiddish et "rue juive" communiste à Bruxelles au lendemain de la guerre (1944-1955)", *Les Cahiers de la Mémoire Contemporaine*, 8, 2008, 193-217.
- (16) "I deliberately asked in Yiddish so that if I was mistaken he would not respond." (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, Interview David (Doov) Stein by Sidney Storch, New York City, December 1973).
- (17) See, for example, the letters from David Stein (KD and MJH), of which 4 letters from November 1944 were also published in *The Jewish Daily Forward* on 2/12/1944 (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).
- (18) Quoted by Richard Menkis from the Ontario Jewish Archives, Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre (Toronto – OJA), Heaps family fonds, David Heaps to A.A. Heaps, 26 October 1944, in Menkis, "There were cries of joy", 129.
- (19) Idem, OJA, Heaps family fonds, David Heaps to A.A. Heaps, 26/10/1944.
- (20) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5266.82 [*Forward-6*], Letter 15/11/1944.
- (21) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943; UPenn, Isaacman Papers.
- (22) American Jewish Archives, World Jewish Congress-files (coll. 361) (further abbreviated as AJA, WJC-files), H59/18, Belgian Jewish Committee (London) to Belgian Jewish Representative Committee (New York), 20/12/1944.
- (23) See for example about Sam Perl (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5297.82, letter 31/12/1944) and the effect of his publication as a source of hope (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 3/1/1945).
- (24) Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*.
- (25) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973.
- (26) *Ibid.*
- (27) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.
- (28) Letter from Stein to his family, 16/11/1944. See also his letter from 22/11/1944: "Because of my recent mistake in writing to the relatives of the survivors of Nazi annihilation who are in need of sending a message through me, my mail is now especially scrutinized so that I shan't make the same mistake again. So, despite the fact that my extracurricular activity is very interesting and important, I choose not to mention anything about it." (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, resp. 5270.82 and 5277.82). Censorship was definitely there during Stein's first months in Antwerp. Afterwards, followed a period without censorship and around the end of May it was again on, so he switched back to sending important info in Yiddish (see, KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 28/5/1945).
- (29) Letter from Lee Stein to Irving Bunin, letter 16/1/1945 (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).
- (30) Menkis, "There were cries of joy", 131.
- (31) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5264.82 [*Forward-4*], Letter 13/11/1944. See also in his 1973 interview: "All the people flocked around me and their first request was can I write them letters to their relatives in America." (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973).
- (32) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, Letter of Walter Mandel to Lee Stein, 22/1/1945).
- (33) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", 31, based on letters from Samuel Cass to his wife Annabel, 12/11/1944, Cass fonds, 3/5, Library and Archives Canada (LAC).
- (34) Letter from Rabbi S. Rotenberg to D. Stein, 26/4/1945. On 15 May 1945 Stein repeated in a letter to inform Reb Rottenberg that the entire Klug family had been deported (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943).
- (35) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, Letter 18/4/1945.
- (36) KD, Transportlisten, KD\_00013.

- (37) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 15/5/1945.
- (38) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 30/4/1945.
- (39) The following has been pieced together by Shifra Stahl from the article appearing in the *Jewish Daily Forward* on 7/9/1945, which was made up of excerpted letters from Doov and Mendy Stein. Stahl puts them in May 1945 in her overview. This seems very plausible time-wise (Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*).
- (40) *Ibid.*
- (41) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 17/5/1945.
- (42) <https://www.auschwitz.org/en/history/auschwitz-and-shoah/the-number-of-victims/>, consulted on 1/3/2024.
- (43) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 21/5/1945.
- (44) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 5/6/1945.
- (45) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), D78/15, Belgium, children, Jan-Sept 1945, 'A letter from Warrant Officer Herbert Weiner to Mr. Jacobs at the Jewish Institute of Religion, 17 June 1945'.
- (46) Hobson Faure, Laura and Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Imported from the United States? The centralization of private Jewish welfare after the Holocaust: the cases of Belgium and France", in: Avinoam Patt e.a. (eds.), *The JDC at 100: a century of humanitarianism*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2019, p. 279-313.
- (47) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 79 ("Les modestes efforts initiaux de nombreux aumôniers et soldats furent rapidement remplacés par des tentatives mieux organisées pour secourir un plus grand nombre de Juifs"). Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*, April 1945 letters.
- (48) Many January 1945 letters, for example, include reference to HIAS concerning people's searches (KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943).
- (49) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, Interview Dec. 1973.
- (50) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.
- (51) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 30/4/1945.
- (52) See also Dash Moore, *op. cit.* and Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*
- (53) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", p. 37.
- (54) Sterngold, *Geleefd en Beleefd*, KD7319, 46 (KD7320, 52).
- (55) 'Israëlietische godsdienst', *Volksgazet*, 26/9/1944, 2.
- (56) "Cass, a Toronto-born rabbi who worked in Vancouver before joining the Canadian army in 1942, conducted Shabbat services for 500 newly liberated prisoners at Westerbork on April 20, 1945, in Yiddish and English. 'For them, my presence and my address was the final evidence of their liberation,' he wrote in a letter to his wife (Lauren Kramer, "Vancouver exhibit captures Canada's response to Shoah", *The Canadian Jewish News*, 3 November 2016, <https://thecjn.ca/news/bc-exhibit-canadas-response-shoah/>).
- (57) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, 210.
- (58) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5263.82 [Forward-3], letter 13 November 1944.
- (59) Klepfish had celebrated Yom Kippur on 26 September, together with about 2.000 Jewish Allied Jews in Ghent, which had been liberated by Polish troops. There is a photo of this ceremony in the collection of the Jewish Museum of Belgium with the honorary table, including Mayor Anseele and Rabbi Klepfish (Vanden Daelen, Veerle, "Het leven moet doorgaan. De joden in Antwerpen na de bevrijding (1944-1945)," *Bijdragen tot de Eigentijdse Geschiedenis/Cahiers d'Histoire du Temps Présent (Brussel/Bruxelles)*, 13-14, 2004, 165. ([https://www.journalbelgianhistory.be/nl/system/files/article\\_pdf/chtp13\\_14\\_008\\_Dossier2\\_VandenDaelen.pdf](https://www.journalbelgianhistory.be/nl/system/files/article_pdf/chtp13_14_008_Dossier2_VandenDaelen.pdf)).
- (60) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5263.82 [Forward-3], letter 13 November 1944.
- (61) *Ibidem.*
- (62) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5266 [Forward-6], letter 15/11/1944. Of the items mentioned, Stein's family located the remnants of the burnt Torah and the covering for the *tefillin*. Ahda gave the music sheet to Seymour Silbermintz, a choir leader in New York. The other items have not been located. Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*) Scans of some of the items are part of the collection at KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943.
- (63) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), H59/18, *op. cit.*
- (64) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", 32.
- (65) Menkis, "There were cries of joy, some of sorrow", 132.
- (66) Dash Moore, *op. cit.*, 209-210; Stone, Dan, *The Liberation of the Camps. The end of the Holocaust and its aftermath*, New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2015, photo 11 and 12 (between p. 136 and p. 137) and p. 165-167 ("Religious celebrations were also opportunities to confront the recent past. Purim, especially, a raucous festival commemorating the deliverance of the Jews of the Persian empire from Haman's plan to destroy them, offered a chance to grapple with the Nazis in the context of long-term Jewish history", p. 165).
- (67) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 1/3/1945. We also see survivors in a Swiss sanatorium in 1946 dressed up like Hitler - for them the first Purim since their liberation (KD, Fonds Berneman-Flam family (KD\_00422), Purim photos taken during Pinie Berneman's stay in a Suisse sanatorium in 1946, KD\_00422\_000034.tif).
- (68) Menkis, "There were cries of joy, some of sorrow", 129.
- (69) Vandecandelaere, Ronny, *Natan Ramet: Mens, kampnummer, getuige*. Berchem: EPO, 2015, 177.
- (70) Vandecandelaere, *op. cit.*, 177 and 179.
- (71) UPenn, Isaacman Papers.
- (72) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 89.
- (73) Judd, Robin, *Between Two Worlds. Jewish War Brides after the Holocaust*, Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2023.
- (74) AJA, WJC-files (coll. 361), D78/15, *op. cit.*
- (75) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 1, folder 17, letter Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 4/12/1944.
- (76) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, collection description.
- (77) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973.
- (78) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 18/4/1945.
- (79) *Ibidem.*
- (80) Vanden Daelen, Veerle, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen. De*

*heropbouw van de joodse gemeenschap in Antwerpen na de Tweede Wereldoorlog (1944-1960)*, Amsterdam: Aksant, 2008, here pp. 271-287.

(81) Gelber, *op. cit.*, p. 480-482.

(82) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 11/2/1945.

(83) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 1/3/1945.

(84) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 29/4/1945.

(85) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 323-325.

(86) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 2/5/1945.

(87) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(88) Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*, February letters; KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943.

(89) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 28/5/1945.

(90) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5264.82 [*Forward-4*], letter 13 November 1944. Anna's story has been recorded in Anna Grünfeld-Landau en Nuphar Nevo. *De stem van Anna. Het verhaal van een Antwerps meisje tijdens de Tweede Wereldoorlog*. Brussel: Stichting Auschwitz, 2022.

(91) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5267.82 [*Forward-7*], letter 15/11/1944.

(92) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5280.82, letter 26/11/1944.

(93) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5291.82, letter 23/12/1944 (after Shabbat).

(94) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 30/1/1945.

(95) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 1/3/1945.

(96) Vanden Daelen, *Laten we hun lied verder zingen*, 189, 433. AJA, WJC-files, H59/18, *op. cit.*

(97) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 4, letter of Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 11/4/1945.

(98) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 6, letter from Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 9/6/1945.

(99) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(100) Shtal, *Dear Everybahda*; KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5267.82 [*Forward-7*], letter 15/11/1944.

(101) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973. UPenn, Isaacman Papers, Box 16, Letter D. Isaacman to his parents 27/11/1944: "Some of the boys went to the remaining synagogue - claiming that there were a number of civilians there."

(102) Menkis, "But You Can't See the Fear", 30.

(103) Hobson Faure, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

(104) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 2, folder 3.

(105) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, MJH, 5243.82.ab, letter 11/12/1944.

(106) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 29/1/1945.

(107) UPenn, Isaacman Papers, box 1, folder 17, letter Daniel Isaacman to his parents, 14/12/1944, quote from box 1, folder 18, letter Daniel

Isaacman to his parents, 16/12/1944.

(108) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 4/3/1945.

(109) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 7/1/1945.

(110) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 22/4/1945.

(111) Nat (Nahftooli) Karper was one of the local Young Israel's most accomplished *Baalei T'feela* (leaders of the prayer service), Stahl, *Dear Everybahda*.

(112) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 29/4/1945.

(113) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, letter 11/6/1945.

(114) KD, Stein Coll., KD\_00943, interview Dec. 1973.

(115) KD, Eli Ringer Collection (KD\_00666).

(116) See also the international research workshop "The US Military and the Holocaust" at USHMM 15-26 July 2024 (<https://www.ushmm.org/research/opportunities-for-academics/conferences-and-workshops/research-workshop-program/military-workshop>, retrieved 8/3/2024).