



FOR ME, ONCE A JEW, ALWAYS A JEW

In February of 1946 I was still in Manila. Passover would be coming up in April. I knew there were Jews in the area, and Jewish soldiers in and around Manila. I also thought there had to be a Jewish chaplain somewhere in the South Pacific. So I decided to arrange a Seder.

It may be hard for a civilian to understand the influence a lowly non-com or a low ranking officer such as myself can have in the army, but any seasoned soldier knows it's true. My job



scheduling entertainment for the entire South Pacific, carried with it power ordinarily available only to high ranking officers. I could requisition anything from special food to an airplane, so it was easy for me to secure everything I needed for the upcoming Seder.

I figured at least seven hundred civilians, soldiers, sailors, and entertainers would attend, so through the navy, I ordered more than enough wine, matzo and matzo meal to be shipped from San Francisco. At the same time, I ordered a thousand Hagaddahs printed both in Hebrew and English.

One day I went to see my friend, Joe Moses at MacArthur's headquarters. "I'm gonna have a Seder, Joe, and I need your help."

"You're kiddin' me. How can you have a Seder here? Where will you have it? Who will come?"

"Don't worry. I'll take care of everything. I just need you to find me a Jewish chaplain. There's gotta be one somewhere in the South Pacific. When you find him, get him to come here for April 17th, the first night of Passover. That's all I need you to do."

"All? Are you kiddin'? I wouldn't know where to start!"

"You can do it. I know you can, and plan on being there for the Seder yourself, okay?"

"There. Where?"

"I'll let ya know."

With a Jewish sergeant driving, I rode a jeep around Manila looking for a place that would accommodate at least seven hundred people sitting at tables. We found a sort of plaza in the walled city inside Manila. It was plenty big for my purposes.

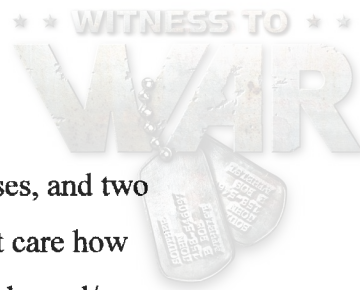
With a sigh of relief I announced, "Sergeant, this is where we'll have our Seder."

"Jeez, Lieutenant. How ya ever gonna get permission to take over a place this big?"

"Don't worry," I replied.

As an officer in AFWESPAC (Armed Forces Western Pacific), I simply wrote out an order commandeering that location in the walled city for my upcoming Seder, turned it in at headquarters, and General Mallon signed it without question..

I figured I'd need ten tables for every hundred people, and two saw horses to support the plywood that would serve as one table top. We would use bed sheets as tablecloths, so I



requisitioned a hundred eight-by-four-foot sheets of plywood, two hundred saw horses, and two hundred sheets. I put two sergeants in charge of getting enough seating, and I didn't care how they went about doing it. They ended up using long planks supported by cinder blocks and/or barrels, which served perfectly as benches.

Through the head chef, I made arrangements for the traditional menu: gefilte fish with ground horse radish, chicken soup with Matzo balls, roasted chicken, green beans, and potato kugel. I sent requisitions to the army and navy for chickens to serve seven hundred to a thousand people. The chef got recipes for the necessary foods from a synagogue in Los Angeles. For dessert, there would be the traditional sponge cake and compote made of dried apricots and prunes. Virtually all the ingredients had to be shipped to us. Somehow it all arrived in good shape and in good time.

It would have been impossible to have a Seder plate for each table, where ordinarily each participant receives a portion of each item on the plate, so I wanted one special Seder plate to be used by the rabbi during the ceremony as a symbol. In another chapter, I write about two hundred Jews that I almost killed in the Philippines. Now I contacted some of them who knew Jewish natives of Manila. I furnished everything they would need, and these people worked together to prepare a Seder plate with all the required items that turned out to be the best, the biggest, and most beautiful Seder plate I've ever seen.

I needed to inform as many Jewish civilians and soldiers as possible that there would be a Seder and they were welcome to attend free of charge. Over the signature of General Mallon, I sent notices from MacArthur's headquarters to every company commander in the area to release men who wanted to attend the Seder. Along with the army, my Jewish friends helped get the word out. Before long everyone was talking about this upcoming event.

Joe Moses did find a chaplain, Rabbi Silver, and made arrangements for the rabbi to arrive in plenty of time to officiate at the Seder.

Since the Seder could not begin until sundown I requisitioned plenty of lights to illuminate the entire plaza and had them set up so that every participant could see to read his/her Hagaddah. A good sound system, a riser for the rabbi to stand on, and a podium were the last items on the list, and easy to get.



By April 16th we were prepared for the Seder. The next day over a thousand soldiers, sailors and civilians (plus a number of non-Jews looking for a good meal) arrived before sundown for the Seder. Rabbi Silver conducted without a hitch, and I was one very happy Jew boy.