

## **THE GREEK LION FROM JUDEA COLONEL MORDECHAI FRIZIS**

*In Memory of Sir Patrick Leigh Fermor. A Great Traveler, Writer, World War II Resistance Fighter and Philhellene. Antio Filedem: "The World and Greece is an orphan without you."*

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Reading an article from Haaretz 1 about the Jewish minority of Finland and their role of defending their frozen land against the Communist hordes of the Soviet Union, I took the initiative to put in writing a similar piece but for a different country and with a different enemy in mind, and lastly with a less happy ending. It is a story of a Greek lion equal to Achilles and Spartan king Leonidas but with Hebrew Romaniote roots that could be traced from the annals of Jewish Greek History. Someone might ask how this is possible. Well let me begin the story of this Greek hero that could equally belong to the pantheon of Greek champion's of Hellenism.

A hero so much loved by his soldiers that he never abandoned them in times of distress and they in return never forgot his parental feelings toward them. The person who I am referring to is no other than Colonel Mordechai Frizis a not so common Greek name but yet a Greek Hero.

He was born in Chalkis, (Halkida) a city on the Greek Island of Evia on January 1, 1893.

He was one among 13 children (12 boys and one girl) that his Romaniote 2 parents Jacob and

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<sup>1</sup> Un-Finnish business, See, at, <http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/magazine/un-finnish-business-1.317886>. It should also be noted that thousands of German Jewish citizens served under the German Army during World War One and died for King and country. For a better perspective on this matter see, at, <http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?id=194372>

<sup>2</sup> The reader should be informed that there are distinctions between the Romaniote Jews that resided in Greece. Specifically in regard with the other Romaniote Jews of Hellas residing mainly in Yanina or Ioanina in Epirus Greece. Yanina Romaniotes claim that they could trace through oral legends their descendants to the Israelites that were taken to Rome as slaves after the destruction of the second Temple in 70 AD by the Roman Emperor Titus. Nevertheless the Romaniotes mainly resided in Greece

Iopi had. His family was directly descended from the Romaniote Jews of Greece that predate all other Jewish settlements in the Balkans and we might argue even in Europe. Specifically the Jews in this city belonged to the Romaniote community that is believed to have been a part of the oldest Jewish population in Europe, established about 2,500 years ago. The expression Romaniote that is used to identify the Greek Jews was formulated somewhere between the 4th and 10th centuries AD. Greek Christians living in the Eastern Roman Empire called themselves Romanoï, (Romans) and the Jews started calling themselves Romaniote to distinguish themselves from the local Christians but also to identify themselves as citizens of the Roman Byzantine Empire. The phrase "Romaniote" is actually a Hellenized Latin word and is associated with Byzantium or "Second Rome as it known to the Greeks.

While all his brothers became business traders, his dream was to become an Officer in the Greek Army, quite an antithesis of the visions his parents had for him. He took the official entrance exams for the prestigious Royal Hellenic Military Academy,(Scholi Evelpidon) but failed to score high enough to gain entrance which would had allowed him to accomplish his dreams. Instead he got accepted into the University of Athens Law School department. His family would have preferred to see him as a successful lawyer in the capital of Greece. However, destiny had different plans for him. Young student Frizis had never given up his aspirations of wearing a Greek officer's uniform and as Michael Schwartz asserts he might not have even successfully completed his legal studies at all in order to pursue his dreams. <sup>3</sup> There are no

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and Italy, and they were different from the Sephardic Jews that arrived after the Inquisition and settled mainly in Thessaloniki the capital of Greek historical Macedonia. Lastly the Romaniote Jews spoke Yevanic, otherwise known as Romaniote and Judeo-Greek, an antithesis of the Ladino language of the Sepahrdim that arrived from Spain in 1492. For more info about the Romaniote Jews of Greece concerning their Culture and History, see, at, <http://www.romaniotesjews.com/>. A Greek Jewish liturgy could be observed from the Jewish Synagogue of Ioannina, see, at, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=THNV67u-IH4> See, also, Romaniote tradition in Greece by Deborah Esquenazi called : "*The Pre Askenazi and Sefardi Romaniote Jews* ", at, <http://fr.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?apage=1&cid=1159193374317&pagename=JPost/JPArticle/ShowFull>

<sup>3</sup> As Michael Swartz writes in his article : "*{M}ost sources state that Mordechai graduated in law from Athens University, which is where his parents' intentions for him came to an end. In fact, an enquiry was addressed to the Law School in Athens regarding Mordechai's career. The Law School replied that its archives only went back as far as 1922. This theme has been followed up by*

archives that defend or decline the notion about Frizis becoming a lawyer, but all Greek and English written sources agree on the fact that he used his Legal Studies as a stepping point in order to pursue his military calling.

At the time, Greece was relatively a new nation among the established Kingdoms of Europe, and since the start of the Balkan Wars (1912-1913) this small country had been expanding its borders at the expense of the Ottoman Empire the "Sick man of Europe". The Hellenic Kingdom was aspiring to accomplish its *Great Idea or Megali Idea* in other words reestablish once more its Byzantine tradition and borders. An Idealistic Vision that under the charismatic leader Eleutherios Venizelos almost became a reality.

By 1916 Frizis found himself engulfed in this patriotic spirit and volunteered in the Greek Army. His University education sent him directly to the NCO academy where he graduated as a sergeant in the Greek infantry. However according with the then Hellenic Army regulations due to his university education and NCO credentials he became a Reserve Second Lieutenant. Moreover, the start of the First World War eventually found Greece in the Allied camp the *Triple Entente* as it was called and Lieutenant Frizis fighting in Greek Macedonia against the Germans and their allies the Bulgarians. <sup>4</sup> His bravery on the Battlefield was noticed by his superiors and by 1919 he became a fully commissioned Second Lieutenant. His dreams had finally become a reality: "A Greek Jewish Officer in the services of the Hellenic Kingdom of Greece."

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*the historian Vasilis Krapsitis in the January 1996 issue of the Greek Journal Chronic, In the view of Kapsitis, Mordechai's career pattern implies that he did not graduate in lax, and this view is confirmed by a lawyer and friend of Mordechai." ...Quoted from Michael Schwartz , Greece's Finest soldier with Greece's Finest Soldier, at, [http:// at www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii\\_001.htm#frezis\\_schwartz](http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii_001.htm#frezis_schwartz)*

<sup>4</sup> In May 1918 Greek military units held a leading part in the battle of Skra di Legen, fighting along with French Units that resulted in the capture of a particularly fortified position, controlled until then by the Central Powers, chiefly Bulgarian troops. This allied Victory is known as the two day World War I battle of Skra di Legen which took place at the Skra fortified position, located NE of Mount Paiko North of Thessaloniki on May 30, 1918. For a more detailed history of events and the order of the battle scene, see, at, [http://www.tokatiallo-skra.gr/default.asp?LangID=2&AM\\_CategoryID=28&AM\\_ArticleID=84](http://www.tokatiallo-skra.gr/default.asp?LangID=2&AM_CategoryID=28&AM_ArticleID=84)

In his newly established military career Frizis' destiny also intertwined with Greece's military obligations to its own national interests and to its allies. The Greek government under Premier Venizelos wanted to be seen from Entent's point of view as a faithful ally in order to get better stipulations and boundaries from any eventual dismemberment of the Osmanli Realm. Athens efforts where indeed rewarded later on with the *Sevres Treaty* of 1920 where by Greece was ceded lands from the former Ottoman Realm.

As part of Greece's new obligations to cooperate with Allied strategies in the area of the Balkans and in Eastern Europe the newly appointed 2nd Lieutenant Frizis soon find himself serving with the Greek military expeditionary force in the Crimea. This time he would be combating the stemming tide of the Red Bolsheviks of the Ukrainian Front as a part of an international force against communism.

In January, 1919, two Greek divisions from the A Army Corps, under Major General Konstantinos Nider, were dispatched to the Crimea where they joined French, Polish, Romanian forces as well as anti-communist "White" Russians. The Greeks fought heroically in the battles of Bol-Buyalik, Cherson, Nikolaiev and finally in Odessa where they distinguished themselves by holding the entire front in order for the rest of the Allies to evacuate to safety.

While stationed in Moldova specifically in the town of Kishinev <sup>5</sup> where many anti Jewish pogroms had taken place some years before, something astonishing happened according to M. Schwartz. Here, Frizis used his cultural and religious traits to help his country. A battle fatigued Greek Army was in need of fresh supplies and thus his commanding officer Colonel Plastiras who later would briefly serve as dictator of Greece had assigned him and a fellow officer with the responsibility of acquiring provisions and supplies for the Greek Army. Having

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<sup>5</sup> For more information about the 1903 and 1905 Jewish Pogroms, see, at, <http://www.cf.jiddisch.org/kehilot/moldova/pogrom-kishinev.htm>

eleven brothers as traders and a Romaniote intuition that his religion will help him find a solution to this problem proved helpful. As Schwartz emphasizes the two officers went into the first shop they came upon and Mordechai took the initiative and spoke directly to the shopkeeper in Hebrew which as a direct result had thrown the shop owners in a state of shock:

*" {W} ho are you? he asked Can't you see? I am a Greek officer. I can see that all right, but how come you speak Hebrew better than I do? Because I am a Jew, and I have studied our language. So how they did they let you become an officer? No one asked me about my religion or which God I believe in. In Athens we have senior Jewish lawyer, civil servants and many others. So why not officers as well? That was it! The news about Mordechai spread like wildfire. Jewish merchants brought wagonloads of supplies of every sort to the two officers. And they never accepted a drachma. They were angry when the senior Greek officer offered them payment. "* 6

By the summer of 1919 the Greek Expeditionary Force was evacuated to Romania and subsequently dispatched to Smyrna to join the occupation forces of Asia Minor. Having served briefly in Eastern Europe Second Lieutenant Mordechai acquired new orders that sent him to the Asia Minor Front (Western Turkey where Greece after acquiring a mandate from the Victorious Allies under the *Treaty of Sevres* 1920 was waging its own war, to reclaim its Byzantine lands, against the opposing Turkish forces of Mustapha Kemal. This war is known to Turks as the War of Independence against the Greeks and the Allied Forces or to Greeks as the "the 1922 Asia Minor Disaster". Upon reaching Smyrna (IZMIR) a Greek City and Cosmopolitan enclave in Asia Minor with his military detachment, Mordechai was promoted to First lieutenant and was immediately ordered to participate in forthcoming large scale Greek military offensives of

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Schwartz, at, [http:// www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii\\_001.htm#frezis\\_schwartz](http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii_001.htm#frezis_schwartz)

August 1922. Ironically however, like the Battle of Waterloo where everything depended in one big battle, the Greek advancing Armies after their initial successes lost their steam outside of Ankara and got entrapped by the Turkish army. What ensued was a complete military disaster. Many reasons are to be blamed for this fiasco but none could be traced to the Greek soldiers' morale and fighting abilities. As a direct result of this military blunder First Lieutenant Mordechai was captured as a POW along with his soldiers by the victorious Turkish Army. When the Turks realized that he was not Christian he was immediately offered freedom and safe passage to Greece, something he defiantly refused. Having rejected this freedom offer from the Turks he shared eleven months of cruel captivity along with his men.<sup>7</sup> This was never forgotten by his superiors or his soldiers. His care and paternal devotion for his fellow soldiers would follow him until the end of his life.

It should be noted that thousands of Greek prisoners did survive to return back to Greece from their interment or those who did were by no means healthy. Many died soon after their freedom from diseases acquired while in captivity since their Turkish captors policies of mistreatment and horrible living conditions were reminiscent of the Nazi Concentration camps that were to follow 20 years later

What followed after his release and return in 1923 was chaos. Hundreds of thousands of Greek refugees poured into Greece from Turkey as a result of the Asia Minor military defeat and population exchanges. The country was in economic ruin, the King had abdicated and a brief republic was declared. Military commanders and Politicians deemed responsible for the Asia Minor disaster were court-martialed and eventually shot. The only one who escaped the firing

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<sup>7</sup> According to Turkish sources 20,826 Greek prisoners were taken. Of those about 10,000 arrived in Greece during the prisoner exchange in 1923. The rest presumably died in captivity and are listed among the "missing". See, at, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Turkish\\_War\\_\(1919%E2%80%931922\)#cite\\_note-7](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greco-Turkish_War_(1919%E2%80%931922)#cite_note-7). See also, Vryonis Spyros, *"Greek Labor Battalions in Asia Minor" in The Armenian Genocide: Cultural and Ethical Legacies*. Ed. Richard G. Hovannisian. (New Brunswick, NJ 2007: Transaction Publishers), pp. 275–290.

squad was Prince Andrew due to a threat from an English naval taskforce anchored in Piraeus objecting to his death sentence (he happened to be England's Prince Philip's father). Nevertheless, military service for Frizis had to continue, since Greece after all had still a standing Army and many enemies at its gates. Now a young battle hardened officer Mordechai was promoted to captain and also was seen by his Army superiors as a gifted officer that was destined for leadership responsibilities within the nucleus of the Hellenic Armed Forces.

It was not long after his return to that he was offered a chance to go and study in France's War College l'Ecole Militaire Supérieure in order to acquire new tactics and skills that could be applied successfully in any future war effort by the Greek armed forces. Immediately after his graduation he was promoted to Major and was assigned to the Third Army Corps in Thessaloniki, the Jerusalem of the Balkans.<sup>8</sup> While stationed there Frizis was ordered again to be among the first Greek officers destined to receive more training in the newly created Greek War College in Thessaloniki. An institution that was formulated by France's military mission stationed there that was specializing in infantry tactics.

Hence we might say that by now with all the citations he had received Frizis star was rising in the Greek Armed forces. After the end of his tour in Salonica, Mordechai found himself serving this time in his native City of Chalkis, at the Infantry school as a trainer and commander. Nobody knows what thoughts might have passed in Mordecai's mind finding himself stationed in his own town around his own family. A dream once inconceivable, but yet a reality had come true for Major Mordechai of the Royal Hellenic Army.

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<sup>8</sup> Nearly 90 percent of Greece's strong Jewish community perished in Nazi concentration camps. Today less than 6000 remain in Greece and their presence in Hellas can be traced back 2300 years. Once Thessaloniki was called the Pearl of Israel because of its large Jewish presence there. A good perspective and guide about the History of Sephardim Jews in Thessaloniki Greece is written by Mazower, Mark, *SALONIKA CITY of GHOSTS*, (New York 2007: Vintage Books Press). See also a current article that deals with Greek Israeli cooperation in reviving the Jewish past of Thessaloniki, Gil Shefler, Thessaloniki Mayor hopes to attract Israeli Tourists. *Jerusalem Post*, 10 January 2011. at : <http://www.jpost.com/JewishWorld/JewishNews/Article.aspx?ID=207584&R=R1>

It should be taken in account that during the inter war years the Greek Republic did not last long. By 1935 the Monarchy was brought back with a plebiscite and in 1936 Greece was under the Constitutional dictatorship of a former Greek Officer and dedicated Royalist called Ioannis Metaxas. In Greece between 1924 and 1935 there were 23 changes of government, a dictatorship and 13 coups.

By the late 1930's Mordechai's knowledge of defensive infantry tactics did not go unnoticed by his superiors. He was promoted to the rank of Lt Colonel and was assigned to the Operations Office of the Ioannina VIII Division in Epirus in the spring of 1940. It was obvious now that the clouds of War were nearing Greece and his skills for the defense of the nation would be in great demand by his superiors. It would be in the mountains of Epirus next to Albania that Frizis would demonstrate his real abilities as a leader, a tactician and become a hero of the Greek Army. His destiny would be manifested on the face of a new enemy, that of Fascist Italy.

On 7 April 1939, Italian troops had occupied Albania, thereby gaining an immediate land border with Greece. The following spring, Hitler had captured France and all Western Europe. Mussolini the Italian dictator was envious and jealous and wanted to show his partner that he too was of equal status as a great warrior and leader. As a result he chose Greece to show his war skills to Führer and to the world. Italy had always coveted Greek territory bordering the Adriatic. The Italian army was 5 times larger, the Italian air force had hundreds of planes and the Italian navy was one of the largest in the world. Mussolini figured Greece would fall quickly.

As the propaganda war was raging on against Greece, Rome notched up the scale of provocations. Italian planes attacked Greek ships and submarines in Naupaktos bay Greece. These provocations culminated with the sinking of the Greek light Cruiser Elli in the Island of



Tinos harbor during the National celebrations of Virgin Mary's annunciation on August 15, 1940 by an Italian submarine. Even with this attack, Greece still tried to avoid war with the Axis 2<sup>nd</sup> strongest power.

Finally, On October 30 at 3 pm, Greek Premier Metaxas was awakened by Emanuel Grazzi the Italian ambassador in Athens demanding the unconditional surrender of Greece or Italy would declare war and invade the country. Mussolini had given the Greek Prime Minister Metaxas three hours to reply. Prime Minister Metaxas responded with the now historic word “ochi”, which means “no” in Greek. His statement embodied the true spirit of the Greek people. His words of defiance echoed the same devotion and love of country that Greek patriots exhibited during their war of independence against the Ottoman Realm when they shouted the defiant words “Freedom or death.” Premier's Minister Metaxas' actions marked the beginning of one of the world's most heroic efforts against totalitarianism and subjugation. Italy immediately invaded; some Italian troops had even started their advance without waiting for the ultimatum to expire.

The Italian Army, deployed on the Greek-Albanian border, launched a major offensive against Greece on October 28, 1940. The main thrust of the Italian invasion occurred in the Epirus sector, with a further flanking move through the Pindus Mountains. In Epirus, the Hellenic Forces defended the Elaia–Kalamas river line, but in reality the Greek units were heavily outnumbered and their General Staff was pessimistic as to the outcome of the fight. Nevertheless, the local Greek forces, under the legendary Major General Charalambos Katsimitros, commander of the VIII Division managed to successfully stop the Italian advance. A similar fate was awaiting the Italians at the Battle of Pindus that took place simultaneously. There the Greek Army under Colonel Konstantinos Davakis smashed the Fascist onslaught.

These initial Greek successes signified the complete failure of the Italian invasion, leading to the dismissal of the Italian commander in Albania and the first victories over the Axis powers in Europe. It is here that Lt Colonel Frizis took over under the auspices of General Katsimitros the important role to defend the sectors of Negradon which included the sub sectors of Soudenon, Kalpaki, and Vrodismeni's. Under his command Frizis detachment was composed of two infantry battalions, two reserve platoons and one artillery Battalion composed of 75mm Skoda cannons. His mission was to defend at all costs mother Greece and he succeeded!

The Italian forces had initiated their initial offensive on the morning of October 28, 1940. The time for their major attack had come. On November 2, the Greek forces were positioned according to the defensive plan in the line: Kalamas-Elaia-Grabala-Kleftis hill. On this day, after repeated air and artillery strikes, the Italian infantry of the *Ferrara* Division, attacked unsuccessfully in order to advance the bulk of their forces closer to Elaia sector.<sup>9</sup> Despite initial successes to capture the Grabalas hill the Greeks managed to recapture it. It was the beginning of the end for the Italian Army. However the Italian Army did not give up its offensive in the Kalpaki section and renewed its attacks all over the front, this time by attempting to cross the Kalamas River.

At least 60 enemy light tanks attempted the crossing but failed, due to Greek fire, obstacles or mines, while another 15 of them were trapped and stuck inside the swampy area. The Battle intensified by the minute, with the Greeks fighting against all odds. What ensued during the battle of Kalama could easily be described as painting scene taken from Dante's Hell. Despite Repeated shelling the Italians failed to dislodge Frizis' men defending the bridge of the Kalama's river. Here Mordechai and his men fought for several hours until the enemy turned and

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<sup>9</sup> The Battle chronicle that took over at the Kalpaki theater of war during the months of October and December 1940 could be better reviewed at, [http://www.army.gr/structure/eng/istoria/mouseia/Kalpakiou/history\\_en.html](http://www.army.gr/structure/eng/istoria/mouseia/Kalpakiou/history_en.html)

retreated, leaving hundreds of dead and 700 prisoners of war. The unique and incomparable bravery of the Greek forces continued until the suspension of the Italian offensive on November 8, 1940. Soon after the Greek Army passed on the counteroffensive and started capturing Italian fortified positions inside Albania. *Upon hearing Greece's victory upon Italy Winston Churchill issued a famous motto as a tribute to the Greek soldiers' morale:*

*"{U}ntil now we knew that Greeks were fighting like heroes; from now on we shall say that the heroes, fight like Greeks".<sup>10</sup>*

When the Greek counter-offensive began, Mordochai found himself once more leading his detachment of troops into Albania. Meanwhile the fame of Lt Colonel Mordechai had started to spread all across the front. His soldiers adored him and he also called them my "boys", thus his detachment was referred as the "Frizean Soldiers". Lt Colonel Frizis Independent Division gained even more victories under its flag by capturing a series of important hills leading to the city of Premeti and by defeating the elite and better equipped troops of the Modena division. Once more Frizis and his boys pushed back the attacking Italians and on December 4th he was master of all the routes leading to the Albanian City of Premeti. However, his glorious military career would soon come to an end. On December 5th after his initial success of the previous day he was ordered to move on to hill 1220 Northeastern of Premeti and capture it. During the attack his troops came under intense air attack from the Italian air force. The Italians were aware that Greeks in the area lacked anti-aircraft capabilities thus airpower was the only means they could use to halt the Greek Attack.

During the air strike Lt Colonel Frizis ordered his men to take cover while he continued to ride his white horse to inspire his soldiers. What happened in this mayhem of war became a

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<sup>10</sup> See, at, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/User:Hectorian>

legend in the Greek military chronicles. As a squadron of Italian planes strafed and bombed the Greek positions, Lt Colonel Mordechai continued ride his horse and screamed the word *Aeras*, a Hellenic battle cry instilling his troops with courage. He knew that the Italians would counterattack after the aerial bombardment. But his concern over his soldiers well being and fighting spirit became evident when he refused to dismount his horse even when all his officers were begging him to do it, thus making him an easy target for the Italian air force. As Schwartz claims his answer astounded them: "*{H}ow can I leave my men ? Aren't they a target? Indeed Mordechai never left his men and always thought of their interest first.*" <sup>11</sup>

Around 11.20 that morning an enemy bomb fell next to him wounding him in the stomach but even then refused to seek cover and continued to inspire his troops. After the Italian planes left, his *Frizians* soldiers found Lt Colonel Mordechai dead; a burst of machine gun fire had killed him. Not having a Rabbi near, an Orthodox Greek priest was brought over and administered last rites. Despite the fact the Lt Colonel was a Jew there was no hesitation from his behalf. He placed his hand on Mordechai's head and prayed Shema Yisrael: "Hear, O Israel, the lord our God, the Lord is one". Lt Colonel Mordechai Frizis, was the first high ranking officer in the Greek Army to be killed in World War II. Leaving behind a wife, his three children and his soldiers without their favorite commander to carry on the war against the Fascists. His men had a great affection for him, even some of his soldiers not knowing that he was dead like private Michael Tapas continued to write letters to Frizi's wife asking about him and telling her how affectionate he was about their needs and concerns "better than their real Fathers".<sup>12</sup> Upon learning of his death, the Royal court of Greece and premier Metaxas sent condolences to his wife and declared Colonel Mordechai an official Hero of the state of Greece. His actual words

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<sup>11</sup> Michael Schwartz, at, [http:// www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii\\_001.htm#frezis\\_schwartz](http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii_001.htm#frezis_schwartz)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid,at, [http:// www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii\\_001.htm#frezis\\_schwartz](http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii_001.htm#frezis_schwartz)

were: "*{I} learned of the death on the field of honour of your husband, before you knew of it and I did not know how to inform you. Now from your letter I see that not only was he a hero, but he had a wife worthy of him. You and your family as well as those families, who have lost their protectors, will become the families of this state of ours. Please be assured that the protection of Greece will never leave you or your children. The children of Colonel Frizis will be revered by our nation's youth. With feelings of honor and love".* 13

In addition the Greek government promoted Lt Colonel posthumously to the rank of Colonel, had he lived he might have become a General. His morals his ethos and his devotions to the nation and to his men were there to vouch for him. After his death, Colonel Frizis was buried where he fell. His remains were reburied at the Thessaloniki Jewish Cemetery in 2004 with full military honors in the presence of then Greek President Kostis Stephanopoulos after being transferred to Greece from Albania, following an intervention by the Greek general army staff. However it is important not to forget the 50 years continuous effort and frustration by his son Jacob to see his father's bones finally buried in his homeland Greece. His grandson, who was named after him, was the rabbi who officiated at the services. In addition many other Greek Jews died for mother Greece as well on the Albanian Front or in the Greek resistance and they should never be forgotten at all. On October 28, 1940 when war was declared 12,898 Greek-Jewish men would volunteer to defend their country on the Albanian Front; 3,500 of them would return severely injured, many amputees due to injuries and frostbite, and 513 would give their lives for

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid, at [http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii\\_001.htm#frezis\\_schwartz](http://www.yvelia.com/kolhakehila/archive/documents/wwii/wwii_001.htm#frezis_schwartz). The family of Colonel Mardochai after his death moved to Thessaloniki. However after the capture of Thessaloniki the Nazis demanded as in all cities of Greece, the record of all Jews residing in each Greek Prefecture. When his widow went to the prefecture of Thessaloniki to register and as she was addressing herself to the designated official, something astonishing materialized in front of her eyes. He told to her not to register her or the children at all but to leave quietly, because the Germans have evil in mind. Either he happened to know the story of the heroic Colonel or maybe he was a soldier that served under him? Thus his family did not register and that action alone spared them from certain death. See, at, <http://agonigrammi.wordpress.com/2009/06/01/>

their country. As Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos Museum Director of Kehila Kedosha Janina and President of the Association of Friends of Greek Jewry clearly states "*{T}hey served proudly. Those who perished did so with honor. They died as Greeks.*"<sup>14</sup>

### **In Memoriam**

Both Colonels Davakis and Frizis managed to contain the Italian offensive in the Epirus sector, and bought valuable time for the Greek reinforcements to arrive which led to the eventual defeat of Mussolini's Armies in the Southern and Northern Epirus frontier. Their rich imagination and tactical initiative enabled Greece's victory over Italy. Mussolini's failure forced Hitler to come to his aid, delaying the invasion of Russia and possibly changing the outcome of World War II. This was a story of a forgotten battle from a forgotten war. Colonel Mordochai Frizis was a master of his own fate. He lived in an age of honor and he was aware that with honor came with duty and sacrifice, Frizis as an officer and a gentleman of the Hellenic Forces had accomplished both. His memory will always be alive along with the other Greek heroes and officers that fought for the freedom of Greece. His bust sits along with his commanding officer Kachimitros in the town of Kalpaki looking across the border of Albania ready to defend Hellas once more if needed and lead their troops for the glory of Greece.

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<sup>14</sup> An informative article about the role of the Jewish community and their participation in the Greek Army against the Italian Fascist Armies of Mussolini is written by Marcia Haddad Ikonomopoulos with the Title: Remembering and Naming the Greek-Jewish War Heroes of World War II Exclusive for the National Herald for Oxi day, 2009 see, at <http://www.kkjsm.org/archives/Greek%20Jews%20in%20WWII.pdf>