

AJEX needs 170K for vital services

BY DAVID SAFFER

AJEX has a £170K match funding campaign this weekend to ensure it continues its vital communal work in remembrance, welfare and education. The 36-hour fundraiser runs from Sunday until Monday 27th February.

AJEX's website includes an illuminating interview by Cadet Edgar Santos with 98-year-old D-Day veteran Mervyn Kersh and exclusive interview with Rachel Riley on Sunday (6pm).

The Jewish military association is dedicated to Jewish men and women who fought, and continue to fight, for freedom and security. AJEX ensures their immense contribution is not forgotten. The charity, counters antisemitism, spans the UK Jewish community across generations and supports veterans and their families.

Nearly every family has a connection to AJEX through a parent, grandparent, great grandparent or relative.

Aside from the Remembrance Sunday parade, AJEX provides educational resources, school visits, speaker programmes and attendance at military events with AJEX Standards flying the flag. AJEX has enabled National Chair Dan Fox to tell the story of Jewish service to the Crown.

"My grandfather served in World War Two, he was a member of AJEX and went on the parade, so there has always been a family connection," he explained. "AJEX has given me the chance to give talks to Jewish communities, schools and associations. My passion for the work AJEX does has grown from there."

Regarding the fundraiser, Fox explained what funds will go towards?

He said: "It is so important we support veterans and their families whether they are at home or in care facilities. There are also serving Jewish veterans who could find themselves to be a veteran in need of help. Funds will help the National Memorial Arboretum by paying for transport, more educational initiatives and other services. The AJEX parade is also a huge undertaking."

Regarding the online interviews, Fox observed: "Edgar and Mervyn have a very moving interaction. They reach out across the generations to understand each other's experiences. It's about appreciating what the World War Two generation did for us and how the new generation can honour that. With Rachel, it's a

wide-ranging interview on the work she has done



AJEX National Chair Dan Fox

in combating antisemitism, but also her career and family."

AJEX is busy throughout the year. Two major events are the Arboretum ceremony during Arms Forces Week and annual parade at the Cenotaph. There are other activities, as Fox explained.

"A priority is to campaign to get Jewish families to claim their medals," he said. "Medals get lost but you can get replacements whether they are from great grandparents, grandparents or parents. And you are entitled to wear them at remembrance events. It is really special to see families on the annual parade. I want to see as many medals as possible to re-emphasise the Jewish service over the decades. They are wonderful artefacts for families to have and pass on."

Veterans are getting older, why is it so important to preserve their memory?

Fox observed: "They took part in some of the most momentous events in British history. There is a responsibility to ensure their stories, experiences and contribution made is remembered. It's particularly important for the Jewish community to ensure we maintain a sense of pride and understanding that our history hugs the contours of Britain's history. This goes for all parts of society and includes the military. The story is still being told today with Jewish members of the armed forces serving.



Edgar Santos with D-Day veteran Mervyn Kersh

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"But perhaps the main point is that Jewish service to the Crown stands in the starkest contradiction to vile antisemitic accusations that gets thrown at us. In particular, the idea of dual loyalty or somehow standing apart from society. Those that served and those who support those who served are obvious contradictions to that slur."

How inspiring is it to walk with the veterans at parades?

"You can't put that into words," he said. "I recently had tea with a DDay veteran and, despite all that has been learnt over the years, it's hard to imagine what it must have been like to land on a beach in France. dropped in to a Netherlands town or set up camp in a Burma jungle and face what they faced every day. That generation is incredible. They remain a source of inspiration for what they did, but also for everything they have done since. They came back from a war or national service to build lives, families, businesses and communities. Their lives without military service is inspiring, but with it is the most incredible story an individual can tell."

Educating youth and the Jewish contribution are key aspects for AJEX. The charity accepts invitations from schools, groups and synagogues to tell the history of AJEX and Jewish service to the Crown.

Fox noted: "We produce educational materials, not just for young people, but for everyone to use."

And youngsters enjoy meeting veterans and military personnel?

"I took a history GCSE pupil when I met with a DDay veteran," enthused Fox. "He's a budding historian and was fascinated. You only have to see the faces and enthusiasm of school groups and cadets on the annual parade to know they are getting to feel a part of something special. They find the experience of a military event and the history that comes with it enriching."

AJEX is well known for playing a huge role in tackling antisemitism.

"Our history is part of the fight," explained Fox. "Jewish veterans from World War Two formed the 43 Group that involved in the 62 Group, which became the CSO then CST. That is very much a part of the history and inspiration."

Jews have served the British Armed Forces for centuries. In World War One, 50,000 Jews served. In 1921, Jewish veterans laid the first wreath at the Cenotaph. With rising antisemitism and fascism in Europe, the Jewish Ex-servicemen's Legion was formed in 1929. To avoid confusion with the British Legion (now Royal British Legion) AJEX, the Association of Jewish Ex-servicemen and women, came about in 1936. After World War Two, when over 70,000 Jews served, AJEX provided support to veterans along with programmes.

AJEX's National Chair is aware of the legacy. The upcoming fundraiser is essential for the organisation.

Fox observed: "Anything people donate will enable us to keep up our momentum to the community."



ENJOY AJEX's exclusive interview with Rachel Riley on Sunday (6pm). See also Cadet Edgar Santos interview 98-year-old D-Day veteran Mervyn Kersh at www.charityextra.com/ajex

Rachel Riley (credit: Alan Strutt)

