**The savage murder of Private Feld**

**By Martin Sugarman, Archivist of the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women, AJEX, of the UK**

Private Mark Feld was born on 28th October 1925 at 9, Reeds Mansions, Gossett Street, Bethnal Green, on the northern boundary of the East End Jewish ghetto of London [[1]](#endnote-1). He was son of Harry and Betsy/Betty/Betsie, nee Ruffell. Harry owned and rented street market stalls [[2]](#endnote-2) and Betsy ran a cafe in Wentworth Street, Whitechapel [[3]](#endnote-3). They were married in a synagogue in 1913. Harry’s father Henry Feld was born in Whitechapel in the 1870’s, of Russian Jewish immigrants, and had been both a Smithfield meat porter and also a spare time bare knuckle fighter in the East End [[4]](#endnote-4).

Mark had 5 siblings; brothers Simeon - who served in the Merchant Navy throughout the war [[5]](#endnote-5); Jack, who was ironically an Army Military Policeman (see below); Arthur, who was an Army boxer; and sisters Eva (who was in the ATS) and Betty the youngest, who was evacuated to Suffolk for most of the War. Every able-bodied military age member of the family was serving in the Forces. Mark Paytress, in his book, describes Mark Feld as ‘a physical lad who was not averse to getting into the occasional scrap [[6]](#endnote-6) ‘and his nephew in law Gary Saffer describes the Feld family as typical and streetwise Jewish working-class Eastenders who could look after themselves in a confrontation [[7]](#endnote-7).

Mark’s Military Jewish Chaplain card [[8]](#endnote-8) shows he was serving in the Army on 3rd February 1944 and was at Maidstone Initial Training Centre (ITC) with 258 Company Pioneer Corps. The family were living at 38, Carlton Mansions, Holmleigh Road, Stamford Hill, N16 at the time. He was seen by Rev Myers on 7/2/44 and given a Jewish prayer book.

In August 1946, Mark was stationed in Marlborough Farm Camp, Burton Dassett, just south of Leamington in Warwickshire [[9]](#endnote-9). His Jewish Chaplain card shows this as Kineton camp. He was then a cook private in the Army Catering Corps, number 14709755, attached to the Pioneer Corps, having served during the war, since early 1944.

On the night of Monday August 19th, 1946, Mark, aged 20, was brutally attacked whilst asleep in his bed and died soon after of his injuries. The first news of this broke in the *Banbury Advertiser* of 21/8/46, where it stated that No 258 Company Pioneer Corps Provost (Police) Sgt Patrick Francis Lyons aged 34, an Irishman, from Barrack Street, Ennis, County Clare, appeared at nearby Kineton at an occasional magistrate’s court next day, charged with Mark Feld’s ‘wilful murder’ [[10]](#endnote-10).

**The First Hearing**

On the bench were Colonel Walter Pepys, Chairman, and Admiral Sir Walter Cowan. (another source in the *Banbury Advertiser* says a Mrs Hanbury and Lt Col Starkey also sat). According to the *Banbury Advertiser* of Aug 28th, Lyons appeared with his three war medal ribbons and a Mention in Despatches, standing stiffly to attention in the dock; he made no objection to a remand.

Sgt Simmons of Warwickshire police (described in other reports as Police Superintendent Simmonds) stated that Lyons had carried out the deed with another sergeant as witness, and had struck Feld *twice* on the head with a truncheon wrapped in American cloth (a type of waterproof fabric) ; Lyons was remanded in custody and, at that time, denied all knowledge of the incident.

The *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser* stated that Feld had left his bed dazed after the attack and was seen wandering the camp, in the early hours of the morning, but was taken to the RAMC hut where a doctor put a stitch in a cut in his head, thinking Mark had been drinking. Next morning it was seen that his condition was worse, and he was transported to Warwick hospital. Then on his way from there to Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Birmingham, he was accompanied by PC Russell, but he died en route in the ambulance; cause of death was due to fracture of the skull, cerebral haemorrhage, and compression of the brain as a result of the two truncheon blows. His body was taken to Solihull mortuary. Detective Superintendent Spooner of Warwick police was leading the inquiries [[11]](#endnote-11) and it was noted that Lyons was granted legal aid.

**The Second Hearing**

A much more detailed account of the next hearing at Kineton which occurred a week later, was reported in the *Rugby Advertiser* of 30/8/44 and the *Leamington Spa Courier* of 27/9/46. The magistrates were Col Pepys, Mrs Hanbury, Mr J B Fisher and W H Grosvenor Bromet. Another source claims a Col. J H Starkey was also sitting.

Twenty-five witnesses, most soldiers, appeared for the prosecution, in a hearing which lasted 6 hours. Lyons, who was remanded at Birmingham prison, denied guilt. Prosecutor Edgar C. Jones stated that Lyons was in charge of the Regimental Police at the camp and was responsible for discipline. Feld, known as ‘Blondie’, to his mates, had gone to bed about 11pm in his Nissen hut which he shared with 5 other soldiers; his bed was near a locked door located at one end. A soldier named Ivor Davies slept at the opposite end and was awake at about half past midnight, having come in later, when he heard a banging on the locked door near to Feld, and then footsteps along the outside of the hut to the other, unlocked door; he saw Lyons enter, wearing a peaked cap, with another soldier (who stood by the door). Lyons walked past the beds to where Feld was asleep and was carrying a truncheon in his right hand and torch in his left. Whilst the second soldier watched, Lyons without any hesitation, struck Feld two blows whilst he slept and then walked out. Davies was terrified as he actually witnessed this cruel act, and feigned being sleep.

After five minutes Davies saw Feld get out of bed and try to put his clothes on; Feld switched the light on, and Davies saw blood on Feld’s face. Feld then switched the light off and left the hut. They did not speak to each other. Outside, Feld was seen by Provost (Police) Cpl. J. Kelly who saw Feld was walking unsteadily and took him to the camp hospital at about 2.30 am, where Kelly saw Feld had a head wound over his left ear. He was kept in but next day was sent to hospital and died as explained above.

Sgt. George Gilchrist RAMC confirmed he saw Feld’s wound that night and a large bruise, but that he was fit and struggled when he gave him the stitch for the wound. Dr Douglas Williams, a local GP of The Grove, Fenny Compton, said it was he who saw Feld in the morning and that he was unconscious; he sent Feld at once at 7.30 am to the civil hospital. The County Pathologist Dr John Colbeck carried out a post-mortem and confirmed the cause of death as due to a hard blow and indeed could have been caused by a truncheon. Bone had penetrated the brain.

Mark’s father Harry also appeared having come all the way from Stamford Hill in East London, accompanied by his wife. Mr Thomas Beak of the West Midlands Forensic laboratory confirmed a hair from Feld had been found on the truncheon.

Captain Ernest Baseley, former Acting Commander of 258 Company, confirmed that when Police Superintendent Mackie questioned Lyons about Feld’s injury on the day after, Lyons said he knew nothing about it. Mr Roderick Baker for the defence asked if discipline at the base was bad and Baseley said it was and that things had improved under Lyons efficient regime. But at the time of the incident discipline had improved to the point of it being good [[12]](#endnote-12).

Another soldier, Private John Davis who slept near Feld stated that he and Feld had been to Leamington and returned about 10pm sober and well, before turning in, but that he had been asleep when the incident occurred.

Cpl Kelly gave evidence that he had heard Sgt. Lyons (who was the orderly Sgt. of the day) about 1a.m., shouting strong language near the NAAFI (canteen) and so left the guardroom to investigate but saw Feld approach him with blood on his face and saying he did not know what had happened to him. At the camp hospital/first aid room, Kelly explained to a Sgt. Henry Crampsey (spelt Crambsie in other reports), in the presence of Lyons, that Feld had had a pretty bad smack on the head. By 3 a.m. Crampsey and Kelly told Lyons that Feld was still bad, and Lyons nonchalantly said in his strong Irish accent, that he (Feld) would be alright in the morning.

Crampsey – who it transpired became the main witness - went on to reveal that the evening before, he and Lyons had had 5 or 6 beers each together (in the mess) until around midnight and Lyons had passed a remark that, ‘Before many nights I am going to do up Pte Feld’. Crampsey alleged that Lyons had had some ‘trouble’ with Feld at one time [[13]](#endnote-13). Clearly Lyons was also drunk at the time, leaving him open to the justified accusation that this gave him the ‘Dutch courage’ to attack Feld. Crampsey and Lyons then had some tea in the kitchen and on the way later to the guardroom, again Lyons said he would ‘do up’ Feld and that ‘I (Crampsey) should keep quiet’. Lyons then entered the guardroom and came out with a truncheon and an American style torch and said he was going for a stroll, and he and Crampsey went to the cook s’ hut where Feld slept.

Crampsey then confirmed to the court what Private Ivor Davies had seen of the killing, except he claimed only one blow was given to Feld, and not two, and that he had heard a dull thud as the blow was struck by Lyons on Feld’s head. He also said that as they left the hut, Lyons repeated that was the job over and I (Crampsey) was to keep quiet and stand by him, and he would stand by me.

Next day, Kelly said Lyons denied Feld had been beaten up, and said he was sure Kelly would give him away. A Corporal Potts gave evidence that he had seen Lyons the next day and told him Feld might not live and that Lyons had replied that it was just like Pte McGinty the other week – was beaten and not expected to live (but what this meant other than a callous disregard for the lives of Lyons’ men, is anybody’s guess – author remark. ). Lyons also told Police Superintendent Mackie the next day that he knew nothing about Feld being injured. When at 5pm on the 19th, Mackie told Lyons that Feld had died, and showed him Crampsey’s statement, Lyons threw it down and said it was all lies and that he had gone for a run around the camp that night and never been near Feld’s hut. Mackie arrested Lyons and charged him with murder, taking him to Stratford-on-Avon police station.

The Jewish Chronicle on page 15 of 30th August 1946, carries its only mention of the case and that was an ‘in Memoriam’ style announcement by the family, not a reporter. It stated cryptically, ‘Pte Mark Feld, PC, due to an injury to the head. Mr H Feld, his father lives at 38, Carlton Mansions, Holmeigh Rd, N 16 (Stamford Hill)’. Perhaps they had been advised to keep quiet for now (see author’s conclusions below)?

Meanwhile**,** Lyons was committed to appear at Warwick Assizes.

**Warwick Assizes**

At the December Assizes, C L Henderson KC (King’s Counsel) was prosecuting Lyons. It was alleged that two shots had been fired at one time over the guard room where the Provosts had their meals, indicating the once bad discipline at the camp. When questioned, Crampsey stated that at no time did he imagine that what Lyons did in the hut that night would result in the death of, or serious harm to, Pte Feld. It was also stated that Feld had recently served 28 days detention for assault, and from time to time the men did insult the Provosts by calling out insults at them at night (*Birmingham Daily Gazette*, 30/11/46) and even attacked them in the dark.

Defending, A P Marshall asked for a verdict of manslaughter, as bad discipline that once prevailed in the camp would mean Provosts (Military Police) were under particular pressure, and as a result, wrong decisions could be made (*Warwickshire Advertise*r 6/12/46). Strangely Crampsey, now demoted from Sergeant to Private, appeared as a *defence* witness at the Assizes!

*The Glasgow Sunday Post* (1/12/46) reported that the jury considered their verdict on Lyons after just one hour, the final verdict being not guilty of murder, but guilty of manslaughter; Lyons was given 10 years penal servitude. Mr Justice Singleton on pronouncing sentence said he was concerned about the accusations of anti-social and unsoldierly behaviour in the Sergeants Mess, by Lyons and his peers, on weekend evenings; and asked how it was possible to impose discipline on soldiers when such behaviour set a bad example to the men. During the proceedings, Lyons also alleged that when he approached Feld’s bed that night, Feld had jumped up at him and he felt he had to defend himself, only meaning to frighten Feld. (According to witness statements this is totally untrue, as was quite a bit of Lyons’ testimony).

The judge also said (*Birmingham Daily Gazette* 2/12/46) he was glad the jury found Lyons guilty, and he was fortunate not to have been found guilty of murder, which many would have said would be right; he was as near to being convicted of murder as it was possible to be.

The *Coventry Evening Telegraph* 2/12/46, added that Lyons had claimed he had aimed at Feld’s shoulder, and it was just a slight blow. This was also clearly untrue. Lyons sat motionless and expressionless for most of the trial and stated (*Warwickshire Advertiser* 6/12/46) he was a native of Eire and married with 3 children. He had volunteered in August 1941 and served on D Day where he was MID for bravery [[14]](#endnote-14). He continued that Feld had used bad language to him and told Lyons he was only fit for Belsen (as a guard presumably), that Feld could be violent and had once threatened him with a knife. In fact it is alleged by another source that Crampsey had reported that Lyons had said ‘Feld would fit in only in one place, and that was Belsen’ - the very opposite to what Lyons had claimed at the Assizes. In other words, a piece of cheap anti-Semitism given Feld was Jewish. But as the main players in this tale are now dead, we may never know the truth.

Lyons claimed he only went to Feld’s hut to check he was in bed as Feld had threatened to go to the guardroom and release a man who was detained there. But no evidence at all to support this was submitted, and witnesses say otherwise. Witness Private Kelly said Lyons was obsessed with his work but was concerned only to improve discipline. Another un-named witness, however, stated that on that night the camp was totally quiet, but not in the Sergeants mess where riotous behaviour was taking place. This begs the question, just who actually were the undisciplined soldiers?? The Sergeants or the lower ranks? Despite saying he was sorry, Lyons clearly carried out a pre-mediated attack, when drunk, on a man who was asleep. He literally got away with murder.

The incident and trial caused quite a scandal and was covered not only by newspapers in Banbury, Stratford-on-Avon, Coventry, Warwick, Rugby, Leamington, and Birmingham, but also nationally in Glasgow, London, Gloucester, and South Shields, over a period stretching from 21st August to 6th December 1946 – more than 16 weeks; it is largely from these newspapers that this story has been taken, from the eye-witness accounts. There was no mention of his murder or the trial in the Hackney newspapers, where the family lived.

**Legacy**

There is little doubt that Lyons was motivated, no matter what he and the wavering Crampsey said, by low level anti-Semitism against Mark Feld, as the comments about Belsen show – if one accepts the view that it was Lyons who made the remark about where Feld should end up, and not the other way round. At the same time, the troubles in the Mandate/Israel (Palestine) between the Jewish residents and Resistance, against the British Occupation, was breeding anti-Jewish feeling in Britain during this period, and many British Jewish servicemen and women in the Forces at the time felt the effects of this [[15]](#endnote-15).

In addition, Lyons was, as proven by Crampsey’s stated evidence, drunk that night and was also clearly a stickler for discipline in a way which the Military Police are historically known for – justified though that may be on occasions, when dealing with the mixed bag of men from often disjointed and deprived backgrounds that soldiers in that period could come from. In addition, Lyons contradicted himself several times during the various hearings and interviews, even at first denying he was in Feld’s hut, and so his evidence cannot be trusted in any case. His act was carried out with planned, malice aforethought.

Gary Saffer, a nephew –in- law of Mark, who knew the family well, stated that Mark had complained to his family about the anti-Semitic abuse he got from Lyons and once knocked Lyons down in a fight over the matter. But this was never revealed during the trial - at least so far as the newspaper reports are concerned - and Mark was not there to confirm it of course [[16]](#endnote-16). Furthermore, surviving family stated that the three brothers of Mark had discussed the possibility of ‘getting’ Lyons after he got out of prison, but this never transpired. Mark’s parents never got over his death and grieved deeply for him until they died. They are buried at Bushey Jewish cemetery, dying in 1983 (Harry) and 2003 (Betty).

When the author asked in December 2018, to see the trial transcript at The National Archives (TNA ASSI 13/24) I was told it is closed till 2044 and that the procedure was that I need to apply under the Freedom of Information Act (FoI) for special access, via the Ministry of Justice (MoJ). Having done so, the MoJ eventually refused on 27th January 2019 on the basis of sensitivity of material contained in the transcript[[17]](#endnote-17). Even if the family wanted to read it, they must first sign a document promising not to pass any facts on to a third party.

14709755 Pte Mark Feld was buried at East Ham Jewish cemetery, Marlow Road, plot U4/44, on 23rd August 1946, and has a Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) headstone in the war graves section [[18]](#endnote-18). It is inscribed, ‘Mourned by your loving mother, father and family. May your dear soul rest in peace’ but the epitaph is hidden by a book shaped grave token placed against it. His parents later received his one service award, the 1939-45 War Medal.

The grave token is virtually unreadable now as it is so weather worn, but on a visit to his grave on March 18th 2019, the author was able to make out that the left hand side bore the Hebrew letters Pay (P) and noon (N) which are the initials of the traditional statement placed at the head of Jewish graves, ‘Po Nikbar’ – meaning ‘here lies buried’. It is followed by, ‘in loving memory’ and then further down his name is just legible. Sadly, the right page of the book token is completely unreadable now.

The ceremony was officiated by Rev Isaacs [[19]](#endnote-19). Mark was the uncle of Jewish Rock Star Marc Bolan/Feld, of T Rex fame. Marc Bolan was named after his uncle Mark the soldier. As is well known, Bolan the singer, born in 1947 in the Hackney area, was of course himself killed in a tragic road accident in 1977 aged 29, at the height of his fame.

As I was about to leave the hedged-off war graves plot, near the Prayer Hall, on that showery but bright afternoon, I read the Jewish prayer for those who have died, the Kaddish. It was for Mark, his family and for the 50 or so other Jewish soldiers, sailors and airmen from Britain, Holland and Czechoslovakia who lie alongside Mark with their Commonwealth War Graves headstones. Bless them all.

**Acknowledgements**

I must thank the staff of the British Library newspaper archives, Hackney Archives, Tower Hamlets Local History Library, and Gary and Julie Saffer of the Feld family for their help. But especially I wish to pay tribute to Gina Marks, stalwart of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain (JGSGB) who, with her customary skill and patience provided so much assistance. I also thank Michael Griesman for his skill in enhancing the poor quality and only photo we have of Mark Feld, and Melvyn Hartog and Leonard Shear of the United Synagogue burial society, for the clear photos of Mark’s grave. Also, I thank the United Synagogue (US) Archivist Charles Tucker for the burial documents of Mark, that he sent me.

1. Birth Certificate from GRO and Paytress (see below). The building was demolished in 1971 during re-development in the area but once stood near the corner of Gossett Street and Brick Lane and can be seen clearly marked on the 1960 six inch Ordnance Survey map. Thanks to Tower Hamlets Local History library assistants. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Though the birth certificate shows Harry stated that he was a butcher [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Telephone interview with Gary and Julie Saffer, Mark’s niece, and nephew-in-law, November 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. See Paytress below [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. His name was found by the author at TNA, Kew, in Merchant Navy log book records and appears in the book ‘Jews in the Merchant Navy in WW2’, by the author, Martin Sugarman, pub. by Valentine Mitchell, London, 2018, page 22 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. From the book ‘Marc Bolan’ by Mark Paytress, Omnibus Press 2002 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Telephone conversation with author in December 2018 [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. The Jewish Military Museum and AJEX inherited 65,000 cards kept by the many Jewish Chaplains who served in WW2, on the vast majority of serving Jewish men and women in the three main British Armed Forces. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Then consisting of Nissen huts and the Garrison church, it is still today a now more modern army camp. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. His Jewish chaplain card clearly shows the word, ‘murdered’ written in pencil across it, and mentions his burial at East Ham (Marlow Road) Jewish cemetery (see above) [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Leamington Spa Courier, 23/8/46 page 3 [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Banbury Guardian 26/9/46 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Banbury Guardian 26/9/46 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. The author searched the London Gazette from June 1944 till December 1947 and found no MiD to Sgt P F Lyons, but there was an entry for a L/Cpl R F Lyons of the KOYLI, No 5439801 on 29/11/45 page 5815, which owing to a mistake/typing error, *could* be him. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. Former serving Paratrooper Joseph Marks attested to this fact with the author when Marks was stationed in Germany doing National Service at this time, and the harassment by non-Jewish troops led to the suicide of Joe’s friend Denis Klemin, who was buried at Ohlendorf British war cemetery, Germany 8/4/48. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Telephone conversation with author in December 2018; this could refer to the 28 days detention Mark Feld got as mentioned by Gary Saffer. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Close family may be permitted to see the documents, but if granted, may not share any details with any third party. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. Mark died on ‘active service’ and well within the official 1947 date of the official end of WW2, the date adhered to by the CWGC [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. This was probably Rev. Simeon Isaacs who was an official Army Chaplain.

[A Single Blonde Hair – Private Mark Feld – In The Frontline](https://inthefrontline.com/2020/10/12/a-single-blonde-hair-private-mark-feld/) [↑](#endnote-ref-19)