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Email From Kuwait: Is Snapple Kosher?

An extraordinary email conversation has been taking place between a US Army Chaplain in Kuwait -- an Orthodox Rabbi holding the rank of Captain -- and a Rabbinic Coordinator of the Orthodox Union *Kashrut* (Kosher Certification) Department on defining what foods being made available to servicemen in the present war are deemed kosher by the OU, as well as on plans to hold seders for troops in Iraq.

Rabbi (Captain) David Goldstrom, of the III Corps 4th Infantry Division, based in Fort Hood, Texas, needed information on a variety of foods being provided to the armed forces serving in Iraq and neighboring countries.

Captain Goldstrom directed his messages to Rabbi Yosef Grossman, one of the OU's authorities on kosher certification.

Just as non-kosher troops receive MRE's (Meals Ready to Eat), those who keep kosher eat *My Own Meals*, which have certification from a rabbi in Chicago. Nevertheless, the military is attempting to supplement the soldiers' diet with food obtained from the United States, Europe and local vendors. These items do not have a kosher *hechsher* (or certification), resulting in the chaplain's questions to the OU.

Captain Goldstrom has asked about Snapple juices produced in the United States but with Arabic labels (not kosher); milk in cardboard containers produced in Kuwait (not kosher because of the possibility of camel's milk being added); fruit juices from concentrate produced in the Gulf States and packaged in small cardboard box containers (some are kosher, some aren't); Kelloggs' cereals from Germany (kosher) and Lays potato chips produced and packaged in the Middle East (still being investigated by the OU), among other products.

The chaplain has posed additional questions about whether items that are kosher all year-round are kosher for Passover, such as My Own Meals with raisins (still to be determined). In regard to a question from Kuwait about spices, Rabbi Grossman wrote back that plain spices are kosher for Passover, but spice blends are not.

The exchange of messages moved Captain Goldstrom to write, "I have always appreciated how much expertise you and others in the *Kashrut* industry must have in order to deal with modern food production methods, but now as I wrestle with being in the Gulf under wartime conditions, I really appreciate it."

"Captain Goldstrom has an extremely difficult task, maintaining kosher standards under the most trying circumstances," said the OU's Rabbi Grossman. "It is a tribute to him and to the troops that look to him for guidance that they expect the same approach to Jewish law while they are fighting a war that they expect at home. The OU is delighted to assist them in

achieving this objective.”

Regarding Passover, Captain Goldstrom declared in his e-mails to the OU, “I’m still looking at how we’re going to do *Pesach* (Passover), and that may take me into Iraq. I’m working on the seder now. I shipped lots of matzah, grape juice, haggadot and miscellaneous other materials. I and the other Rabbis in the theatre are figuring out how to best cover as many of our troops as possible. The idea is to set up a couple of seders and make it possible for soldiers (airmen, marines, etc.) to leave their units and attend. Not everyone will be able to get away, and there are some “solo seder kits” to distribute to them as best as possible.”

“I’ll probably stay here in Kuwait the first days, and may visit soldiers in Iraq during *chol hamoed* (the intermediate days of Passover, when travel is permitted), the chaplain continued. “The greatest difficulty in bringing some *Yiddishkeit* (Jewish observance) to our troops is how spread out they are. Bringing them together for *Pesach* would be wonderful, but I don’t think it will happen. Too many things are going on in the war.”

Rabbi Grossman took the opportunity to inform the chaplain that somewhere in Iraq there is a marine carrying with him the book *Machaneh Yisrael* (the Camp of Israel) by the Chofetz Chaim, a great 19th century rabbi; the marine borrowed the book from Rabbi Hershel Schachter, one of the leading rabbis of Yeshiva University. The book was written for Jews in military service and explains their religious obligations in wartime. The marine “hopes to come back safely from the war and return the book to Rabbi Schachter,” Rabbi Grossman wrote.