

SPRING 2007



AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

UNITED STATES & CANADA VOLUNTEERS

136 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016

DAVID GERARD, Z"l; A TOUGH SAILOR

Dave Gerard passed away on January 29, 2007 after a long and valiant battle against cancer.

Dave was born and raised in Brooklyn, N.Y. In 1943 he enlisted in the U.S. Coast Guard and saw service in Europe and in the Pacific. (During World War II, the U.S. Coast Guard engaged in landing Allied troops on the invasion beachheads). When his mother took ill he was granted leave to visit her. Returning for

duty to his ship he found out that during his absence the enemy had torpedoed the boat and all hands were lost at sea.

Dave returned to civilian life in 1946 after his discharge from the service. His brother, Ben, was active in the Zionist movement and volunteered to serve in Aliyah Bet. On the day the ship was to sail Ben was gravely ill and Dave Gerard reported to serve in his brother's place. On the S.S. Mala he served as purser directly under Captain

Danny Maltese. He was known as David Goldstein. The ship picked up Holocaust survivors from the Camp Grande Arenas near Marseilles. Dave remembered loading the refugees on the Mala in the dark of night off the secluded French fishing hamlet of La Ciotat. Dave spoke with nostalgia about the times that he characterized as "unforgettable". Martin Silver, his shipmate on the Mala takes us down memory lane.

"Prior to being renamed S.S. Mala the ship sailed as the Mayflower, the United States Presidential Yacht that served five

American Presidents, including Teddy Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. The crew of the Mala were all volunteer American Jews [except the paid Captain]. Many were WW II veterans. We repaired the Mala in a Brooklyn Navy Yard. It flew a Honduras or Panamanian Flag. We carried about 20 Chalutzim (pioneers) of Harshomer Hatza'air to do unskilled labor on board. They

Continued on pg. 11

Ephraim Tsouk Z"l

The crew of the Ulua is gradually jumping this earthly ship. Early January Ephraim Tsouk packed his last seabag and left us. He was the go to guy for Israeli ship engineer problems on the storied Pan York, for the Navy, for Zim lines, and others.

A most treasured photo of him is in New Zealand at age 80 bungee jumping, if you will. He was not above tilting at windmills.

The government, as punishment for going on strike, drafted him into the Army. The commanding officer of the post to which he was shipped was Gedda S., a former shipmate on the Ulua. Phil landed on his feet again.

He felt life was to be lived, not watched.

Hear! Hear!

By Arthur Bernstein



David Gerard in his USN uniform.

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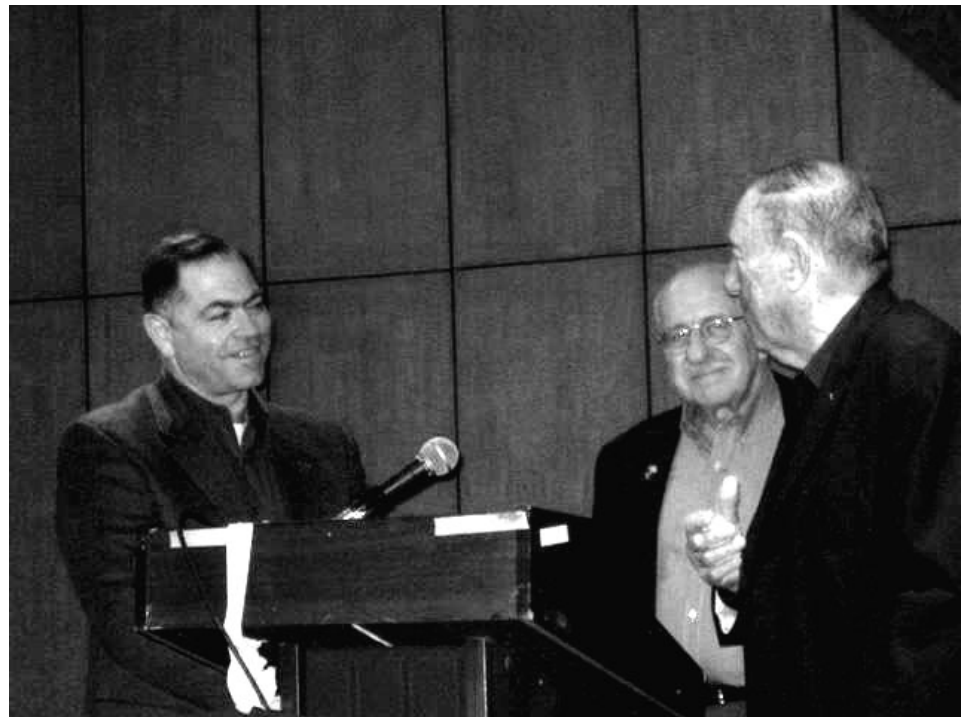
Websites

<http://www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html>
<http://www.israelvets.com>

AVI CELEBRATES PURIM

On Sunday, March 4, AVI celebrated Purim for the first time ever. It replaced last year's Hanukah celebration that we were compelled to cancel when the Bnai Zion social

hall was under reconstruction. The Purimevent was replete with the usual brunch banquet including lots of Haman tashen. A portion of the Megillat Esther was recited by Sam Klausner. We gave Mishloach Manot



Col. Rafi Aviram, Managing Director of the Friends of the IDF accepting an AVI check from Si Spiegelman and Paul Kaye.



Gloria Frankel accepts check for Friends of Israel Disabled Veterans from AVI's Paul Kaye and Si Spiegelman.

for the troops; \$1000 donation for the Friends of the IDF and \$1000 to the Friends of Israel's Disabled Veterans. Colonel (res) Rafi Aviram and Linda Frankel respectively accepted the gifts for the two organizations. They acknowledged how the gifts came from modest donations by many people and were truly heartfelt as many of the contributors had given of themselves in the struggle for the creation of the State. A musical program followed performed by the noted Israeli artist Avram Pengast. The afternoon concluded with the rousing battle song of 1948. Many in the audience joined in with the Palmach song, Bat Sheva, Be'arvot Hanegev, Hayu Zmanim, Ha'amini Yom Yavo and so on. It was a stirring moment for many who were taken back down memory lane to a time long gone when so few did so much in another critical moment in Jewish history.

Si Spiegelman

OPERATION VELVETTA II: SPITFIRES FOR ISRAEL

The Velvetta operations I and II were conducted by the fledgling Israel Air Force in 1948. Their mission was to ferry WWII Spitfire fighter aircraft purchased from Czechoslovakia to Israel as the War of Independence was in full swing.



The "Spits" were flown to Israel with a refueling stop in Yugoslavia. They formed the backbone of squadron 101 and engaged the enemy in combat in the fall and winter of 1948. They were an important factor in Israel's emerging victorious in the war. Most of the aviators of squadron 101 were U.S., English and South African Machal volunteers. The "operational" language was English.

Here is the story of Velvetta II that appears in the book "South Africa's 800" by Henry Katzew.

Jack Cohen and Sam Pomerance flew back to Czechoslovakia to prepare thirteen more

Spitfires for flight to Israel. They were joined a little later by Amie Ruch and Issy Greenberg, the radio mechanic. The flight of the latter two to Prague was not without its anxious moments. Their Dakota piloted by Claude Duval, now back on the PAAC Johannesburg-Lydd-London run, lost an engine half way to Athens. After repairs, Duval continued to Geneva where the South Africans boarded an east-bound plane. Arriving finally at Uherske Hradiste, Ruch joined by Jack Cohen performed their test flights while Greenberg began the extraction of the planes' radio sets. As with the first six Spits, the thirteen

were stripped of all accoutrements, this time. as we have just noted the radios as well. Ruch and Jack

Cohen were the only South Africans among the thirteen pilots. Three were bright young Israelis: Mottie Fein (Hod) (see note 1), Sandy Jacobs and Danny Shapiro - men who were in later years to leave their mark on the IAF. These three had not yet completed their training but, nevertheless, successfully flew this difficult mission. They subsequently completed their training and received their wings with two other Israelis, Shia Swartsman and Tibi Stern under American volunteers Rudy Augarten and Caesar Dangott in the first pilot's training course in Israel.

This time the Yugoslavs refused a renewed Israeli request for the use of Niksic. The fate of Velvetta 2 hung in the balance. "Like a non-stop from Cape to Cairo." Issy Greenberg

thought, allowing himself the slight exaggeration. Several Israelis in the technical and

engineering team believed that without Niksic the flight would be suicidal. The factors in their minds were not only the perils of distance, but winter, with its snow and winds. Pomerance was adamant. The flight could be made, he insisted, and had to be.

The issue was settled by the Yugoslavs who, relenting, once again opened the airfield to the Israelis, Tito never lost an opportunity to assert his independence of Moscow.

On Dec 18th at 0800 hours, the first flight of six left the secluded and remote Kunowice pilots were

Continued on pg.9

Velvetta Pilots

Back row; left to right:

George Lichter (USA), Boris Senior (SAF), Lesley Shagham (SAF), Arnie Ruch (SAF), Sam Pomerance (USA).

Front row; left to right: Syd Cohen (SAF), Rudy Augarten (USA), Al Freeman (USA).

MESSAGE FROM SMOKY SIMON; WORLD MACHAL CHAIRMAN

RAV-ALUF GABY ASHKENAZI

World Machal wrote a congratulatory letter to Gaby Ashkenazi, on his appointment as the new Chief-of-Staff of the IDF.

MACHAL REUNION IN 2008 – ISRAEL'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

We feel that in principle there should be a Machal Reunion in 2008, which will most certainly be Machal's last "Round-Up". The proposed reunion would be for say a week, and would include participating in Yom Hazicharon and Yom Ha'atzmaut ceremonies; a visit to an army or air force base; a visit to Yad V'Shem and the Menachem Begin Heritage Centre, and a celebratory dinner to be addressed by a leading personality. Due to severe budgetary constraints, World Machal does not expect any financial support from the Government. Hence, air fares, hotels, expenses for the events, etc., will have to be paid for by the Machalniks themselves.

CONTINUITY OF WORLD MACHAL

Due to the ageing syndrome, the 1948 Machalniks have migrated from "an endangered species", to a "highly endangered species". As a first step towards Machal's continuity, which should naturally be centred in Israel, our committee has made a collaborative and co-operative arrangement with Machal/Nachal 1956. This organization consists of South African volunteers who came to serve in the Sinai Campaign (1956), and were drafted into Nachal. This initial group was followed by smaller waves of volunteers in the

late 50's and early 60's. Members of Machal/Nachal 1956 will be joining us at our forthcoming Yom Hazicharon service in April. We are also considering the feasibility of co-operating with members of Mahal 2000 who come on Aliyah after completing their voluntary service in the IDF. The general idea is to have a sort of umbrella Machal organization, so as to preserve the volunteering spirit of Machal, and to keep the Machal flag aloft. World Machal has proposed to the IDF to arrange a gathering of World Machal, Machal/Nachal 1956, and Mahal 2000, so that the young Machalniks will have an opportunity of meeting their forerunners – the old warriors from 1948 and 1956. However, due to the IDF's present emphasis on reconstruction and training, we are having great difficulty in implementing this gathering, which we hope might be addressed by the new Chief of Staff.

THE MUSEUM OF THE JEWISH SOLDIER IN WORLD WAR II

Despite the Government's decision in 2002 to establish a Museum known as "The Museum of the Jewish Soldier in World War II", to memorialize the remarkable contribution made by Jewish servicemen in World War II (1939-45), has not yet come to fruition. The stumbling block has been the absence of funds from the Government for the establishment of the museum.

It truly is a shame that the 1,500,000 Jews who served in all the Allied Forces, including the partisan and underground military organizations, should not be memorialized in the Jewish State. There is no other nation or country which made a comparable contribution to the war effort than the 1,500,000 Jews who served, out of a total population of

12 million Jewish souls, as 6 million of our brethren perished under the Nazi tyranny.

WORLD MACHAL MUSEUM

World Machal has come to an agreement with the committee of the Museum for the Jewish Soldier in World War II, that the Machal Museum will be incorporated into the Museum for the Jewish Soldier, as most of the Machalniks were veterans of World War II. A large volume of material and memorabilia of Machal 1948-49 has been collected and collated, due largely to the enormous efforts made by Migdal Teperson.

INTERNET EDITION OF THE MACHAL BOOKLET

You will be pleased to know that the Machal booklet entitled "*MACHAL, OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE*" is now available on the internet and downloadable from links on the homepage of www.mahal2000.com, the Mahal 2000 website. AVI (American Veterans of Israel) will be placing an internet version of the booklet onto their website. www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html www.israelvets.com (Virtual Museum)

The 47-page internet edition in colour includes photographs, a bibliography of books written by and about Machal, a list of films, videos, and Machal websites.

So dear friends and colleagues, keep pedalling, drink lots of water, stay in the race, and God Willing, we shall meet in 2008.

*Sincerely,
Smoky Simon
Chairman, World Machal*

CONGRATULATORY LETTER FROM WORLD MACHAL TO THE NEW IDF CHIEF OF STAFF

18th February, 2007

Rav-Aluf Gaby Ashkenazi
Chief-of-Staff of IDF
Ministry of Defence
Hakirya
Tel Aviv

Dear Rav-Aluf Ashkenazi,

Please excuse me for not writing to you in Hebrew.

In my capacity as Chairman of World Machal (1948-49), and on behalf of my fellow-Machal comrades, I wish to congratulate you on your appointment as Chief-of-Staff of the IDF, and we wish you every success in your critically important assignment.

I was most interested to hear from a fellow-Machalnik, Aluf-Mishne (Mil.) David “Migdal” Teperson, a Machalnik from South Africa, that he served in the Palmach with your Late Father, a Machalnik from Bulgaria.

You may know that most of the 3,500 Machalniks from 44 countries who served in 14 branches of the IDF and on the Aliyah Bet ships were veterans of World War II. The Machal presence was predominant in the IAF and Air Transport Command (ATC), where 95% of the 425 flying crews were Machalniks, mainly from the Anglo-Saxon countries. The Machalniks played a pivotal role in two respects in the War of Independence – firstly in winning the war, and secondly in establishing the foundations on which the IDF was founded – ground forces, air force, and navy.

At the dedication of the Machal Memorial in 1993, the Late Yitzhak Rabin who was then Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, said in his speech, “You came to us when we needed you most, during those dark and uncertain days in our War of Independence. You gave us not only your experience, but your lives as well. The People of Israel and the State of Israel will never forget, and will always cherish this unique contribution made by you – the volunteers of Machal”. On an earlier occasion, the Late Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion said, “The Machal Forces were the Diaspora’s most important contribution to the survival of the State of Israel”.

As most of the Machalniks are now well into their 80’s, we are a “highly endangered species”, with a high rate of attrition. Notwithstanding the aging syndrome, we are planning a World Machal Reunion in 2008, to celebrate Israel’s 60th anniversary. On the occasion of the reunion, it would indeed be wonderful if the “old warriors” would have the opportunity of meeting the IDF’s incumbent Chief-of-Staff.

Once again, please accept our heartfelt good wishes and our prayers for the success of yourself, your officers, and your men and women in the IDF, in the fateful days and years ahead.

Respectfully,

Harold (Smoky) Simon, Chairman
World Machal

NAOMI'S CORNER

As a one person "speakers bureau" I have had the privilege and pleasure of talking to a number of our members in the United States and Canada. Every speaker, every member of AVI, has a personal story of idealism and courage worth sharing with all of our members, with their children and grandchildren, and with the public.

Martin Segal, born and raised in New York City, now resides in Boca Raton, Florida. His contribution to Hagana and to the IDF and State of Israel is documented in the IDF Archives in Hakiryia, Tel Aviv, Israel.

In the winter of 1946/1947 Marty was introduced to Teddy Kollek, who was in the US to organize a group to supply the communications equipment to Hagana. Marty became the purchasing and shipping agent

for military equipment and supplies. In May 1948 Marty became an assistant to the director of the Provisional Government of Israel Supply Mission. In the summer of 1948 Dr. Chaim Sheba, the head of Shin Resh, the Israeli Army's medical service, arrived in the States with instructions from Prime Minister Ben-Gurion to arrange financing to outfit Tel Hashomer Hospital, which had been stripped clean by the Jordanian Army. The Sheba Project was turned over to Marty, whose first purchase was 1000 new unused US Army hospital beds for one dollar each. He continued to raise funds by contacting charitable groups and offered them projects such as operating rooms, x-ray equipment, and wards for IDF soldiers.

Marty's last project for the Medical Corps was funding and helping to create a workshop for making artificial limbs for wounded soldiers. When the workshop was

completed Marty was invited to the inaugural ceremonies at which David Ben-Gurion opened the doors to the new facility. Marty brought his new bride to the ceremony. The new bride was Paya Goldberg, a member of the Zionist youth group Habonim. The year was 1950.

Marty was appointed chief purchasing agent for Israel by Ben-Gurion. He continued to work buying items as diverse as railway cars and 1500 milk cows and bulls needed to increase milk production in the new State. In 1966 Marty resigned to pursue other interests. He had worked with the State of Israel before its inception and afterwards for about 20 years.

Naomi Kantey

Note: *If you would like to share your Machal/Aliya Bet experience, please contact me at 201-836-2004, Naomi Kantey.*

Letters To The Editor

To the Editor:

Apologies for always writing as your critic. Your Winter 2007 edition front page headline worried me, namely "November 1948: American Aircrews to Israel Air Force – Keep Promise or We Quit!"

I for one cannot believe that all American aircrews were involved in this ultimatum. Nor can I believe that all American aircrews were only concerned with monetary or contract considerations. Being under a contract should exclude them from our definition of Machal, and, therefore, simply be considered mercenaries.

As you know, modern media

headlines have made Israel and its People the polecats of the world. Your headline should have been more specific, for example: "A group of American Aircrews", or "A.T.C. Aircrews", or: "Some American Aircrews".

The Late Eddy Kaplansky's book "The First Fliers" as at the end of October 1948 listed 182 American aircrew, including 22 on command and ground duties and six who had already made the supreme sacrifice. William Gerson and Ernest 'Glen' King, both died on 21st April. Benjamin Stein on 6th June; Robert Vickman 9th July; Spencer Boyd 18th July, and Stanley Andrews 20th October. The following two were killed after 30th October: Oliver

Holton 7th December, and Sam Pomerance 18th December. Sam Pomerance, an aeronautical engineer and licensed commercial pilot, was the leading figure behind the two Velvetta operations, participating in both of them, the second taking his life. As these operations are probably unknown to most AVI newsletter readers, I will add some information which I think will be of interest:

These operations involved ferrying Spitfire fighter aircraft, given to the free Czech Air Force by the British in World War II, then sold by the Czechs to Israel. Velvetta I was at the end of September, flying six Spitfires non-stop from Yugoslavia. It would be the longest

hop ever undertaken by such planes, using auxiliary fuel tanks fitted under the wings. The pilots, Israeli Modi Alon, American Sam Pomerance, South Africans Sydney Cohen, Jack Cohen, Boris Senior, and “Tuxie” Blau. Only three of them made it to Israel. Blau’s aircraft damaged in a belly landing at Niksic, Yugoslavia, the refueling stop after take-off from Czechoslovakia. Because of miscalculation in the use of the extra fuel tanks, both Modi Alon and Boris Senior force-landed at Rhodes, being imprisoned by the Authorities for fourteen days, facing possible execution, as at the time the Greek Government was involved in a war with Communist rebels. Velvetta II was carried out in adverse weather conditions during mid-December. The pilots – Americans: George Lichter, Sam Pomerance, Bill Pomerantz, Aaron Finkel, Bill Schroeder, Caesar Dangott; Israelis: Moti Fein, Sandy Jacobs, Danny Shapiro; Canadians: John McElroy, Lee Sinclair; South Africans: Jack Cohen and Arnie Ruch.

Only eleven of the thirteen made it to Israel- Sam Pomerance crashing into a Yugoslav mountain on the flight from Czechoslovakia and John McElroy having to return to Niksic because of engine trouble. Sam Pomerance’s non-Jewish wife Elsie was waiting at the Ekron Air Base, a down-to-earth woman embellished with a rich sense of humour. Being told of the disaster, she stood shocked. Recovering her composure, she said “If Sam had to go, I am glad it was this way – for a cause in which he passionately believed”. Sam was air crew, and certainly not in Israel for monetary or contract considerations.

*Sincerely,
Joe Woolf*

2/25/2007

*Editor Emeritus
3/2/2007*

P.S. – I wonder if it was wise to publish this story of November 1948. It was not something to be proud of. At the same time, the job done by ATC was absolutely of inestimable importance to the war effort. The “so-called revolt” did taint a wonderful performance, but in all dramatic situations in which humans are involved, some negative phenomenon appear to be inevitable.

Joe

Response to Joe Woolf:

The offending article was written on my watch so the current editor bears no responsibility for it.

I can only agree with most of what Joe Woolf writes with two exceptions. I would not amend the title of the article. The norm of journalism would have the headline entice the reader to read further. It becomes clear in the first few paragraphs that only certain aircrew members were disaffected in the way described. I joined the ATC after serving with the infantry on the Jerusalem front and had no expectations of remuneration beyond pocket money. I flew with some of the individuals mentioned and had no idea about their contractual relations before reading Avi Cohen’s excellent research.

Secondly, Joe Woolf would prefer only praiseworthy reports. I tire of the unsullied heroism and seek some realistic balance. Joe Woolf recognizes this in his closing note but would prefer to mask it.

Avi Cohen’s Geshet Aviri L’Atsmaut is a detailed and wonderfully balanced report on the ATC, its missions and personnel.

Sam Klausner

Dear Chaverim of AVI

Our “shtetl” (San Francisco) may be a continent away, but our shared experiences in Tzahal and Israel’s War of Independence keep us all linked together... Todah Rabbah for your work in maintaining the bonds of camaraderie.

*Kol Hakavod
Rabbi Yaacov Frankel
San Francisco, California*

Dear Editors,

It was nice getting the newsletter, it brings back many memories. I was among the students at the Hebrew University who were recognized as Machalniks. There were about 100 students, many World War II veterans of the American Army who really were important in the War of Independence, especially in Jerusalem. For us in Jerusalem the war started the night the UN Resolution was passed, 29th of November 1947. I remember some of the people mentioned in the newsletter: Ben Steuerman, Moshe Brotsky, Dave Marco, Sam Klausner (it’s hard to recognize him with that great white beard), and Jeny Rinov.

I came on the Marine Corps in February 1947. I stayed on in Israel, married and raised a family here. It is sad to read the inevitable obituaries. Several months ago a dear friend passed away. Esther (Suttner) Drillman came to Palestine in 1946. She was a friend of mine from New York. Our families were friends. She knew Hebrew very well, having been a student of Professor Abraham Halkin at Brooklyn College. His son Hillel Halkin is a well-known writer

PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDAR

ON SUNDAY, MAY 6, 2007 WE MARCH UP FIFTH AVENUE
IN THE SALUTE TO ISRAEL PARADE.

ON SUNDAY, MAY 20, 2007 WE GATHER FOR THE ANNUAL
MEMORIAL SERVICE AT WEST POINT REMEMBERING
MICKEY MARCUS AND ALL THE FALLEN MACHALNIKS.
(We may offer bus service from NYC at \$10.00 round trip)

DON'T STAY HOME  COME AND JOIN US!

(MORE INFORMATION TO FOLLOW)

in Israel. We were in the Hagana together, first-aid workers and also in the army after the State was declared. After the war, she went back to New York. She worked at the Israeli Consulate for some time. After her marriage, she came back to Israel with her husband and two small children. They settled in Jerusalem in Rehavia. Bert Drillman passed away several years ago. Esther died some months ago, leaving her daughter, two grandchildren, and her son. She was a dear, dear friend to all who knew her. Both of us had friends from our days in the Hagana from the veteran population in Israel.

It hasn't been easy living here all these years with wars and more wars. Will we ever have a more normal life? Terrorism makes every place in the world dangerous, but we are the most vulnerable.

*Sincerely,
Frieda (Drillick) Zeira
2 Hamaavak Street
Givatayim 53520
ISRAEL*

Dear Editor,

Save your confederate dollars, the South will rise again!

The January 2007 Midstream carried an article co-authored

by Giveon Cornfield, a British Machalnik living in Honolulu. They wrote of Israeli arms purchases in 1947-'48 and the role of Hank Greenspun. I decided it was time to read Hank's memoir, Where I Stand. An online search offered several volumes at over \$200 each! Obviously, like confederate money, those published memoirs of ours might make good investments.

They quote a recent historian, one Amtsur Ilan, on Hagannah's arms procurement operations in the US as "a mirage and Israeli deceptive dream". Si Speigleman, I guess you were just a mirage collecting guns door to door in New York.

Reminds me of another historian named Halamish who ventured that Mossad put too many crew members on the American-manned ships. But then again, mighty few historians have been on the high seas in a gale when your deck cargo breaks loose and you call "all hands on deck" to jettison the cargo. We didn't have too many hands that day, and fortunately no seasick historians.

*Sincerely,
Arthur Bernstein*

ODDS & ENDS

- ULVA/Arlosoroff former crew

and friends held an informal dinner April 15, 2007, 1300 at "Misadag Restaurant" Bat Galim Promenade, Haifa. 60 years since they rammed up on the beach.

- Exodus people are exploring possibilities of a 60th anniversary Israel reunion. Nothing specific or definite to report as of yet.
- We are in receipt of the initial distribution from Adri an Phillips' bequest.
- The current issue of the Hadassah magazine carried a fine article on our museum, as did the North Shore Jewish Journal of Massachusetts.
- We are still seeking permanent or timely locations to mount copies of our museum displays.
- The 60th anniversary voyage of the S.S. Ben Hecht was commemorated at the Silver Spring, Maryland Jewish Center. Thanks to Moshe Brodetsky.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Joseph Warner has taken over the AVI presidency from Art Bernstein, who completed his term

MAILED IN YOUR DUES
CHECK?....
WE THANK YOU!
FORGOT?... PLEASE
REMIT WITHOUT DELAY
AND SAVE US POSTAGE
AND TIME TO MAIL
REMINDER NOTICES.

at the end of 2006. Joe served in the Canadian Air Force during WWII after graduating from the University of Toronto. He was trained as a wireless air gunner on bombers. He joined the Machal volunteers, but the Israel Air Force had no bombers mounted with weapons requiring his skills. Joe joined the 5th troop-anti-tank regiment. The unit provided artillery firepower in support of the Givati Brigade's action at Faluja and Iraq es-Suweidan. After the war, Joe built a career in the corporate world working for the Pfizer Corporation. He ran Pfizer's business in Israel for 12 years. He retired from the company in 1995 after 40 years of service.

As we mourn the loss of our treasurer Dave Gerard, AVI keeps on going. Paul Kaye has assumed the function of AVI Treasurer. Paul has been an AVI member since its early days. He has served as an officer of the organization for many years and held the presidency several times, last in 2003. Paul served on the Hatikvah and the Galila and subsequently in the Shayetet 13 commando unit.

Sam Klausner has retired as editor of the AVI Newsletter to devote his time to private research and writing. Readers of the Newsletter agree that Sam has done an outstanding job publishing the Newsletter for many years. Sam is an Air Force veteran of the ATC's mission ferrying weapons and materials from Czechoslovakia to the newly founded State of Israel. With this issue, Art Bernstein is taking over as the AVI Newsletter editor. Art served as Senior Deck Officer on the Ulua (Haim Arlosoroff).

The AVI Board is thankful to these chaverim for their service and for assuming new responsibilities at a very difficult time.

OPERATION VELVETTA

Continued from pg. 3

Americans George Lichter, Bill Pomerantz, Aaron Finkel; Israelis Sandy Jacobs, Mottie Fein (Hod), led by American

Sam Pomerance. The planes which were without oxygen equipment ran into foul weather. All except Pomerance and Pomerantz rendezvoused over Niksic airfield. Sam Pomerance was lost in the clouds over Yugoslavia. Possibly he tried to climb on top of the weather and flaked out through lack of oxygen. He flew into a mountain. It is not known what happened. He failed to arrive at Niksic. Then the Yugoslav authorities notified them that a plane had crashed into the mountains and it was confirmed that it was Sam's.

It was later learned that Bill Pomerantz had made a forced landing on a beach near Zader. He was given a hard time by the Yugoslav police until the intervention of an Israeli agent.

Elsie Pomerance, Sam's wife, had in the meantime embarked in a Skymaster to Israel.

The weather deteriorated further and the other four returned to Kunowice.

The remaining Spitfires plus the four that had returned departed Kunowice on

December 20th in two formations of three followed by one of five. The first three of Mottie Fein, Danny Shapiro were led by George Lichter, followed by the second flight of Arnie Ruch, Caesar Dangott with Canadian John McElroy leading. In the last formation of five were Jack Cohen. Sandy Jacobs, Aaron Finkel and another American, Bill Schroeder, led by Canadian Lee Sinclair. All eleven arrived at Niksic 3 hours 45 minutes later.

These eleven Spitfires with the

same pilots take off for Ekron in two formations, one of five and one of six, each led by a C46 navigating, carrying the Spits' armaments and life-rafts in case of ditching. One, (McElroy's), had to return to Niksic due to engine problems. The remaining ten planes reach Ekron after a flight of 6 hours 45 minutes, landing in quick succession one after the other.

Jack Cohen had taken the worst Spitfire. She behaved reasonably well at the beginning, but later gave him the most uncomfortable ride he had ever made. The violent vibrations of the panel mystified him. The icy waters of the Mediterranean sent shivers down his spine but he drew comfort from the fact that he had never heard of a Merlin engine letting anyone down. This one proved faithful also. All the same, he was thankful when his wheels hit the tarmac at Ekron.

Jack Cohen's was the sad task of breaking the news of Sam Pomerance's (2) death to his wife, a task made all the more difficult from the fact that in Czechoslovakia he had been very close to the couple. Elsie was a down-to-earth woman, a non-Jewess, who embellished life with a rich sense of humour. Now she stood shocked. Recovering her composure, she said if Sam had to go, she was glad it was this way – for a cause in which he passionately believed. Cohen searched for the cause of his erratic and bumpy flight and found it. He had flown all the way on eight cylinders. Somebody had bungled at Uherske Hradiste.

After another brief stay, Cohen returned to Czechoslovakia, this time with Bob Dawn, an American who had worked with Sam Pomerance on the conversions in Operation Velvetta I and now continued with the work. Cohen did the test

flying. When the planes were fully serviceable, they were crated and sent by sea. An elderly Czech, with a cordial dislike of the Communist dispensation in the land, pleaded with Cohen to crate him with one of the planes, but Cohen, sympathetic as he was, had to refuse, rightly believing that the man would not survive the voyage.(3)

(1) *Mottie Hod was later to become chief of the IAF during the Six day War.*

(2) *Sam Pomerance and Bill Pomerantz, were not related.*

(3) *Velvetta II details provided by IAF archival records*

Note:

This narrative on Velvetta II is printed with the kind permission of the voluntary publishing team of the book "South Africa's 800", researched and written by veteran South African Jewish author, Henry Katzew, now in his 90's and living in retirement at Sarasota, Florida. While written mainly through South African eyes, this book also contains gripping anecdotes about volunteers from the USA, Britain, and other countries. Its 350 pages record almost all the historical events of that period, and brings the reader into the great atmosphere of those times. To anyone interested, the book is now available from "Migdal" Teperson. E-mail: dave_tep@netvision.net.il, or phone: 972-9-958-2718.

The Velvetta operations I and II were conducted by the fledgling Israel Air Force in 1948. Their mission was to ferry WWII Spitfire fighter aircraft purchased from Czechoslovakia to Israel as the War of Independence was in full swing. The "Spits" were flown to Israel with a refueling stop in Yugoslavia. They formed the backbone of squadron

101 and engaged the enemy in combat in the fall and winter of 1948. They were an important factor in Israel's emerging victorious in the war. Most of the aviators of squadron 101 were U.S., English and South African Machal volunteers. The "operational" language was English.

Here is the story of Velvetta II that appears in the book "South Africa's 800" by Henry Katzew.

GEFILTE FISH

On May 30th an incident occurred which was to become part of early IAF lore. A Messerschmidt flown by an American Jewish pilot, Hilton Rubinfeld, attacking an Arab column in the Tulkarm area was hit. The pilot ditched in the Mediterranean off the fishing village of Michmoret, and swam to shore. Fearing the villagers might mistake him for an Egyptian, and lacking Hebrew or Yiddish to explain himself, he waded ashore, his hands up, proclaiming his identity with "Gefilte Fish! Gefilte Fish!".

(From South Africa's 800)

DAVID GERARD

Continued from pg. 1

later established Kibbutz Sasa, near the Lebanese border, during the War of Independence. Collins Distributors, our Shoo-shoo ships chandler, in lower Manhattan, supplied 2 spare boilers. It was quietly rumored that the sealed boiler drums were stuffed with small arms. It took 31 days to cross the Atlantic to Marseilles. The S.S. Mala made 2 crossings from La Ciotat, France to Haifa in the summer of 1948, under wartime conditions. Each crossing carried about 1400 Displaced Persons, emptied out of a refugee camp, north of Marseilles called Grande Arenas. The younger DPs were

recruited into the IDF, right on the dock. A few fell, hardly trained, in the battle for Latrun."

Abe Rotenberg, who also served on the Mala, recalls that most of the Holocaust survivors who sailed on the ship to Israel had previously been forced off the Exodus as it was intercepted by the British and returned in prison ships to camps in Germany. They found their way to La Ciotat and unto the Mala for the trip to the newly-founded State of Israel.

David's wife, Arleen, mentioned that in November they were to celebrate their 50th wedding anniversary. David is also survived by his son Bryan and daughter Anna, their spouses Joyce and Alan and four grandchildren; Justin, Jaclyn, Taylor, and Randi.

Dave served AVI as Treasurer for many years during which he solidified our finances and kept us on course. He was a cautious and conservative board member who voiced strong opinions. So Dave was our gauge in testing the waters before we jumped in. He was an outspoken voice for prudence and moderation. But his passion for all our activities was such that he rolled up his sleeves at every opportunity to make things happen; be it membership dues, West Point Assembly, Salute to Israel Parade or our Hanukah celebration. Each spring he would lead the AVI contingent marching up Fifth Avenue in honor of the State he helped create.

Sam Klausner said it well in remembering Dave Gerard; "Few surpassed David in his devotion to Israel, to the Jewish people and his commitment to sustaining the history of Machal and Aliyah Bet". His death is an immense loss for all of us.

The Gerard family can be

contacted at 10 Trumpet Lane,
Commack, L.I., N.Y. 11725

Si Spiegelman

P.S. Martin Silver will be serving his fifth tour of duty as a volunteer in Sar-el during October 2007. Sar-el volunteers serve with the IDF providing support services to the troops. He asks Machalniks to join him. It is never too late. As Martin states "I would be glad to have other Machalniks join with me. I will make it easy for them to serve". Martin can be reached at microtools-usa@msn.com

ISRAEL DAY PARADE 2007

Ira Feinberg led a small contingent of AVI members in this year's Salute to Israel parade up Fifth Avenue in New York on May 6, 2007. The few stalwart ones this year marched proudly with fluttering banners high past the acclaiming crowds on the sidewalks.

There were loud cheers and lots of enthusiastic applause along the parade route as the loudspeakers announced that the "Veterans of Aliyah Bet and Israel's War of Independence" were marching by.

The marchers were accompanied by children and grandchildren; a sign of the times that brought back memories of earlier years when scores of AVI members participated in the tribute to the Jewish State we helped create...Hayu z'manim.

Si Spiegelman

RESCUE IN BROAD DAYLIGHT

It happened towards the end of the summer of 1948. The State of Israel was barely six months old and



Salute to Israel Parade -AVI Assembly.

Left to right: Randi Knepper (granddaughter of Dave Gerard z"l), Ira Feinberg, Si Spiegelman, Paul Kaye, Harold Kraushar, Benjamin Marcus (Mickey Marcus family).

struggling for its existence against the Arab armies that invaded the country from the north, south and east. From the north, the Syrian Army attacked; from the east the Transjordanian Legion and the Iraqi army and from the south the Egyptian army advanced. They were accompanied by units from the various Arab movements such as the Moslem Brotherhood.

Battalion 89 was a commando unit in the 8th Brigade made up entirely of volunteers. The battalion was usually entrusted with vitally important tasks. The mission at the time was to capture the police station at Beit Jubrin on the road between Migdal, on the coast, and Hebron which lies south of Jerusalem – a

vital lateral artery that served the units of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies.

The large, reinforced concrete police station was easily captured from the Egyptians by units of Battalion 89, but immediately after its fall a battle commenced with a Jordanian armoured unit that had probably arrived late to take over command from the Egyptians. The Jordanian unit was equipped with mortars and machine guns and systematically shelled and strafed the police station and the Israeli force that confronted it at a village near the police station. The Israeli unit had no artillery, as at that stage of the war there was a severe shortage of artillery. The heavy fire laid down by the Jordanian armoured

unit wounded several members of B Company. It was vital to remove them from the line of fire in order to render first aid. Enemy fire immediately hit whoever tried to reach the wounded lying close to the Jordanian position. One of the Israeli wounded soldiers was Shlomo Friedrich, the company medic who had been hit close to the Jordanian position.

Leslie Marcus, one of the soldiers of the unit, a South African volunteer, asked my permission to try and rescue him. Together we worked out the best route and he set off immediately. It was early afternoon, a time when the enemy would immediately spot any movement, unless it was in the shadow of the rocks and shrubs. Initially Leslie's movements went undetected, but at a certain stage could not remain unnoticed. It was essential at this point to act with great speed and decisiveness. The Jordanians opened fire. Leslie picked up speed and reached Shlomo Friedrich's position unharmed. He hoisted the wounded soldier onto his shoulders, crawled out of the position, and ran across the open ground. He reached the collection point for the wounded with Shlomo on his back. Although exhausted from the physical and mental effort, Leslie immediately went back down the hill to join his comrades in defending the command post.

As Leslie Marcus' commander, I am proud to recount this story of valour.

*Naftali Arbel
Company Commander,
Company B,
89th Battalion*

