

SPRING 2008



AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

UNITED STATES & CANADA VOLUNTEERS

136 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016

Life After AVI...

The matter of organizational survival was on our minds. Should the future of AVI as an organization, be sustained by admitting veterans of Israeli conflicts after 1948? Should comradeship among the surviving veterans and the memory of Machal and Aliya Bet be sustained by devolving the organization to a Trusteeship? Three years ago the AVI Newsletter published articles arguing for each of these futures. Subsequently, the entire membership was polled. Each of the options received significant support but the majority elected to follow the second path, appointment of Trustees.

Twelve Trustees were selected. Some were the children of veterans while others were selected for their expertise in one or another area of organizational management. Last year the then current officers of AVI and those Trustees able to get to New York gathered at the offices of the Jewish National Fund for an all-day orientation meeting. Those unable to come to New York participated through a conference call. The AVI Executive committee had prepared a charge for the Trustees. The charge envisioned a transfer of management and financial responsibility to the Trustees by a date certain. At that date the funds in the AVI treasury would be transferred to Trustee control. The Trustees would assist members in staying in touch with one another and in arranging any events that AVI members might initiate. It was not anticipated that any further dues would be assessed. The Trustees would also maintain contact with AVI's correspondents

such as Israel Consulates in the United States and Canada, World Machal and Machal and Aliya Bet Veterans in other countries as well as with the communications media. Last, the trustees would oversee the AVI archives in custody of the University of Florida as well as the exhibition and web site produced by AVI.

Following a discussion of the

charge, Machal Executive Committee members briefed the Trustees on the histories of Aliya Bet and Machal and the history of our organization. We agreed that subcommittees of the Trustees be constituted around particular responsibilities such as financial records and management, computer list maintenance, monitoring

AFTER AVI continued on pg. 10

Looking to the Future

David Teperson, of South Africa Machal/Palmach, is seeking donations to keep the International World Machal, Machal-Nachal website expanding. This website complements the present Machal Museum in Israel. It documents the overseas volunteers serving in 1946-1949 and the 1956 war and those who saw combat in Lebanon recently. There are 200-400 currently serving in the IDF from overseas.

Col. Teperson has labored tirelessly on this project to honor and record the participation of world wide Machal. He is reaching out for pictures, letters, materials and donations.

Contact at Telephone number 972-9958271 8

or 9 Havazelet St. Kfar Shmaryahu 46910

Fax 972-99560673

Donations to Machal Museum P.O. Box 9590 Kfar Shmaryahu 46910

Proposal from David Guttman; Refuting the Naqbah Myth

The Arabs and their various gentile and Jewish allies are working hard and successfully to legislate an enormous lie – that the innocent Palestinian Arab victims suffered a “Naqbah” at the hands of the Jewish forces in 1948 – into the truth of Israel's War of Independence. To argue against that lie is to be a “Naqbah Denier” on a par with a “Holocaust Denier”.

Given our personal experience in the War of Independence, AVI members are uniquely fitted to refute that lie. We ask all AVI'ers who witnessed the flight of the Arabs in 1947 to 1949 to write blunt accounts of what you saw, and where and when and what was your role. We will collect and publish your essays for presentation as an authoritative document. Send us your reports and we will take it from there.

Arthur Bernstein c/o AVI

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Or call me at 978-532-6956.

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Websites
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<http://www.israelvets.com>

MASSACRES ???

by Ralph Lowenstein

Every elderly Arab in every Arab refugee camp in the West Bank, Jordan and Lebanon apparently has a key to a mansion the family left behind in Israel in 1948. This lost mansion has become part of the Palestinian myth that millions of Palestinians were chased out of their palatial homes in 1948 at the point of a rifle or by the overt threat that they would be massacred.

In truth, some Arabs did live in fine homes, especially in Haifa, Jerusalem and Jaffa. In truth, some were forced to leave their homes in the course of combat between Arab soldiers and Jewish soldiers. In truth, there were some massacres as there are in any war – but these massacres were perpetrated by Arabs, as well as Jews, and the record will show that there were many more by Arabs than by Jews.

But these are the facts:

- The typical Arab home was not a mansion. In urban areas, they were more likely to be slums, by Western standards. In Arab villages, they were typically small stone houses facing streets with open sewers running down the center.
- Those few Arabs forced to leave their homes lived in strategic areas that had been used continually since November 29, 1947, to snipe at and otherwise harass and impede communication between Jewish towns, cities and kibbutzim. Some 2,000 Jewish civilians were killed in the War of Independence, most of them before May 15, 1948.
- The Jewish massacres have been blown far out of proportion by “revisionist” Israeli historians like Benny

Morris (“Righteous Victims,” Vintage Books, 2001), who is generally reviled by his own colleagues at Ben-Gurion University.

Some 750,000 Arabs became refugees as a result of the Arab-Israeli war of 1948. A great number left during the period between November 1947 and May 1948, when the British, not Jews, were still in charge and had 100,000 well-armed troops garrisoned in the country. British newsmen had free rein in the country during this period. Stories of Jews forcing Arabs to leave their homes are hard to find in the British press of the period.

Like civilians anywhere, Arabs departed in droves from Haifa, Jerusalem, Jaffa and other mixed areas to get out of the way of fighting between Jews and Arabs. The Jewish civilians had nowhere to go. The Jewish sin, if there were any, was not to let the Arabs return after the armistices of 1949. But who could honestly blame the Israeli government for acting in the best interest of protecting its own people? The armistices were not peace agreements. Israel was still threatened, and, in fact, four other wars did occur.

Through no fault of their own, the Jewish forces were not well trained or well disciplined. In fact, the few major alleged massacres committed by Jews occurred in battles involving irregular forces before statehood was declared on May 14, 1948. Even after statehood, the ragtag Israeli army did its best to organize an army overnight from a mixed group of sabras, new immigrants and a scattering of foreign volunteers, and both training and discipline were often questionable.

In my own unit, the 79th Armored Battalion, there was never anything approaching basic training. We fought when necessary, and

MASSACRES continued on pg. 11

WHY ALIYAH BET AND MACHAL HISTORY REMAINS LARGELY UNKNOWN.

by Ralph Lowenstein

Over the years, veterans of Aliyah Bet and Machal have had one common refrain: "No one in America knows about us. Israel pretends we never existed."

There is some truth and much misunderstanding about both statements.

We were and are largely unknown in the United States and Canada. Out of a population of more than 5 million Jews, we numbered only 1,250. It is safe to say that very few North American Jews know about the volunteers. During my own lifetime, no American Jew or Christian who discovered that I had volunteered for Israel in 1948 had ever met another American Jew who did the same. The odds against their knowing someone like me were about 4,000 to 1. Immediately after the 1948 war, the publicity about our experience was nil. All American volunteers had violated the terms of their passports, and perhaps other laws then extant, risking at best fines and jail time, and at worst loss of their citizenship. Canadian laws, if applied strictly, could punish volunteers from that country severely.

We did not want publicity.

For the most part, the American and Canadian volunteers did not bear names that attracted publicity. Two exceptions were "Buzz" Beurling, Canada's top ace in World War II, and Mickey Marcus, a West Point graduate with a brilliant World War II record. Marcus had also been an important public servant in New York City. Both died very early in the war, Beurling in a plane crash in Italy, and Marcus in the attempt to open the road to surrounded Jerusalem. Except for three other unusual individuals -- Ben Dunkelman or Toronto, Paul Shulman of Stanford, Connecticut, and Al Schwimmer of Bridgeport,

Connecticut -- the volunteers were not appointed to high ranking jobs in the Israeli military, partially because of their lack of facility in Hebrew. Dunkelman, an outstanding field commander for the Royal Canadian Army in World War II, recruited the 300 men from Canada, then became brigadier of the 7th Brigade. Shulman, an Annapolis graduate, was the first commander of the Israeli Navy. Schwimmer, purchased the large transports and recruited the air crews that would provide the air bridge from Czechoslovakia to Israel; he became second-in-command of the Israeli Air Force and later founded and served as CEO for many years of Israel Aircraft Industries, the largest employer in Israel, with more than 20,000 employees.

Most of the volunteers had World War II experience, and could contribute badly-needed military skills to Israel. The clandestine recruitment process sought young men and women between the ages of 20 and 26 -- old enough to have had military experience, not old enough to have the weighty responsibilities of spouses and children. Our parents were not among the movers and shakers in American Jewish life. With only one or two exceptions, we were first generation Jews on at least one side of our family. Our fathers had not yet "made it." In my research, I found only four volunteers from Ivy League schools. The Jewish representation in the student body at Columbia University was significant in 1948, perhaps as high as 20 to 30 percent. Yet I was the only undergraduate at Columbia to volunteer.

Only two published novels were written by volunteers about their experience; neither was a best-seller. The three or four non-fiction books over the years about this general subject concentrated on the effort to rescue Holocaust survivors or acquire arms for Israel, not on the critical role of the volunteers, including some Christians.

In short, we were never

"forgotten," because we were never known in the first place.

This is not to say that we did not provide significant services for the war effort. In two areas, the North American volunteers contributed far out of proportion to their numbers. Those two areas were Aliyah Bet and the Air Force. The young men in Aliyah Bet crewed the big ships that brought almost half of all the Holocaust survivors from Displaced Persons camps throughout Western Europe to other more livable refugee camps in or near Jewish Palestine. Exodus 1947, captained by a Palestinian Jew, but crewed mostly by young Americans, provided publicity that many contend was the tipping point for the United Nations vote in favor of partition. About half the North Americans who volunteered for the Israeli armed forces served in the Air Force. Without them, there would have been no Air Force, since only a few Israelis knew how to fly combat planes, and none could fly the large multi-motor aircraft in the Air Transport Command.

The ground war in 1948 Israel gets most of the space in history books, and deservedly so, but the small arms and ammunition to win the ground war were flown into the country from Czechoslovakia, the only country in the world that would sell war materiel in bulk to Israel, and the transport planes and bombers (and most of the pilots) were American in origin. Without the Air Transport Command and World War II veteran pilots, there might not be an Israel today.

American veterans of Aliyah Bet and Machal have criticized Israel for not giving more public credit to these North American contributions.

But I think that in making such criticism, we fail to take the larger perspective. We fail to see ourselves as Israelis see us.

First, Palestinian Jews suffered the brunt of Arab attacks, beginning in November 1947, well before Machal volunteers were anything but

WHY continued on pg. 12

ART'S VISIT IN ISRAEL

In the past Spring of 2007, my wife Evelyn and I journeyed to Haifa, Israel. It was to mark the sixtieth year since my clandestine immigrant ship was intentionally grounded on the beach there. The remaining crew and shoreside facilitators gathered for an informal sociable luncheon. We did have a little trouble recognizing each other after all those years. The alert, dashing sailors were now somewhat slower and paunchy. A picture of our little yacht ULUA that carries the name of my blockade running ship caught their fancy.

There was no formal program and no officials had been notified or invited, but I did ask my neighbor who the young general was who had joined us. A shoulder shrug. He certainly wasn't invited. This was a pay-your-way affair. Of course many of us rose to make remarks and observations. I eulogized our most recently departed shipmate and paid long past due tribute to our skipper, a master among master mariners. The elderly woman sitting next to the young general introduced herself as a passenger from the Ulua, thanking us profusely for giving her a chance to have a full life. Turning to the general, she said "... and my son

would like to say a few words".

Well, he spoke in Hebrew and we uncomprehending Yankees tried not to look too blank. And he graciously translated into English. This tall, lean, square-jawed, well-spoken general couldn't thank us enough for giving him the opportunity to be born in Israel and to be who he is.

It was a mighty moving moment.

*Arthur Bernstein
Summer 2007*

Obituaries

LOLA SPRINZELES



Lola Sprinzeles

Lola Sprinzeles passed away on January 5th, 2008 after a long and hard battle with cancer. She served as AVI President from 1988 to 1990 and was a long-standing, active member of the organization. Even in sickness she traveled to Israel at every opportunity. She showed a true love for Israel and Machal. In her professional life she was a psychotherapist, having earned a PhD from New York University. During her career she worked for the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and in her private practice. She is survived by her two children, Daphna

and Michael, two grandchildren and a brother.

Lola was born in Germany and was one of the 10,000 children who found refuge in England, escaping alone through the "kindertransport". She went to school in England and subsequently took nursing training. In 1948 with the establishment of Israel she volunteered to serve in Israel's Army Medical Corps. She wrote later: "Since I had narrowly escaped the horrors of the Holocaust, I felt I owed "my people" allegiance and served in the IDF. I always believed, had there been a Jewish homeland, the holocaust might not have happened or at least not have cost millions of innocent lives."

After two years of military service, Lola volunteered to serve in Aden with "Operation Magic Carpet", bringing Yemenite Jews to Israel. She later immigrated to the U.S to return to her studies and in 1955 married Paul Sprinzeles, also a veteran of Israel's War of Independence.

*Yehei Zichrona Livracha
Si Spiegelman*

LOLA SPRINZELES: VOLUNTEERS AGAIN AS A DEVOTED SENIOR

Lola wrote this letter in 2004

In 1948 I volunteered (from England) to serve in the IDF. Very few people knew of my plan and those who did know considered me crazy. At this point in time, the reaction of family and friends is not different. While my immediate family and friends did not exactly support my various trips to Israel, they understood my desire to do so. In 2002 I (again) embarked on my venture despite disparaging remarks and even ridicule; for example, "Israel is waiting for assistance from a woman in her seventies (other than financial contributions)? What do you want to achieve by going to a war-torn country? I planned to volunteer in some capacity and was not to be deterred.

A former colleague from Columbia-Presbyterian Medical Center in New York City has become Director of Movement Disorders, Department of Neurology at Ichilov Hospital in Tel Aviv. Prior to his departure from New York (to return to Israel), he told me that he would accept me in his department any time I am interested in working in his

field. When I approached him upon my arrival in Israel, he kept his word and I was assigned to his department. My assignment consisted of computer operations, correcting charts, papers, etc., not a strenuous assignment but helpful to the overworked staff which was overburdened and stressed to the limit of endurance. Therefore, the work I did had been left for months. Life in Israel goes on despite depression and anxiety. The determination of most Israelis to survive in the face of scant tourism and economic distress compounds their feelings of Israel's isolation, disappointment and anger. I was saddened to find more gentiles visiting the "Holy Land" than our own brethren who were afraid to come to Israel. Personal health problems have curtailed my travel plans since 2002 but I fully intend to visit Israel before the end of 2004. I hope more machalniks will do so as well.

*Best,
Lola*

THREE EXODUS SAILORS

During the late fall of 2007, three Exodus sailors passed away within weeks of each other; Frank Lavine, Bill Millman and Bernie Marks. They were among the 40 Americans who volunteered in 1946 to sail the "USS President Warfield", a Chesapeake ferry boat that became the "Exodus 1947" and carried 4530 Holocaust survivors to the shores of Mandate Palestine. The vessel was intercepted by five royal navy destroyers in international waters. Passengers and crew threw potatoes and cans of kosher meat at the British marine boarding party. The British responded with tear gas, fire hoses and lead-weighted truncheons. The second mate, of the Exodus, Bill Bernstein, from San Francisco and two passengers were killed in the two-hour melee. The refugees were returned to German displaced persons camps, enflaming world opinion against the British government and its Jewish exclusion

policy in Palestine. On November 29, 1947, the United Nations voted in favor of a plan to establish a Jewish state alongside an Arab State in Palestine. Half a year later the State of Israel was born. Most of the refugees immigrated to Israel.



Marks - 1947



Millman - 1947



Lavine - 1988

Avi Livney, from New York City served as a pharmacist on the Exodus 1947. He now lives in Israel and remembers the three comrades-in-arms who passed away.

Dear Si,

The following is information that I know about Frank, Bill and Bernie. In addition, Frank and Bernie wrote their own stories which appear in the Aliyah Beth book, Ha'Shaarim Petuchim (The Gates Are Open).

BILL MILLMAN - Was born and brought up in Boston, Mass. During World War II he was in the U.S. Navy and served on the cruiser Pittsburgh. On the President Warfield (Exodus of 1947) he served as an A.B. and at the end was promoted to boatswain. During the battle with the British, Bill was in the wheelhouse and was shot through the jaw and shoulder, at the same time that Bill Bernstein was clubbed to death, but survived. After his recovery, he was deported back to the U.S.A. by the British authorities. During lighter moments on the ship Bill, a strapping six-footer, and Bernie Marks used to do some amateur boxing. In later years, he married and was in the drapery business in Boston. In 1999 Bill Millman narrated "Exodus-Desperate Journey" on the History Channel.

FRANK LAVINE - Was born and brought up in Boston, Mass. During World War II he was in the U.S. Army Air Force from 1942 to 1946. On the Exodus, Frank served in the deck crew and after the battle with the British, in which he was wounded, was one of the Americans on the three British prison ships who went to Germany with the maapilim. He was sent to the camp at Poppendorf, and he and the other members of the crew were smuggled out of the British Zone of Germany in the guise of being a soccer team. Back in the States, Frank received a masters degree in library science, and worked many years as a Library Director of the City of Medford, including a

period at the Library of Congress in Washington. For a number of years, Frank came to Israel each summer and worked as a volunteer and lecturer at the former immigrant camp at Atlit. He also participated in a number of sailings of American Jewish youth on "Exodus" trips from Europe to Israel in the 1990's. In later years he spent much time in the reading rooms of the Atheneum, in Boston, that he traveled to from his home in Medford. Frank passed away on December 1, 2007 at age 83. He is survived by the wife Katharine and daughter Sarah.

BERNARD MARKS - Was born and brought up in Cincinnati, Ohio. A graduate of the Merchant Marine Academy at Kings Point, he observed the D-Day landings in Normandy from the deck of a merchant ship. In 1946 he served as second mate on the Haganah, one of the two former Canadian corvettes that served in the Aliyah Beth. In his book "Underground To Palestine" I.F. Stone wrote extensively on "Tom" as he referred to Bernie, and called him a "lamed-vavnik". Bernie served as chief mate on the Exodus, was arrested when the ship arrived in Haifa and freed and expelled from Palestine after a month. Back in the country as war broke out, he was one of the few sent to Czechoslovakia for parachute training. Later, back in Cincinnati, he was for many years successful in real estate activities.

*Y'hei zichronam baruch.
Avi Livney (Exodus 1947)
Israel*

UNAFRAID

We Jews have a marvelous song in Yiddish titled in translation "I Ain't Afraid". It comes to mind when thinking of Bill Millman. U.S. Naval historian David C. Holly wrote about him " Bill Millman...ran to the starboard side of the wheelhouse (of the Exodus), grabbed a British sailor by the seat of the pants...Another British sailor aimed his pistol at point blank range and shot Millman in the jaw. He fell across the bridge, blood spurting

from his face..." Bill epitomized the spirit of the Exodus '47. He seized the opportunity. It was not granted. He and others risked their life so that our people live free and proud.

*Art Bernstein
Ulua/Haim Arlosoroff
Northland/Jewish State*

SWIFTY

Irvin R. "Swifty" Schindler, who made front-page news in July 1948 when he tried to smuggle a World War II B-17 bomber to Israel, died September 22, 2007, at the age of 91. Cause of his death was heart failure.

Schindler was also a key person in the successful effort to purchase transport aircraft in the U.S. during Israel's War of Independence and ferry them to Israel. His ownership of a license for a charter airline, Service Airways, provided a perfect front for the transport planes Israeli operatives were buying to provide transport for arms being purchased in Europe.

Then, his fortuitous friendship with a man who had connections with the president of Panama opened the way for these same planes to be transferred surreptitiously to a newly-created Panamanian airline, avoiding a U.S. embargo on sales of planes to Israel. Schindler earned the nickname "Swifty" because of his

quick gait, especially on the tarmac.

Swifty was a native of Miami, Florida, and learned to fly at a small airport in Gainesville, Florida, while attending the University of Florida. During World War II, he flew four-motor aircraft between the U.S. and Europe, carrying supplies to combat zones and bringing back wounded troops.

He began working with Haganah operatives, especially Al Schindler, in the U.S. in 1947, and used his knowledge and experience with heavy transports to advise on the types of aircraft needed to bring war materiel from Czechoslovakia to Israel. Following the War of Independence, he became one of the first pilots for El Al, moving his family to Israel for two years.

His attempt to fly a B-17 from Westchester County Airport in New York to Czechoslovakia was unsuccessful, but not until after a headline-making cat and mouse game with the FBI. Swifty first had to land the plane at a Royal Canadian Air Force Base in Halifax, Nova Scotia, because of bad weather. He was apprehended there by Mounties, but instead of flying the plane back to Westchester, he eluded the FBI plane escorting him and flew the B-17 across the Atlantic to an Azores refueling stop. He was arrested there by Portuguese



Swifty Schindler

authorities and extradited to the U.S., where a federal judge gave him a one-year suspended sentence.

As he was sitting in the pilot's seat of the B-17 on the ground at the Westchester County Airport, one of seven other volunteers on the plane – none of them pilots – said to Swifty, "Man, you have a lot of guts to fly a plane like this." Swifty replied, "No, you have a lot of guts to be flying with me. I have never been in the cockpit of a B-17 in my life." It was a true statement.

When Swifty left El Al to return to the U.S., he became a developer, mortgage broker and well-know talk-show host on a Miami radio station. He is survived by his son Roger, daughter Victoria and one grandson.

Ralph Lowenstein

IRVING "SWIFTY" SCHINDLER

Irvin ("Swifty") Schindler folded his wings in Miami (perhaps prophetically) on Yom Kippur. He was 92 and in failing health. Although Swifty is known for failing to deliver a B-17 bomber to Israel, what is less known is the very major role he played in the creation of the Israel Air Force. He has never received the credit justly due him.

In late 1947, on behalf of the Haganah, Al Schwimmer purchased ten Curtiss Commando C-46s and three Lockheed Constellations. The corporate cover for these aircraft was Swifty's privately owned company, Service Airways. Overnight, with its thirteen airplanes, Service Airways became the largest, legitimately licensed non-scheduled airline in the United States, Irvin R. Schindler, president and CEO. When the U.S. government moved to impound the aircraft, Swifty was instrumental in the formation of LAPSA, the Panamanian airline, into which the aircraft were transferred. Now, as an "international airline," LAPSA's airplanes delivered the munitions and supplies to Israel so vital for its victory in the War of

Independence. Without LAPSA, the end results might well have proved quite different. Without Swifty, there would have been no LAPSA.

The cast continues to diminish.

*Harold Livingston
Westlake Village, CA*

BILL LICHTMAN



Bill Lichtman

William "Bill" Lichtman, who helped deliver the three-plane fleet of B-17s to Israel and then served as a flight engineer in the 69 "Hammer" Squadron for the duration of the War of Independence, died in Chicago in October, 2007. He was 89 years old.

Born on the Lower East Side of New York City in 1918, Bill became a flyer during World War II, first serving with the RAF and then the United States Army Air Corps. He was a combat flight engineer in China-Burma-India Theater for six years.

The three B-17s were owned by a Miami businessman named Charlie Winters, who used them to ship cargo between Miami and Puerto Rico. He sold them to Israeli operatives for \$25,000 each. Lichtman's log shows that the three planes left Miami on June 19, 1948, refueled in Puerto Rico and the Azores, then landed in Zatec, Czechoslovakia on June 20.

After being refitted with guns and bomb racks in Zatec, the three B-17s, Israel's only heavy bomber

squadron, took off with full bomb loads on July 15. Bill's plane was piloted by Ray Kurtz, a former New York Jewish fireman, and also a World War II veteran. On their way to Israel, they made a detour over Cairo and dropped their bombs. It was the first time an Israeli plane had bombed Cairo, and essentially put a stop to the daily bombing of Tel Aviv by the Egyptians. Bill's log, now on display in the Museum of American and Canadian Volunteers in Israel's War of Independence, in Gainesville, Florida, and also on the AVI web site, www.israelvets.com, shows that his own B-17 in 69 Squadron made an incredible 50 combat flights between July and the cessation of fighting in January 1949.

Following the War of Independence, Bill returned to the U.S. and became a policeman in Chicago. However, he remained an indefatigable friend of Israel all his life, writing frequent letters to the editors of major metropolitan newspapers defending Israeli policies and extolling the exploits of American and Canadian volunteers.

He recounted his own experiences in two different air forces in a book, "Between the Star and the Cross" (New York: The Citadel Press, 1957).

Bill is survived by a daughter.

DESTINATION CAIRO

This page of a flight log kept by flight engineer Bill Lichtman, 30, of New York City shows that the B-17 took off from Miami on June 19, 1948. After refueling stops in Puerto Rico and the Azores, it landed in Zatec, Czechoslovakia, on June 20 to be refitted with guns and bomb racks. It took off from Zatec on July 15 with a full bomb load, and on its way to Israel detoured for a bombing mission over Cairo. This was the first and time an Israeli plane bombed Cairo in 1948. This raid essentially put a stop to the daily bombing of Tel Aviv by the Egyptians. Pilot of the B-17 was Ray Kurtz, a former New York City fireman. Both Kurtz and Bill Lichtman

were World War II veterans.

BILL

LICHTMAN LETTERS

Si:

Bill Lichtman's daughter called and left a message that Bill died in October. I wondered why I had not heard from him – he would write me at least two times a month for the last five or six years, and would really get ticked if I did not respond to him at least once a month. He had no e-mail, so it was a chore for me, but he became a good friend over the years. He did more in the way of writing letters to the editor defending Israel and promoting the contribution of Machal than any other person I ever knew, and his letters always appeared in major publications.

Ralph Lowenstein

To Letters to the Editor:

I am Wm.(Bill) Lichtman. I am a member of the AVI. Sometimes I wonder why? If it wasn't for someone like Ralph Lowenstein, a true gentleman I pack the AVI in and say good bye. I read the recent AVI newsletter and everything about the air force, the flying of aircraft to Israel, etc, etc. and I'll be damned! There isn't one word about the three B-17's that were smuggled out of Miami, or the bombing of Cairo. Believe me when I say flying the B-17's to Czechoslovakia and on to Israel was not "chopped liver". The IAF don't seem to know a damn thing about the men that flew the B-17's and the important part the 17's played in the 1948 war. As to the 69th- B-17 "Hammer" squadron, it's like we never were in Israel during the war. I busted my butt- almost lost my life getting one to Israel. I could use stronger language, but I'll end here.

Sincerely

*Wm. (Bill) Lichtman
Chicago*

Note: Bill Lichtman passed away since this letter was received

IRV FELLNER



Irv Fellner in 1948

Irv Fellner, a loving husband, father and grandfather, died August 27, 2007 at his home in Mesa at the age of 83. He is survived by his wife Eileen, six children and 11 grandchildren. He is also survived by a sister, Harriet Levin

Irv was born in New York City. He served in the U.S. Army from 1943-46 and fought in Europe during World War II. He later saw action with the Haganah in Palestine in 1947-48. He is a member of the American Veterans of Israel and a former member of the Jewish War Veterans.

Irv received a master's degree in social work from Indiana University in 1952. Among his positions was regional consultant in child welfare for the U.S. Children's Bureau, and



Irv Fellner

director of the Foster Home Division of the Jewish Child Care Association of New York. He and his family moved to Arizona in 1971 when he took a position as a social worker for the Bureau of Indian Affairs on the Gila River Indian Reservation. He later worked for the Department of Defense as Director of Community Activities on a U.S. Army base in Germany. During his career as a social worker, he published a number of professional articles.

After retiring, Irv began a second career as a playwright and had three plays produced, including two off-Broadway in New York -- "Bitter Herbs" and "Sam's Quest." His most recent play, "The 8th Stage," was performed at Temple Emanuel in Tempe this past May.

Irv was interred at the National Memorial Cemetery of Arizona. Contributions in his memory are suggested to plant trees in Israel through the Jewish National Fund (www.jnf.org). Irv also asked that in his memory you hug your children and grandchildren.

Dan Fellner (son)

Gilbert, AZ

YITZHAK HIMMELFARB

In Memory of My Brother Yitzhak (Jack Himmelfarb) (Of blessed memory)



Yitzhak Himmelfarb

Yitzhak was two years older than I. During our childhood we

both received the same education in a Hasidic family in Poland before World War II. We were orphaned upon our father Haim's (Of blessed memory) death on September 5, 1939 when members of the Nazi SS carried out the first massacre of Jews in Poland. About 60 Jews, among them our father (of blessed memory) were murdered in the local synagogue in the town of Krasnosielc which is located in northern Poland about 32 km from the border with East Prussia. Five weeks later we were driven out of our home to the Russian occupied area of Poland (Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement) and the Russians exiled us to the Far North. In my autobiography "From the Holocaust to a New Dawn" I describe what happened to us during this period. Yitzhak behaved heroically and served both for me and others as a personal model for resisting suffering, solicitude for and solidarity with the family and with our neighbors.

I will never forget these events to the end of my life.

At the end of the war we arrived in France on our way to Israel. In the month of June 1948 we went to the office of the Machal in Paris and volunteered to serve in the Palmach. We fought during the War of Independence with the Hativat HaNegev. Yitzhak saw action in the area of Bir Asluj and Dahariya south of Hebron.

Yitzhak left after him a loving wife Tova, a son Ron, who is an attorney in Toronto and a daughter Irit who is a family specialist.

His death was a great shock to us and left us in deep sorrow as though part of our history was taken away with him. May his memory be blessed.

*His brother: David Shachar
(Himmelfarb)
Ramat Gan, Israel*

MIKE ONDRA

Mike Ondra was born in 1912 in Slovakia. He immigrated to the U.S and served in the Air Force during WWII as Chief Aircraft Mechanic in England and then France. In 1948

Mike was hired by Al Schwimmer because of his mechanical expertise with C-46's that were purchased in the war surplus market. He went on to Czechoslovakia to support the airlift of weapons and supplies to Israel.

His story is intertwined with that of seven other non-Jewish Americans involved in a top secret operation to bring war surplus C-46's and converted B-17 aircraft to Israel. These planes were flown by U.S pilots and ferried disassembled fighter planes and large amounts of armament from Zatec airfield in Czechoslovakia to Ekron field (name changed later to Tel Nof)

He served in Israel between 1952 and 1955 as chief of the propeller shop and then Flight Engineer. Back in the U.S he continued his civilian occupation working for major airlines until his retirement. His wife Winona passed away several years ago. He is survived by his children Michael, Thomas, and Joy. Grandchildren Matthew and Tara; Cedrick, Derrick and Liana; Jonathan and Christopher. His story appears in books written by Evelyn Dahm's and Winona Ondra concerning the 1948 War highlighting the contribution of non-Jewish volunteers who served in Machal.

Michael Ondra (son)

Note: Evelyn Dahm's book is titled "Gutsy Guys and Rattle Trap Planes That Helped Save a Nation".

MARSHALL SCHWARZBACH

Marshall Schwarzbach passed away on September 11, 2007 just following his 81st birthday. He was born and raised in Chicago and became a prominent attorney in that city. During World War II he served in the Air Force as a side and tail gunner on B-17's and P-61 night fighters. He was shot down over Germany. The pilot died in the crash but Marshall survived with fractured limbs. A farmer helped him reach an advancing British unit. The British army hospital

where he was treated was located outside the recently liberated Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. Here he discovered the atrocities perpetrated on Jewish prisoners that he never forgot. In 1948, when Haganah representatives contacted him he immediately volunteered to serve in the Israel Air Force. He sailed to France and then on to Haifa on the Pan York. Because of the U.S. embargo he took the name of Moshe Cohen but was known to his air force buddies as "Blackie". He served in the 69 squadron out of Ramat David as a side gunner on the B-17's. He saw action in the battles of the Negev in fall of 1948 over Falujah, El Arish, and Majdal. During one of the sorties, a messerschmit ME-109 flown by fighter pilot Ezer Weizman flew cover on his side. Many years later, Marshall told an amused President Ezer Weizman that catching the silhouette of the German fighter plane he reflexively trained his sights on the Messerschmit with his finger touching the trigger.

Marshall Schwarzbach is survived by his wife Ilene, his children James, Steven, Kathy Stewart, Gayle Kagen and twelve grandchildren.

James Schwarzbach (son)

PHIL (EPHRAIM) TSOUK

I sailed with Phil on the Ulua and the Pan York. We were both engineers, he was Chief and I was First. Phil was the most knowledgeable engineer with whom I ever sailed. It took a lot of ingenuity to keep those rust buckets going and Phil came up with some very creative ideas.

However, the most useful idea had nothing to do with engines. In Costanza, Romania we had to get in the good graces of the Russians so Phil was selected to throw a party for them. He got the best vodka and the fanciest sandwiches. The Russians came and were polite but seemed half-hearted. After a discussion with

the ship's chandler, he got the most rat gut Vodka he could find and put the biggest, fattiest chunk of pork he could find in the middle of the table. The Russians seemed overjoyed. They drank up all the vodka, finished off the pork and we never had any trouble getting supplies after that.

After she was beached, Phil scuttled the Uluva in Haifa Bay so the Brits couldn't do anything with her. He was the only person to escape from Acre Prison without any outside help. He trained novice crews to run the engine rooms on Israeli Naval ships so they became top crews.

Phil sailed at sea since he was 14-years-old. He sailed on British ships and was sunk by a German U-boat. The crew abandoned ship into lifeboats. The U-boat surfaced and the crew thought that this was the end. Instead the U-boat Captain gave them food and charts to find shore. Phil sailed with the US Army Transport Service the rest of the war. After the war, Phil discovered that the U-boat Captain had been sunk. However, Phil got in touch with the Captain's nephew and invited him and his wife to Israel to show his thanks.

After two years with the Pal Yam, I went back to the US. I didn't see Phil for many years after that, though we did write occasionally. He stayed at sea while I went on to become a psychologist. Then one day he called me up from off the shore of Florida and asked me to meet him in Baltimore. I drove to the dock just as his ship was coming in.

Since then we have stayed in closer touch. I stayed with him in Israel many times. He would never let me pay for anything. He showed me all around Israel and we went to many digs. I returned the favor when he came to the US, but had only two opportunities. After he retired, he got a BS and a Masters from Haifa University. His Masters thesis got international recognition. During the last year or so he went into the West Bank and stood between settlers and the Arabs so that the Arabs could pick

their olives without being shot at. Phil loved Israel, but he was hurt by some of the things she was doing. He has a very strong system of values and stuck by them and it often cost him. In the last few years he was going deaf and was blind in one eye, but he was just as sharp as ever. He was a very good friend and I shall miss him very very much.

Gene Alexander

SAVE THE DATE

1. ISRAEL REUNION CELEBRATING 60TH ANNIVERSARY

Hundreds of Machalniks from Israel, U.S.A, Canada, South Africa and Europe will be gathering in celebration of Israel's 60th anniversary. The program of events will run from May 6th through May 13, concluding with a celebratory reception and luncheon attended by prominent Israeli political and military leaders as guests of honor. For many this is a last Hurrah. It is not too late to join. Call Si Spiegelman at (212) 685-8548, spiegelsi@aol.com or Paul Kaye at (718) 428-2465, pkaye3@nyc.rr.com. In Canada contact Joe Warner at (416)497-0140, joewarner@sympatico.ca

2. 42ND MICKEY MARCUS MEMORIAL AT WEST POINT SUNDAY, MAY 18,2008

This year's program will be special as we mark the 60th year of Israel's independence.

A coffee collation is scheduled at 10:00 a.m.at the Jewish Chapel of the U.S. Military Academy.

The memorial program will begin at 11:00 in the morning. The program will include a remembrance service by the Chaplains, musical renditions, greetings by a prominent representative of the Government of Israel. A guest of honor delivers the keynote address. Last year Rear Admiral Aaron Landes spoke and the year prior Major General

William A. Cohen. Following the Chapel program, a memorial service will be conducted at the graveside of Colonel David Marcus remembering the names of the fallen. The ceremony will conclude with the presentation of colors by the U.S.M.A honor guard, laying of wreaths, a six-gun salute and the sounding of Taps by the bugler. We expect to adjourn around 1:00 P.M.

3. SALUTE TO ISRAEL PARADE -

SUNDAY, JUNE 1, 2008

The Salute To Israel Parade, the single largest gathering in the world in support of Israel, will celebrate the milestone 60th Anniversary of the State of Israel on June 1, 2008 on Fifth Avenue in New York City. More information forthcoming.

4. TRUSTEES TRANSFER MEETING

SUNDAY, JUNE 8, 2008

The formal transfer of management from AVI officers to the Trustees is scheduled to take place at a special gathering on Sunday, June 8, 2008. The meeting will begin at 10:00 in the morning at Bnai Zion, 136 East 39th Street, New York City.

AFTER AVI continued from pg. 1

of the archives at the University of Florida and preparation and circulation of an occasional Newsletter. Those AVI officers currently responsible for each of these tasks provided instruction. Several conference calls were conducted to monitor this transfer of knowledge.

At the moment transfer of management and financial authority from AVI officers to the Trustees is scheduled to take place at an assembly in New York on June 8, 2008.

The Trustees are Elizabeth J. Appley, Esq. Bryan Feinberg, marketer of computer chips; Michael Flint, a film producer; Daphne Genyk,

a corporate compliance officer; Dr. Arthur Kiron, university librarian; Henry Lowenstein, Esq.; Jeffrey Margolis, Esq.; Dr. Augusta Gooch, professor; Sharon Baldree, music agent; Donna Parker, administrator; Sharona Ben Ami, administrator, Bob Krauthamer, educator. At the New York meeting Jeffrey Margolis was confirmed as the first coordinator of the Trustees Committee. Samuel Klausner, former AVI President, has served as liaison between the AVI Executive Committee and the Trustees Committee.

Names and contact e-mail addresses for AVI Officers and Executive Board members have been carried on page 2 of the AVI Newsletter. After June 1, treat those individuals as secondary contacts. Following will be the Trustee contacts after June 1.

Augusta Gooch (aogooch@knowlogy.net) for any general questions about members of AVI, their addresses and current personal status, and for communications media contact.

Henry Lowenstein (henrylow@bellsouth.net) for questions regarding the archives at the University of Florida as well as matters relating to the exhibition and the *www.Israelvets.com* web site.

Jeffrey Margolis (jamargolis@margolislawfirm.com) for questions on finances and legal matters.

Donna Parker (donna.parker@verizon.net) for questions about AVI computerized lists and records.

Bob Krauthamer (rafi_marom@hotmail.com) for questions about the continuity of the annual Mickey Marcus memorial gathering at West Point.

Elizabeth J. Appley (eja@appleylaw.com) for questions about the Newsletter, submissions of articles and obituaries.

Sharona Ben Ami (sharona215@hotmail.com) for questions about Machal West and about AVI members west of the Rockies.

They will be supported by the

remaining trustees as the need arises.

The cash remaining in the treasury will be managed by the Trustees group. As such the AVI board will allocate funds for the trustees to cover expenses related to the functions they cover. We no longer will collect annual dues. Instead we will ask all members to make a one-time contribution into our treasury. The archives and exhibitions will continue to be supported by our treasury and the special Machal endowment fund in the foreseeable future. A \$10,000 bequest was recently willed by an AVI member. We count on our members to help.

Samuel Klausner

MASSACRES continued from pg. 2

trained in between fights. I was assigned to the 79th five days after arriving in the country, and went into combat for the first time five days after that. I was too young to have been in the U.S. armed forces (I did serve later, during the Korean War) and had never fired the sten gun in my possession before my first night of combat.

Almost every fight initially began at night, without benefit of night-vision goggles (invented decades later) or even basic communication equipment. It would have been unusual under such circumstances if civilians had not been killed. But this was a situation that the Arab politicians largely brought upon themselves by not agreeing to the Partition Plan, and directing the general invasion and harassment of the Jewish civilian population.

In Operation Hiram in late October 1948, the 79th spearheaded the attack on the upper central Galilee from our starting point at Safad. On the opening night, we engaged in a fierce battle against the Arab town of Jish, defended by Syrian troops mingled with civilians. Civilians were killed during the night fighting. By the next morning we were on our way north toward

the last Arab strong point on the Lebanese border, the British police station at Malkiya.

On that first full day of daylight travel between Jish and Malkiah, we drove past a number of Arab villages. The Christian villages were still occupied, the children waving as we rode past. The Arab villages were completely deserted.

In the 60 years that have passed since that day in October 1948, I have often wondered who would tell our side of the story about the Arab refugees – people like me or revisionist historians like Benny Morris?

The typical newspaper, magazine or book account now reads that Arabs “fled or were pushed” from their homes by Jews, as though the numbers who fled or were pushed were equal – an absolute falsehood that lives in history and the prevailing myth.

Meanwhile, in Lebanon there are now no Jews. In Iraq, Syria, Jordan and Egypt there are no Jews. Some 800,000 Jews who lived in those countries from time immemorial came to Israel. They do not live in refugee camps. There are no revisionist Arab historians to tell their story. They do not hold keys from their mansions in the Arab countries where life was so sweet. In contrast to the “judenrein” Arab nations, there are a million and half Arabs who are now citizens of Israel. If there were so many massacres and forced ejections in 1948, why did the satanic Jews leave them in?

A NURSE REMEMBERS

I was serving as a nurse in Northern Israel. Noah Cohen was the Commander of the Western Galilee during Israel’s War of Independence. He was born and raised in Haifa and had many friends in that city. The day after the battle for the city of Haifa was over, he visited many of his Arab friends and urged them to stay in their homes and ignore the Mufti’s false propaganda. I was with Noah when we visited a friend who

had constructed an electrified model of Jerusalem. He and his family remained in Haifa. Sadly, many others left; most joining the exodus to Gaza.

Naomi Kantey

WHY continued from pg. 3

a trickle. Some 4,000 Jewish soldiers and 2,000 civilians were killed between November 1947 and March 1949, a staggering 1 per cent of the population.

Second, Israel did not want to give us publicity that might have affected our lives in America and Canada adversely. Following the war, almost a dozen Americans involved in arms transfer and/or service in the Israeli armed forces were tried, fined (in one case imprisoned) and lost their civil rights for life.

Third, Israel treated us not as arriving saviors, but as arriving immigrants, just like immigrants streaming into the country from the Displaced Persons camps of Europe and the internment camps in Cyprus. We were given citizenship documents, along with our enlistment assignments. Not counting several hundred thousand Holocaust survivors, we were 1,250 of some 3,500 volunteers from 37 different countries. I think Israelis expected most of us to stay, and were disappointed when we did not. Only about 200 North Americans (16 percent) remained in Israel immediately after the war, although many others immigrated to Israel in their later years.

Fourth, Israel was involved in nation building. It had to form a cohesive citizenry out of disparate mass. It needed local, not foreign, heroes as models to inspire Israeli youth.

And fifth, the war did not end for Israel in March 1949. The country has been harassed every day of its first six decades by a succession of enemies determined to undo the victory of 1948 -- Fedayeen, the PLO, Hezbollah, Hamas, every one of the 22 Arab

nations, a politicized United Nations, European nations that have forgotten their sordid history of anti-Semitism and fratricide, suicide bombers and you-name-it. Since the armistice that was signed in March 1949, Israel has been engaged in five additional wars for survival of the Jewish state. Israel does not have the luxury of breaking out the flag on Independence Day, watching the parades and looking back at the brave foreign volunteers who helped them to victory in just one of their many wars.

I believe if there had been American immigrants to Israel who achieved high positions of military and political leadership in post-1948 Israel, there would have been much greater publicity directed at our role during the war. However, that did not happen. We came, we helped and, for the most part, we left.

Israel cannot be blamed for giving too little publicity to this handful of volunteers. But American and Canadian Jewry can be. While 5 million North American Jews were cheering for Israel, sending the

important cash that Israel needed and dancing the hora at bar mitzvahs, 1,250 of their sons and daughters were putting their citizenship and lives on the line so there could be a Jewish nation where all of our brethren, now and in the future, could find refuge, if necessary.

In risking their citizenship, as well as their lives, the American, Canadian and British volunteers were unique. In rescuing Holocaust survivors in such large numbers, in air-lifting rifles, machineguns and ammunition to weapons-starved Israel, in providing the greatest numbers of pilots for bombers and fighter planes that played an important role in stopping Egyptian armed columns a few miles from Tel Aviv, the North Americans were unique. But American Jewish historians and museum directors, who should know better, have ignored the role that American Jews and Christians played in volunteering for combat at a time when Israel was desperate for help from every quarter. The American Veterans of Israel tried for years to convince every major

WORLD MACHAL REUNION-MAY 6 – 13, 2008	
PLANNED EVENTS	
MAY 2008	EVENTS
Tuesday 6 th	Armoured Corps Museum, Latrun & Machal Statue.
Tuesday 6 th ; Eve	Erev Yom Hazicharon- Ceremony at Kotel (via TV)
Wednesday 7 th	Machal's Yom Hazicharon Service at Sha'ar Hagai Memorial
Wednesday 7 th Eve	Erev Yom Ha'atzmaut-Ceremony on Har Herzl (via TV)
Thursday 8 th	Yom Ha'atzmaut
Friday 9 th	Visit to Palmach Museum, Tel Aviv
Shabbat 10 th	Free day
Sunday 11 th	Visit to Begin Center, Jerusalem
Monday 12 th	Visit to Yad V'Shem, Jerusalem
Tuesday 13 th	12.30 p.m. Closing celebratory reception and luncheon in Tel Aviv. "itzrubal", Gilot Junction, Tel Aviv Invited Guests of Honor: President Shimon Peres; Rav-Aluf Gaby Ashkenazi (Chief of General Staff).

For travel and hotel information contact:
Si Spiegelman • (212) 685-8548 • spiegelsi@aol.com

American Jewish museum to devote just one permanent museum case to this role – to no avail.

Yitzchak Rabin said of us, “They came to us when we most needed them, during those difficult, uncertain days of our War of Independence in 1948.” An Israeli army colonel once said to me, about the role of American and Canadian volunteers: “We knew we were not alone.”

The two museums and this web site that we surviving veterans have built with our own funds and the help of a few caring foundations are efforts to fill in this shocking gap in North American Jewish knowledge. We are proud of what we did in the 1948 war, and we believe our fellow North American Jews would be, also – if only they knew.

Note: Ralph Lowenstein is Dean Emeritus of the College of Journalism and Communications at the University of Florida in Gainesville. A native of Danville, Virginia, he volunteered for the Israeli Army at the age of 18, while a summer exchange student in Europe at the end of his freshman year at Columbia University. He lived in a Displaced Persons camp in Marseilles under an assumed name, then saw combat with the 79th Armored Battalion 10 days after being smuggled into Israel. He later served in the U.S. Army during the Korean War. Lowenstein holds two degrees from Columbia and the Ph.D. from the University of Missouri. An award-winning reporter, he was visiting professor and head of journalistic studies at Tel Aviv University from 1967 to 1968. He is author or co-author of five books, including “Bring my Sons from Far,” (World, 1966), a novel about Israel’s War of Independence.

Dr. Lowenstein welcomes e-mail responses to this essay or any other portion of israelvets.com. He will try to respond to all comments, and can be reached at:

rlowenstein@jou.ufl.edu

NEWS FROM THE WEST

Sharona Benami and Mike Flint are both serving on the AVI Trustee Committee. Sharona also serves as Public Relations Chair on the Machal West Board of Directors. She volunteered to serve in the 1973 Yom Kippur War. Her father, Norm Zimmerman, is a New York native and 1948 Machalnik who sailed on the Pan York and served in the Signal Corps. Her mother Elana is a former Palmachnik. Sharona’s husband Yehuda Bock also volunteered to serve in the Yom Kippur War. He is the son of Sara and Phil Bock. Phil served for many years as an AVI Director and was a veteran of the ship Geula (Peducah) and the Golani Brigade. Mike is an officer in the US Naval Reserves. His father Mitchell was a 1948 fighter pilot in the 101 squadron. Mitchell also served on the AVI Board as the representative of Machal West.

Our AVI trustee from the West, Sharona Benami, reports about Machal West’s recent celebration that I was privileged to attend.

“On December 9, 2007 Machal West celebrated its 40th Anniversary at an event held at the American Jewish University, where our Permanent Machal Exhibit is housed (the East Coast permanent exhibit is located at the Hillel House in Gainesville, Florida.) Founding President of Machal West, Mitchell Flint (and current Secretary/Historian) was honored. Current President Esther Friedman, with strong support from husband Aaron and Joyce Flint, worked diligently to create a beautiful and meaningful event. Rabbi Daniel Bouskila lit the Hanuka candles, Israel Consul General Yaacov Dayan gave a moving address, and a delicious luncheon was served. Two Machal grandchildren added to the musical entertainment - Shira Bouskila sang and Mayan Benami played guitar, while their grandfathers Nesim Bouskila and Norm Zimmerman watched proudly. Mitchell’s son Mike Flint served as MC and shared a video of his father the pilot, telling stories

of 1948 when he served with, among others, Ezer Weizman. The celebration ended with a film appropriately titled “Courage.” Consul General Dayan handed out certificates of recognition to the veterans on behalf of the State of Israel. In the words of the Consul General : “It is your responsibility to tell your stories, for the sake of Israel and for the sake of your children and grandchildren.”

Si Spiegelman

FROM THE HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS OF THE “HATIKVA” TO THE VOLUNTEERS OF THE ALIYAH BET SHIPS

The children of Israel wandered for forty years in the desert after they had gone out of Egypt.

Then no one survived who could remember the flesh pots of Egypt, the passage of the Red Sea or how Moshe stretched out his hand over the sea and divided it. Only the second generation entered the Promised Land.

We are more fortunate- Forty years have passed since we left the Diaspora. Almost all these years we have lived in the Promised Land with our children and grandchildren. We recollect not only the horrors of the Diaspora’s Holocaust; we remember also those wonderful people who stretched out their hands and divided the sea for us and who gave us the Hope- HATIKVA.

Forty years have passed since our Exodus and we did not cross the sea on dry ground, but we have survived and live in the Promised Land with our children and grandchildren. Thank you for bringing us here.

*The Ma’apilim of the “Hatikva”
July 1987*

AVI... IN RETROSPECT

By Si Spiegelman

(Contributors: Samuel Klausner, Sidney Rabinovich, Paul Kaye, Mitchell Flint, Ira Feinberg and Jerry Rosenberg)

As we turn over the management of the organization to our young trustees in the face of a membership roster that continues to decline relentlessly, we remember the successive AVI officers, directors and board members crossing the stage over the years. Many of the familiar faces now gone left an indelible mark on our collective memory. At its zenith, the organization listed 600 members of which 110 had made Aliyah. Today one-third of them are no longer and the remainder are mostly in their late seventies and early eighties in age. Each person has told his or her story often to children and grandchildren about the epic days in the history of the Jewish people that became part of their lives. AVI has a collective history as well.

By late 1948 and early 1949, Israel's War of Independence was winding down. By mid-1949 Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria had signed armistice agreements with Israel. The Rhodes Agreement, negotiated under the guidance of Dr. Ralph Bunche of the United Nations, established the borders of Israel. Some American volunteers for the Haganah and later the Israeli military began to return to the United States and other countries from which they had come. Not an inconsiderable number chose to remain as Israeli citizens.

In early 1950 a dozen or so of these veterans gathered at a parlor meeting at the home of Samuel Klausner in the Rockaways. They discussed the significance of their experiences and their desire to form an organization as a means to this end. A list was developed of veterans in the New York area known to those assembled. Among

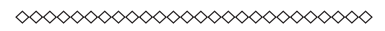
the individuals present were Ben Foreman, Lou Brettler, Jack Alston and Zvi Kraushar. A few months later some 150 of them met at the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan to establish the organization. Sam Klausner was elected President. In 1951, Sam left to teach at the Hebrew University. Unfortunately, no one took responsibility for the organization after that. It would be some twelve years later that another group, now including those who served in Aliyah Bet and headed by Sidney Rabinovich and Joe Heckelman would convene to reestablish the group. The meeting took place at the Temple Emanuel in New York City.

American Veterans of Israel was granted a Certificate of Incorporation in the State of New York on July 31, 1963. The officers representing the organization were Sidney Rabinovich, Joseph Heckelman, Reuben Gross, Murray Aronoff, Benjamin Halpern, Samuel Alexander, and Aaron Lebow. The purpose for forming the organization was described as follows in the Certificate of Incorporation: "To preserve and strengthen a spirit of comradeship among its members; to assist worthy comrades; to perpetuate the memory of our dead and to maintain and extend the institutions of freedom; and to foster good will between the United States and Israel."

The Canadian Machalnicks formed an informal group a few years after returning. They joined AVI as a result of the contacts between Larry Hoffman in New York and Jerry Rosenberg and others in Toronto. As a result a large contingent of American and Canadian Machalnicks met in Toronto and assembled in Israel for a reunion in 1968 celebrating the 20th anniversary of the State.

In 1963 several Machal veterans of 101 squadron living in California formed Machal West in order to better address the needs of the large

number of Machalnicks living west of the Rocky mountains. Among the organizers were Mitch Flint, Rudy Augarten, Aaron Finkel and Tev Zimmerman. Mitch Flint served as the first president of Machal West. Esther Friedman is the current president. Joseph Warner, remains the AVI president leading the transition to trusteeship on June 8, 2008.



During one of Ben Gurion's early visits in Manhattan (*see photo pg. 15*), he was informed about a "few" New York volunteers who had fought in Israel's War of Independence. He asked to see them in his room at the Plaza Hotel. The number of Machal visitors filled the room, with the overflow congesting the hallways as the disconcerted security officers watched nervously.

AVI members met socially at members' residences in the regions and at the annual Hanukkah celebration at Bnai Zion in New York. Independence Day celebrations were attended at the Israel consulates across the country. Special reunions were held at resorts in New York's Catskills mountains, Washington D.C and most recently in Las Vegas. The organization fostered special reunions of comrades who served together on distinct ships and in army units such as the 7th Brigade and the Givati. The Palyam reunions in Israel were attended by Aliyah Bet servicemen from North America.

Special reunions took place in Israel, in association with World Machal, marking independence anniversaries at regular time intervals starting with the 20th in 1968. Whenever possible the veterans were invited to meet with the president at his Jerusalem residence. The most moving one took place on the 50th anniversary reunion as the former fighter pilot Ezer Weizman, then president of Israel, recognized and embraced his fellow pilots from the 101 squadron. As the joking went on, Ezer told the Machal veterans: "I've seen you boys looking much better".



L to R - Paul Kaye, Murray Aronoff and David Ben Gurion at The Plaza Hotel visit

In a more serious moment, during the informal chat, he commented “Just imagine how things would have looked around these parts if instead of 1000 of you who came to fight with us from North America, there would have been 100,000. (500,000 Jews had served in the U.S. armed forces during WWII).

American Veterans of Israel was instrumental in the creation of the annual “Salute to Israel Parade” In New York City almost 40 years ago and members have marched carrying the organization’s banner every year. In the early days we marched together with our entire families and our children still have recollections of those days. In the 1970s AVI was engaged in the fight to free Soviet Jewry by participating in the “Solidarity Day” rallies.

Throughout the years the organization gave from its treasury

for the welfare of IDF soldiers. It played a significant role in the founding of such IDF support groups as the “Friends of the IDF” In fact, its first director, General Chaim Granit, began operations using the national office of AVI working with Paul Kaye, Harry Eisner and others.

Another highlight of the organization’s activities has been the annual memorial service held at West Point to perpetuate the memory of David “Mickey” Marcus and the other 39 North American volunteers who gave their lives in the creation of the State of Israel. This event, initiated by AVI with the involvement of the Jewish Chapel at West Point, is now in its 42th year. Last year large numbers of the extended Marcus family attended. From all indications, our trustees will continue the memorial service focusing on attendance by the young as the old

soldiers fade away.

A major project in the 1990s was the construction, in partnership with the Jewish National Fund, of a memorial monument at Sha’ar Hagai to pay tribute to the 119 volunteers from 37 countries who gave their lives. Inscribed in the stone are the names of the fallen and Yitzhak Rabin’s words about Machal: “They came to us when we most needed them, during those difficult, uncertain days of our War of Independence in 1948”. Also in those years AVI worked with JNF to erect a memorial plaque at Har-el honoring the 40 North American volunteers killed in Israel’s War of Independence. The North American share to carry out these projects came from hundreds of modest contributions from AVI supporters, among them some members who were dues- exempt because of financial hardship.

Largely through the intensive efforts of Ralph Lowenstein, the organization's archival repository was set up and endowed through the Machal Fund at the University of Florida in Gainesville. The archives served as the source for the exhibits displayed at the Aliyah Bet and Machal Museum.

Many AVI members responded generously in funding the project and significant support came from the Gainesville Hillel, Norman Lipoff and the Shepard Broad, Brechner and Braman families. The exhibition was inaugurated in November 2005, attended by a large number of AVI veterans, their families and friends. Two permanent exhibitions were set up telling the saga of the volunteers in bringing Holocaust survivors out of Europe by attempting to evade the British blockade as well as their contributions to the Israel ground forces, navy and air force in the war that began in 1948 following the founding of the State of Israel. One exhibition is on display at the Hillel House in Gainesville and the other, sponsored by Machal West and the American University of Judaism, is located at the UJ campus in Los Angeles. An 8-panel mobile version of the exhibition was produced in 2007 for display at other venues. It is available upon request and is being offered on loan to major Jewish museums.

The AVI newsletter had its start with the formation of the organization and was published for many years by Sidney and Edith Rabinovich. Samuel Klausner followed as editor of the Newsletter in 1997 and Art Bernstein in the summer of 2007. Back issues of the AVI Newsletter are filed in the Special Collections section of the Library of the University of Florida in Gainesville. In 2003 Zippy Porath coordinated the publication of the Machal booklet that AVI distributed in North America in years following. Recent years have seen the development of internet sites

sponsored by AVI. The web sites can be accessed by logging on to *www.israelvets.com* and *www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html*

In 1993 the Israel Ministry of Defense awarded the veterans the Freedom Ribbon (Ot Ha komemiyut) and the Statehood Warriors Decoration (Itur Lochamei Hamedina). On June 1, 2003, Consuls Alon Pinkas and Ido Aharoni held a special tribute ceremony on the U.S. Carrier Intrepid honoring the Aliyah Bet and Machal volunteers on behalf of the government of Israel. Each veteran was awarded a certificate of recognition as his service unit or ship was called out.

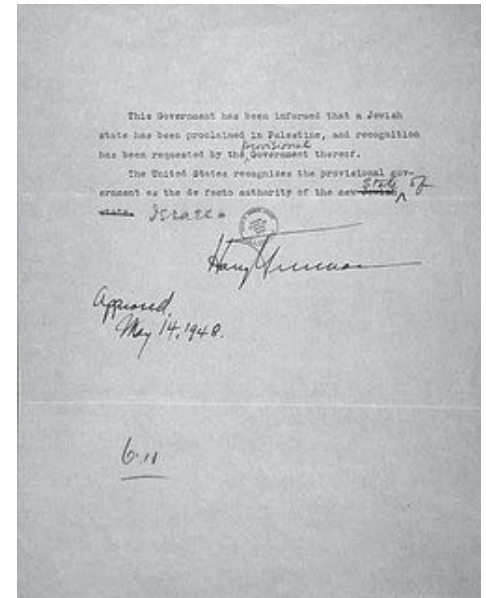
The grand finale may just be the upcoming reunion of the World Machal associations in celebration of Israel's 60th anniversary at which President Shimon Peres and Chief of General Staff Gaby Ashkenazy are our guests of honor. (General Ashkenazy's father served in Machal).

Throughout the years, AVI and Machal West answered calls for speakers at social, fund-raising and synagogue functions and members participated in media interviews as well as documentary films and wrote their stories. But in the end, the contribution of the North American volunteers was felt by many of the veterans to remain "a well-kept secret". Much of the North American public remain uninformed of the contribution of a small segment of their countrymen who risked their lives for the creation of the State of Israel.

Future historians may confirm that without the Machal contribution, specifically the clandestine supply of equipment from the U.S.A, the airlift of weapons, ammunition and equipment from Czechoslovakia and the service of the early fighter pilots and other aviators, the war of 1948 would have taken a different, even calamitous turn. For now, most veterans feel privileged in having witnessed the victories in battle of

the Jewish forces and having served to create the new Jewish State. It was a gift we cherished deeply all the days of our life.

As one of the Machal volunteers, Ben Ocopnick, stated in David Bercuson's book "The Secret Army" ... "We fought for the re-establishment, after nearly 2000 years, of a Jewish State. I am sure that when I die the last thing that will pass through my mind will be what I did and others did in Israel then."



Harry Truman letter approving the recognition of the state of Israel by the United States (May 14th, 1948)



David "Mickey" Marcus, 1901-1948