



AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE
 UNITED STATES & CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS
 136 East 39th St., New York, N.Y. 10016

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

AVI is going global!

It is a pleasure to report that our meetings with the World Machal Executive Committee in June resulted in commitments to work together on our respective online, media, museum and other ongoing projects. At the World Machal Executive Committee meeting to which I had been invited, I was able to describe our concepts and goals for the expanded coverage of the AVI Newsletter and for the virtual museum projects, and to offer to make these resources available to the World Machal constituencies.

We in turn would welcome the opportunity to work with them on the Machal Museum project, which under its director Migdal *aka* David Teperson and is moving along at an impressive clip, and in other areas where our outreach and capabilities might be helpful.

Col. Migdal, a strapping 6 foot-plus South African who looks like somebody right out of central casting, is a veteran of all of Israel's wars, and the oldest IDF reserve officer. He has assembled a large and impressive collection of Machal visual material, and has received commitments for a permanent Machal display in the highly-acclaimed Palmach Museum adjoining the Tel Aviv University Campus, for which the Israeli Defense Ministry will underwrite maintenance expenses. I suggested that Migdal's project would provide an ideal component in Ralph's virtual museum

NY CZECH CONSULATE COMMEMORATES CRITICAL CZECH ASSISTANCE TO ISRAEL IN 1948.

This article is in three parts: an account of observances at the Czech Consulate in New York, historical background on the role of Czechoslovakia in Israel's War of Independence and excerpts from an Israeli and an Egyptian histories of the events of 1948. The first two sections were prepared by Simon Spiegelman and the last by the Newsletter editor.

HOMAGE TO CZECH NATION AND IAF AND MACHAL PILOTS

In the presence of Israel's Consul General, Alon Pinkus and Czechoslovakia's Consul General, Petr Gandalovic, Czechs, Israelis and Americans gathered to re-

In This Issue....

1. A referendum on changing membership requirements of AVI. Explanations and a ballot are at the end of the Newsletter. All paid-up members may vote.
2. The AVI Newsletter is reaching out to Machal veterans around the world. It is our intent to include reports on veterans in Europe, Latin America, South Africa and other countries. We also invite submittals from them. This issue is being distributed without charge to these veterans. If you are interested in continuing to receive the Newsletter please contact the American Veterans of Israel, 136 E. 39 St., New York, NY 10016-0914.

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L-R: George Lichter, Hugo Marom (Israeli Entrepreneur), Col. Josef Prokpec (Czech AirForce), H.E. Petr Gandalovic (Consul General), Uri Bialer (Historian Haifa), Zdanek Klima (Czech Historian)

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Visit the AVI Website to read past issues of the Newsletter
www.sas.upenn.edu/~sklausne/aviweb.html

ON MACHALNIKS AND WAR ARTISTS IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

One of the best kept secrets of the War of Independence is that Machal and other fighters were recorded for posterity in sketches drawn by several artists. Among the artists were two Machalniks, and Israel's internationally renowned Nahum Gutman.

South African volunteer Edal Marcus began his Israel Air Force (IAF) career in July 1948 as a radio operator with 103 Squadron at Ramat David. On the 29th of that month he made a pastel drawing of me, which still adorns a corner of my living room wall. Marcus was appointed official IAF war artist soon after the powers-that-be at Air Force headquarters learned of his artistic talents.

To the best of my knowledge none of Marcus's drawings have ever been on exhibit publicly, and most are probably gathering dust in some IDF Archives store-room. I can visualize one he made at Sdom, which beautifully captures its isolation in the rich red and brown shades of adjacent barren hills. As will be recalled, Sdom, whose airstrip was the world's lowest at 1300 feet below sea level, was then accessible only by air and linked to 'mainland' Israel by night and day supply runs of the IAF's DC-3, Norseman and D.H Rapide transport airplanes.

Another Marcus drawing that comes to mind is one he did in March 1949 at Avraham airstrip in the wake of Operation Fact. In this last and only bloodless campaign of the War of Independence, the IDF occupied all Negev territory up to Um Rash-Rash (site of today's Eilat) that had been allotted to Israel under the historic UN Partition Plan of Palestine. It shows a DC-3 being unloaded of its cargo in the heart of the desert.

The other Machalnik I know of who drew War of Independence scenes back then was Sol Baskin of the USA, who in WW2 rose in the field from private to officer in the U.S. Fifth Army's 34th Infantry Division through the Italian campaigns. In 1948/49 he was with the IDF's Alexandroni Brigade, first as a platoon commander and finally as commander of its 37th Battalion. He stayed on in Israel af-

ter 1948, and served in a combat capacity in its later wars. Many battle scenes depicted in Baskin's sketches, from Italy in 1943 to the Yom Kippur War in 1973, were done from 'up front,' not as an official war artist but on his own initiative as a labor of love. His sketches often appeared in the US Army newspaper 'Stars and Stripes.' Sol Baskin is still active as one of Israel's leading artists and sculptors.

It was a pleasant surprise for me to discover earlier this year that also Nahum Gutman was a war artist of the War of Independence. Gutman was then into his fifties, and already well known for his paintings and drawings which faithfully record both early Tel Aviv and the Yishuv in general.

Being a WW1 veteran and former member of the Jewish Legion likely helped Gutman capture the spirit of the times in his War of Independence drawings. Many of his drawings showing on-duty soldiers, sailors and airmen, appeared in his 1950's book 'So They Were' in which he admiringly wrote of their high-morale and determination. A selection of those nostalgia-evoking ink drawings are now on display, until September, at Tel Aviv's Nahum Gutman Museum in a special exhibit also called 'So They Were.'

Some months prior to the opening of the exhibit, the Museum's director Yoav Dagon made a concerted effort to determine the identities of the people depicted in Gutman's sketches. Only three subjects in four 'air force' drawings had been identified when he enlisted my help. Easily recognizable in two drawings is fighter pilot Rudy Augarten of the USA, as is his comrade-in-arms Ezer Weizman in another drawing. The fourth depicts retired El Al captain Oded Abarbanel when he was an IAF light-plane pilot.

Reliance on memory and comparisons with photos yielded only several possible and one positive identification, that of South Africa's pioneer Machal pilot Boris Senior. I then enlisted the help of other former 'first fliers' in Israel and overseas, among them the well known South African Machal pilot Arieh Kaplan (Kappy) who was super helpful. Thanks largely to their collective input, names have been added to all 16 Gutman drawings I dealt with. Besides Rudy Augarten, positive Machal identifications include Bill Schroeder, 'Slick' Goodlin and Leo Nomis

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On Machalniks
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of the USA, Arnie Ruch and Jack 'Tich' Isaacson of South Africa, Harold Caplan and Sandy Jacobs of Britain, plus Canada's Denny Wilson.

The satisfaction I derived from this unusual research project is more than ample reward for the time and effort invested. Viewing the sketches at the Nahum Gutman Museum, or even in its beautiful 'So They Were' catalogue, would surely be similarly gratifying to ex-Machalniks. Catalogues may be ordered at \$10 each, post-paid, from the Nahum Gutman Museum, 21 Rokach Street, Tel Aviv 65148, Israel (info@gutmanmuseum.co.il).

© Eddy Kaplansky, Haifa, June 2002.



- jumbo crew

only left the air



The photo above is of Donald F. Albrecht, a 1948 volunteer to the Israel Air Force from Flint, MI. In July 1948 he was member of the crew of a B-17 flying from Zatec to Tel Aviv. Subsequently, he flew as a gunner with the 69th Squadron stationed at Ramat David. He became chief armaments officer there and prepared planes for "Operation Ten Plagues." Donald died in 1965.

His daughter, Laura Huggler is anxious to hear from people who knew him. Her address is 6810 E. Nashua, West Bloomfield, MI. 48322. Telephone 248 592 9436. or LauraHuggler@CS.com

LATIN AMERICAN MACHAL IN THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The day after Ben Gurion proclaimed the birth of the State of Israel, the War of Independence began. Even before that, Jews in the free world were mobilizing and recruiting volunteers for the new Israel Army. Over 4000 volunteers served in Israel's War of Independence, the majority being WWII veterans from the U.S., Canada, England, South Africa and France. They also formed the Israel Air Force that among its many achievements stopped the Egyptian army 40 kms. From Tel Aviv in a location today known as Ashdod. About these volunteers, Ben Gurion said, "They were few, but we owe them much".

Some 400 volunteers came from Latin America, having no military experience whatsoever, but imbued with a high spirit of solidarity. The Holocaust and the struggle against British immigration restrictions to Palestine strengthened the resolve of the Zionist movement. Most of the communities mobilized in support of the creation of a Jewish State. This was expressed on November 29, 1947 with the United Nations vote in favor of the creation of the Jewish State. The vote of the Latin American nations turned the balance in our favor. Thanks to the efforts of Moshe Tov, originally from Argentina and representative of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Latin America (cited in Abba Eban's autobiography), the Jewish masses took to the streets in support of the State. At a massive gathering that took place in the Community Center in Montevideo, Abraham Mibashan, representative of the JNF in Argentina and Moshe Kostrinsky (Kitron) representing the World Zionist Organization addressed the crowd. I was with them representing the Zionist Youth Federation of Uruguay. Before the demonstration, I informed the leadership that my speech would include a call to the Jewish youth for

mobilization in view of the imminent battle in Israel. I was told that this was not politically sound and we should await directions from the Jewish Agency.

Within weeks we received a representative from the Jewish Agency, Zamosh, to work with those who had volunteered to serve. The interviews were conducted at the Youth Federation and the medical check-ups were performed by Dr. Jacobo Hazan, public relations officer for Moshe Tov and the Political Department of the Jewish Agency (later evolving into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs). Zamosh set up two camps, one in Uruguay and the other in Argentina for training (no weapons). At the start there was a minor difference with the Argentine Hashomer Hatzair who took the position that only members of the "hachshara" be accepted as volunteers. Naturally, the Jewish Agency did not accept this. Consequently 27 young Argentines boarded the "Campana" on May 29, 1948. The following day, other Uruguayan volunteers joined us in the port of Montevideo. The recruitment of the volunteers was conducted secretly, but the farewell was not. Both ports were filled with thousands of relatives, friends and members of the community who proudly joined the send-off of this first group of volunteers to fight in Israel's War of Independence already in progress. In Rio de Janeiro, two Brazilian young volunteers joined us. Zamosh put me in charge of this first group together with David Halpern (Hardan) of the Halutz movement.

We landed in Marseilles and assembled in a camp named "Bnai Akiva" run for the Hagana by a young woman, 20 years of age, and a young man aged 22. She (we later discovered) was the daughter of the President of the Citrus Association and he was the son of a physician. It was here that we received our first military training and then transferred to Grand Arenas, another camp receiving hun-

OBITUARIES

The editor thanks David Hanovice, Lola Sprinzeles, Eddy Kaplansky and William Gelberg for their assistance in the preparation of obituaries.



Rudolph Newman

Rudolph Newman : B-17 Crew Member

Rudolph Newman of Bloomfield Hills, Michigan died on January 18, 2002 at the age of 74. Rudy told WWII recruiters he was 17, when he was 16, and was accepted in the US Army Air Corps. He trained as a radio navigator and then became a fighter pilot in the Pacific. He served on the aircraft carrier U.S.S. Lexington through the end of the war and received a Distinguished Flying Cross. He returned to Detroit in 1946, graduated from Michigan State College (now MSU) in 1948, and began studying law at Wayne University.

Approached by Rabbi Irwin Gordon of Hillel House at Wayne to fly supplies to pre-state Palestine, Rudy found his sense of adventure and love of flying was greater than his commitment to law. His first mission was to ferry the newly acquired surplus B-17s to Zatec in Czechoslovakia. Subsequently, as a member of the Air Transport Command, he flew circuitous routes at odd hours to pick up arms from Czechoslovakia and deliver them to Tel Aviv. Later he served as Base Commander for the Israel Air Force base at Ruchama. He was flight instructor at Ekron and, after the war remained in Israel to fly for El Al.

Mr. Newman met his wife, Ann, in Israel. They were married in a 1949 ceremony, attended by many of the Israeli air force pilots. After the birth of their first son, the Newmans returned to Detroit in 1952. He worked in mortgage banking and eventually owned his own company.

Mr. Newman maintained close ties with Israel. He made frequent trips; his final visit was with his family for Passover in the spring of 2000, shortly after he was diagnosed with cancer.

"He was so quiet and unassuming, but he was a hero of the Jewish people — a movie should be made of his life and maybe it will," said Irwin Cohen of Oak Park, a local Jewish historian. In 2000, the Southfield-based Yeshiva Beth Yehudah honored Mr. Newman with its Golden Torah Award. "His life has been dedicated to the causes of the Jewish people; bringing our homeland into existence and supporting the education of the next generation of Jews," U.S. District Judge Avern Cohn, general chairman for award dinner, said at the time.

Rudolph Newman is survived by his wife, Ann Newman; sons and daughters-in-law, Eugene Charles and Robin Newman of Bloomfield Hills, Robert Sherman and Judy Newman of West Bloomfield, William Gary and Natalie Newman of West Bloomfield; brother and sister-in-law, Stanford Donald and Victoria Newman of Warren; grandchildren, Michael (Marcela), Sarah (Tim Brown), Samuel, Jesse, Elizabeth, Daniel, Benjamin, Jeremiah, Abigail, Rachel, Jacob, Aaron, Shoshannah, Caitlin, Eli, Josh, Jonah; great-grandchildren, Rebekah, and Eden Brown. Mr. Newman was the loving brother of the late Norma Shoemaker.

Contributions may be made to Yeshiva Beth Yehudah, P.O. Box 2044, Southfield, MI 48037 or the Leukemia Foundation of Michigan, 29777 Telegraph, Southfield, MI 48034. Interment was at Clover Hill Park Cemetery in Birmingham.

Condolences to
Mrs. Ann Newman
1762 St. John's Court
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48302

PERCY "PUSSY" TOLCHINSKY r.i.p.: IAF 'first flier.'

Percy (Pesach) Tolchinsky, better known as 'Pussy' by those who knew him, passed away on May 12th in his 82nd year at Kfar Giladi. He leaves behind two daughters, a son and five grand-children.

His wife, Amalia, predeceased him by 15 years.

It was in the hungry 1930s when Pussy, then a teenager, joined Habonim in his native New York. By the time he enlisted in the US Army early in 1942, he was a committed Zionist. After earning his pilot wings, he served as a DC-3 pilot in the south Pacific. Upon completion of his tour of duty, he was sent back to the USA where his 'war-hero' status, good looks and congenial personality were put to good use for the US War Bonds drive.

Soon after his Army discharge late 1945, he began preparing for aliya. A letter from regional airline Aviron Ltd. of Tel Aviv, offering Pussy a job as a pilot, helped him obtain



Percy Tolchinsky

a US passport "valid for travel to Egypt and Palestine." But faced with British restrictions on Jewish immigration, his getting there was anything but routine.

He got to Alexandria, Egypt, as crew on a Swedish cargo-ship and promptly jumped ship. He sought out Eretz-Israelis of the Jewish Brigade in the certainty they'd help get him into Palestine, but instead encountered suspicions that he was a British agent. After gaining their confidence, they soon got Pussy to Tel Aviv by train in the guise of a returning Jewish Brigade soldier. Several months after joining his Habonim *garin* of Americans and Canadians at Kfar Blum, he met and married Amalia, a daughter of neighboring kibbutz Kfar Giladi.

Pussy's IAF career began early 1948 with the Hagana's Aleph Squadron, flying its mixture of light planes of on varied missions considered too risky for the less-experienced pilots. For a while he was with Aleph Squadron's sub-unit at Yavniel in the Galilee, flying Austers in support of the Golani Brigade. When a DC-3 was added to the fleet in May, he was among the first to fly it.

Early on May 15th he and Cyril Katz (South Africa) were in the cockpit of the DC-3 at Tel Aviv's Sde Dov airfield, getting ready to fly it to Ekron, when they realized that they were under attack by Egyptian Spitfires. They scrambled out to safety, and when the all-clear was sounded they

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took-off for Ekron despite bullet holes in the DC-3's tail and wing.

Some 48 hours later, after the DC-3 had been repaired, Pussy flew it to besieged Beit Ha'arava, on the Dead Sea's northern shore, to evacuate the remaining women and children. Copiloting was flight engineer 'Freddy' Ish-Shalom (UK). While on final approach he spotted some Arab Legion tanks a few miles off heading toward the kibbutz. After landing he kept the engines running, while some 60 passengers scrambled aboard. He barely managed to get the overloaded airplane airborne, and had to descend slightly toward the Dead Sea in order to reach safe flying speed before climbing away.

A short time later Pussy was transferred to ATC, and for several months flew as C-46 copilot on the airlift from Czechoslovakia to Israel. In October's Operation Yoav (a.k.a. Ten Plagues), and later in Operation Horev, he flew bombing missions in the C-46s.

Only after my transfer late January 1949 from disbanded 35 Flight to 106 Squadron (ATC's successor) at Ekron, did I get to know Pussy. By then he had qualified as a C-46 captain.

On March 17th I sat in for his regular co-pilot on an ill-fated supply run to Sde Avraham, a crude strip 20 miles north of today's Eilat. The other crew members were my fellow Canadians, Ben Sturrey (navigator) and Jack Smith (radio op). Our cargo included drinking water and nine VIP passengers from IAF HQ.

For the return flight, some five tons of surplus land mines had been loaded aboard. Just after take-off, the left engine suddenly lost its power as it backfired loudly. It was all we could do to stay in the air, a few feet above rocky hillocks, while shutting down the bad engine. Some five endless minutes later, we crashed into the ground and caught fire close to Avraham airstrip. Thanks to a chance sand dune at the point of impact, crew and passengers escaped certain death.

During the years that followed, on every March 17th (St. Patrick's Day) Ben, Jack, Pussy and I would recall our brush with death, and often wished one another a happy birthday. With Pussy's demise, three-quarters of us are now gone.

Pussy spent his remaining years at Kfar

Giladi, where he is fondly remembered by friends and family as a keen bridge player and a good-hearted person. His fellow 'first fliers' the world over will always remember him as a levelheaded pilot blessed with the proverbial 'nine lives' of a cat.

Eddy Kaplansky, Haifa
kaplansk@shani.net

Ben Fingeroot— Specialist in Aircraft Electrical Systems

Ben Fingeroot died on May 19, 1988 at the age of 74. At the time he lived in Detroit. Ben enlisted in the United States Army during WWII and was assigned to an airplane mechanics school at the University of Chicago. Following his training program, he served as a Sergeant and was leader of a group of airplane and electrical mechanics. He served with the US Army Air Corps in Italy.

Several years after the end of WW II Ben Fingeroot attended a meeting of the Jewish War Veterans in Detroit.. At that time the British were leaving Palestine, the State of Israel was declared and all the neighboring Arab countries invaded Israel, the 1948 Israeli War of Independence had started. The call for Jewish and non-Jewish volunteers from all over the world touched a spark in Ben and he volunteered to take part in the struggle for the survival of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

He returned to Detroit for a short time before attending a meeting of the Jewish War Veterans. It was at that meeting that he learned of the great need for men with his military experience in the Israeli Defense Forces.

"I didn't hesitate a minute" he said. "When I heard the war had started, I felt I should be there". He was first assigned to an air base at Zatec helping to dismantle Messerschmitt airplanes, ferrying them to Israel and reassembling them for service and maintaining them for service by the IDF IAF.

In Israel, he was stationed in what had been the British air base at Tel-Noff on the coastal plain between Rehoboth and Gedera near Givat Brenner. (known as Aqir

for a nearby Arab village). His responsibilities were primarily to service fighter planes, and to train others on the electrical systems of the airplanes. He served 18 months from May 1948 to October 1949. Ben Fingeroot was awarded a Victory Medal by the Israeli Consulate and posthumously honored by the Friends of the Israel Defense Forces.

He is survived by his wife, Annette, whom he married in 1959 and by his children Susan Adler Shanteau, Martin Fingeroot, Judith Jacobs and Howard Fingeroot.

Condolences

Annette Fingeroot
27599 Echo Valley Drive W. #238
Franklin Hills, MI 48334



L-R Selma Hoffman, Zipporah Heckelman, Rabbi Joseph Heckelman z"l, Larry Hoffman z"l

Larry Hoffman: Israel Army Veteran, AVI President

Larry Hoffman died this year at the age of 75. After service in the US Navy 1944-46, he sailed for Israel on the DP ship Galila from Marseilles in 1948. His wife of many years, Selma, reports that he served in Company B - 72nd Battalion - from 8 November 1948 until 3 March 1949. He was then placed in the IDF reserves. He returned to the states via Canada in 1951 where he was "interned" for questioning about his involvement in Israel because he landed there with a phony passport.

Larry served as AVI President 1985/1986 and was instrumental in persuading the Canadian Volunteers to join forces with AVI at the Fallsview get-together on October 12, 1985.

Condolences to Selma Hoffman

707 Flanders O Kings Point
Delray Beach, FL 33484

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OBITUARIES CONTINUED

Mildred (Birnbaum) Rosenberg: Israeli Medical Corps

Mildred (Birnbaum) Rosenberg died May 23, 2002. Mildred, a 'Machalnik' from the United States, served in the Israeli Medical Corps from 1948-1951 and was stationed in Military Hospital #5 (Tel Hashomer). There she organized the physical therapy department and, due to Mildred's resourcefulness, organizational ability and intelligence became known as one of the best departments of its kind. Everybody in Tel Hashomer knew Mildred. I was a Machalnik from England, worked on the acute surgical unit and had only few dealings with physical therapy and, hence, only cursory contact with her. When I went to Aden in 1950 to participate in Operation Magic Carpet (transferring Yemenite Jews to Israel), I lost touch with Mildred.

In 1966 I worked at Bellevue/New York University Hospital. One day, while sitting in the hospital cafeteria, I saw a familiar face, Dr. Uri Birnbaum. I walked over and asked whether he had served in Tel Hashomer hospital in 1948. He looked at me in astonishment and asked who I was. After a few brief comments he invited me to visit his family and there was Mildred. Since then we cultivated and maintained our friendship. We enrolled together at New York University for some courses, etc. Moreover, she introduced me to AVI. I did not know of its existence before that.

She was active in several civic programs and, among others; she took part in the relief project of the Ethiopian Jews and frequently commuted between the United States, Ethiopia and Israel. Although she considered my participation in that program as a positive contribution, I was unable to leave my young family at that time with a son of ten and a daughter of eight.

Mildred has a daughter, Dorit, and three grandsons in Israel, a daughter and a granddaughter in Sidney, Australia and a son, Avi, and two granddaughters in Cleveland, Ohio. Her family and many friends mourn Mildred. For me, Mildred's death marks the closure of an era. She was basically the only person I knew from my army days with whom I stayed in touch. I will miss her. May she rest in peace,

zikhronah livrakha.

Lola Sprinzeles

Condolences to
Jon Birnbaum
7690 Fairview Ave.
Mentor, OH 44060



Then



More Recently

Benjamin Sushman

Benjamin Sushman: Armorer of Israeli Buses

Benjamin Sushman (October 31, 1918-April 28, 2002) was intrigued by the idea of a Jewish state. As a teenager, Ben joined the Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist youth organization promoting *aliya* to Palestine. His plans to emigrate, however, were postponed by the eruption of WWII and later by the White Paper issued by Great Britain.

During the war Ben carried out his duties as a Medic in the 81st Medical Armored Division that helped liberate Mauthausen concentration camp. People who knew him well state that he was never quite the same after his discharge from the army. His personality went from light-hearted to somber, more introspective. He never elaborated on his experiences during the war.

Back in the states he learned that plans were afoot, illegally, for the transport of refugees from France and Italy to Palestine. He became interested and volunteered and was assigned ship's barber among other duties. One of the crew was I.F. Stone, the writer, with whom Ben maintained correspondence for a number of years.

After disembarking from the Hagana in Haifa he was mingled with the refugees

along with the rest of the crew and whisked away to Kibbutz Ain Hashofet. I understand that this was the last ship allowed into the country before the British started diverting them to Cyprus.

After a few weeks of recuperation Ben joined his *haverim* from the states at Kibbutz Hatzor in the south. There he worked on construction, a job he found gratifying, but decided after a few years that collective living was not meant for him and left the group.

He went to live at the Beit Hastudentim in Kiryat Bialik, just outside Haifa, where American students were living and attending the Haifa Technion. At that time a number of events took place in his life. He was married; Israel became a State; his first child, Yisrael, was born and the War of Independence broke out. The fact that Ben worked as a welder in the States enabled him to obtain work in that field at Vulcan where armored buses were being turned out at a rapid pace.

Another twist of fate, his wife's illness, brought Ben back to the States where he enrolled in the Maryland Institute of Art. This eventually led to his job as a lithographer in New Jersey. He remained a staunch supporter of Labor Zionist Israel.

Among his many interests was fine art in which he dabbled in for a short period. In American politics, he voted Democratic or Independent, depending on the candidate, wrote numerous letters of dissent or protest to newspapers and periodicals, collected rare American stamps, which became his lifetime hobby. He sold his last stamp a few weeks before his death. Last but not least, he was an avid reader.

Ben suffered from End Stage Renal Disease and had to be on dialysis three times weekly for almost three years. He finally reached the point where he decided life was not worth living under these conditions and refused treatment. He died a peaceful death at home with his wife, Sylvia by his side. He leaves four children: Israel, Jonah, Miriam and Reuben, a son-in-law, Owen, a daughter-in-law, Nancy and a grandson, Joshua.

Condolences to
Sylvia Sushman
40 Empire Ln.

Willingboro, NJ 08046-2239

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A Lost Opportunity

I am accustomed to receiving frantic letters of concern from overseas friends and relatives, but lately my e-mail has been inundated with letters from people I don't even know. Furious and frustrated by international media bashing of Israel for defending itself against horrendous Arab terrorism, my pen pals want to know how they can help, how to volunteer? My address is on a web site in connection with MACHAL, the Hebrew acronym for overseas volunteers who fought in Israel's War of Independence

Noah from New York wrote: *"How does one join the Israel army? I am 25 years old... I have emergency medical experience. I could help."*

Rick from Tennessee: *"I love Israel and the Jewish people, and I am enraged when I hear most of the nations of the world condemning them for defending themselves against Arab aggression... What can I do?"*

Albert from London: *"I had enough of this. I mean just look at today's incidents. How can I help?..."*

From Los Angeles William wrote: *"I am interested in volunteering to serve Israel this summer in any capacity. Doing something is better than doing nothing."*

A letter from Wai Mung, a Chinese girl in Singapore, and another in a similar vein from Peter in Kenya saying: *"Due to my esteem for the nation of Israel I would like information about overseas volunteers."*

Abraham, a native Virginian asked: *"Are there volunteer positions available in Israel? I'm 46 (some service as a US Border Patrol Agent) Speak Spanish and minimal Hebrew. I feel useless doing nothing to help."*

The letter from Dean, who lives in Sweden, really got to me. *"I'm a 22 year old guy who would like to join the IDF... I am a top athlete, I swim, jog, box and I'm a sharp-shooter. I just feel that I have to do my share...It's like a MUST... I feel I HAVE to do this..."*

His words, ringing in my ears, sounded very familiar, history repeating itself. During Israel's War of Independence in 1948 feelings like these had motivated over 3,500 volunteers from 41 different countries to rally to Israel's defense. Most had just been released from the allied forces after serving four or more years during

World War II. They were eager to offer their military skills and combat experience to the newly formed Israel Defense Forces. Jews as well as non-Jews, they wanted to be part of creating and defending a Jewish State.

They manned Aliyah Bet ships in heroic efforts to bring Holocaust survivors to the shores of Eretz Yisrael. They joined the Haganah, the Palmach. They formed the core of the nascent Israel Air Force, providing the first combat and bomber pilots, navigators, aerial photographers and ground crews. They ferried Messerschmidts and weapons from air bases in Prague to Tel Nof in Israel. The first naval commander, the first radar technicians, the first heavy artillery gunners in the IDF, the first battlefield surgeons were MACHAL volunteers. The significance of their contribution exceeded by far their numbers.

That was 54 years ago. Today, Israel has a mighty army and doesn't need to mobilize overseas servicemen. But overseas volunteers want to be recruited. Their outpouring of enthusiasm and interest needs to be galvanized into appropriate frameworks of volunteer activity.

Replying to these letters, I urge the writers not to pack their kits and hop on the next plane to Israel, as some of them planned to do. Instead, I suggest they check out the Sar-El program (<http://www.sar-el.org>), which enables volunteers of all nationalities and ages to live and work for 2 or 3 weeks at IDF maintenance bases, under the same conditions as Israeli soldiers. A youth leadership program aimed at Jewish community activists requires a longer-term commitment. Participants sign on for a brief enrichment program in Israel, followed by a 14-month stint in the IDF, which carries with it the obligation to return to their home communities and serve as part time shlichim (emissaries). They are then eligible for 3 years of free academic studies in Israel. (mahal_2000@hotmail.com). There may be other volunteer programs of which I am unaware. But, for sure, none of them even begins to meet the present need.

A former MACHAL veteran from New York, Lola, now in her 70's, who had served as an operating theater nurse during Israel's War of Independence, knowing the

situation, didn't bother to write. Using her own personal contacts she arranged a 10-day volunteer stint at the medical computer facilities of Ichilov Hospital. On arrival, she called me to say hello. As she put it, *"I just couldn't sit by idly without doing something to be helpful."*

A few of the letter writers will probably enlist in these programs. Others will be frustrated at not getting into the action. Some may consider coming on a solidarity visit, a study mission or as olim. Probably all of them will follow developments in the Middle East with heightened personal interest, their hearts beating in tune with our distress: their concern palpable. But the challenge remains for the powers-that-be to find practical ways RIGHT NOW to harness the gut feelings, good will and skills of these potential volunteers into suitable frameworks which will forge an enduring commitment to Israel. It would be a shame — a lost opportunity — if we fail to do this.

Zipporah Porath, author of **"Letters from Jerusalem 1947-1948."**

87 Hagalil St.

Givat Savyon, 55900

Israel

Tel. and FAX 972-3-635-1835

zip@netvision.net.il

Songs of the Volunteers

In a recent edition of the Newsletter of the American Veterans of Israel, there is a mention of the "Songs of the Volunteers" written in 1948 by several young men. The article referred to two English volunteers on their way over to Israel. My father, who recently passed away, was a volunteer originally born in Germany and later sent on a ship to England where he was raised in a Jewish boys orphanage. He volunteered in 1948 to go to Israel and worked on a ship. He used to sing that song to me and my brother and he claimed that he wrote it with some friends.

My father was Max Leo Kampler and, later on, he worked in Be'er Sheva after the war. My mother tells me that he was in the 79th Tank Brigade. The song was composed while they were bringing people from Marseilles to Palestine on that ship. He was about seventeen years

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR CONTINUED

Letters

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old then.

If there is anyway you could get me in contact with Aaron Baranan who wrote the song. It would be interesting if they were friends and wrote it together.

Gine Kampler
Los Angeles, CA

Letter to the editor...

While surfing the net, I ran across your Newsletter mentioning a song that Aaron Baranan had written. Aaron Baranan is my father, and I remember him singing this song to me as well. When he went over to Israel he was Aaron Epstein. He changed his name to Baranan after he came back.

I'm not sure why you all can't locate him. He's still very much alive, still living in Atlanta, GA and still very much active and a part of the fight to protect Israel. I thought he was still a member of AVI, but could not swear to it.

I will let him know that you are looking for him, and find out how he would like to be contacted.

Reena

From David Gerard, Treasurer of the AVI

Aaron Baranan is alive and a dues paying member of AVI. He does live in Atlanta.

Internationalizing the Newsletter

Your project to bring the AVI Newsletter to the attention of Machalnikim worldwide is noble. It will be an information link for all and particularly for those who wish to trace long-lost colleagues. A column headed 'Searching for..' would be appropriate.

I have enjoyed being a recipient of the Newsletter and wish you every success in this worthwhile undertaking.

Stanley Medicks
Coordinator, British and European Machal Association

Benny Peled IAF Commander Dead at 74

Benny Peled, who commanded the Israeli Air Force during the 1973 Yom Kippur War and led the rescue of Israeli hostages at Entebbe in 1976 died of emphysema at the age of 74.

Peled was born in Tel Aviv in 1928 and began his military service as an airplane mechanic. He completed his pilot training

Palyam Reunion in Israel

"WE THOUGHT WE WERE FORGOTTEN." Bergman.

"WE LOVED YOU THEN; AND WE LOVE YOU NOW." Lova Eliav.

In a moving program at the original Palyam Base at Kibbutz S'dot Yam the Palyam Veterans Association paid tribute to the AVI American and Canadian seamen who served in Aliya Bet in 1946-48.

The salute to the AVI veterans was the featured event at the June 8 Annual Palyam Reunion, and followed by the dedication of a permanent Palyam memorial on the grounds of S'dot Yam. More than 100 Palyam veterans and their families attended it. Among them were notable figures in

Israel's Aliya Bet and Navy history including Samek Yanai, last commander of Palyam, currently Chair of the Palyam Veterans Association, and principal organizer of the event. Dan Pattir, former Press Counselor at the Israel Embassy in Washington and Media Advisor to Prime Ministers Begin and Rabin presided at the program.

Other historical figures included three former Israel Navy Commanders Moka Limon — earlier Commander of Hagana Ship PADUCAH / GEULA, and other Aliya Bet vessels; Shmuel Tankus and Avraham Botzer. The Captains and Hagana Commanders of the American vessels participating in the program were: Aliya Bet Captains Aryeh Friedman — NORSYD/HAGANA/BIRIA; Gad Hilb — ULUA/CHAIM ARLOSOROFF and PAN YORK/ATZMAUT; Ike Aronovitz — PRESIDENT WARFIELD/EXODUS and PAN CRESCENT/KOMIMIUT; and Operational Commanders Lova Eliav — ULUA; Alex Shore — TRADEWINDS/HATIKVAH; and Yoske Almog — NORTHLAND/MEDINAT HAYEHUDIM.

The AVI contingent was led by Israel Vice President Dave Baum — HAGANA, one of the event's organizers, and included AVI President Eli Bergman — PADUCAH; Vice President U.S. Eastern Region Arthur Bernstein — ULUA; Dov Mills and Frank Lavine — EXODUS; Avi Livney — EXODUS, PAN YORK and PAN CRESCENT; Willy Rostocker — ULUA and PAN YORK; Mordy Schelesnitzki — NORTHLAND; and Aryeh Malkin — BEAUHARNOIS/WEDGEWOOD.

In thanking Palyam on behalf of the sailors Eli Bergman recalled and paraphrased the memorable remarks of Bernie Marks — HAGANA and EXODUS: "In life after Aliya Bet we went on to many successful accomplishments. But none of them matched the accomplishments and satisfaction we experienced in Aliya Bet working with you. Thank you for making it possible for us to participate and serve."

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as it acquires a global reach, and the World Machal people agreed.

I was impressed with the World Machal leadership, under Smoky and his able associate Doreen, who are committed to maintaining and enhancing a global legacy, despite the inevitable shadow of the universal time-clock, which we at AVI too are experiencing. They do not have any organizational hang-ups; they face up to practical issues, like the maintenance of existing memorials and exhibits, before creating new ones.

AVI is ably represented on the World Machal Executive Committee by our Israel VP Dave Baum, and by Eddy Kaplansky.

Aside from enhancing a realistic, mutually beneficial, and close relationship with the World Machal leadership, I claim another major accomplishment during my Israel stay. I managed to persuade Zippy Porath, who has been an AVI stalwart over the years, to join the Executive Committee as Director of Global Programs. Zippy brings a wealth of professional talents and experience, and valuable contacts in Israel and the Machal world, to our programs. She is already at work with Sam Klausner on global distribution of the Newsletter.

I am informed that one of their initial hurdles is to provide French and Spanish translations for Chaverim in those linguistic regions. But that problem has been promptly solved by our Executive Committee Chair Si Spiegelman, who, as our man for all seasons, including being AVI linguist, is fluent in both languages, and has volunteered his services.

Finally, a moving event I attended was the Palyam Annual reunion, which this year was a Salute to the American veterans. A summary by Dave Baum and I elsewhere in this Newsletter describes it.

Greetings to everybody for a pleasant summer.

Eli

Czech Observance continued from Page 1

member and pay homage to Czechoslovakia for the special military assistance it provided to Israel in the 1948 War of Independence. The program was organized under the auspices of the Czech government with the help of Shoshana Dagan, Curator and Head of Traveling Exhibitions at The Diaspora Museum in Israel.

The panel moderated by Consul General Gandalovic consisted of George Lichter, Machal instructor of the pilots and IAF cadets in Czechoslovakia; Hugo Marom, Israel pilot who trained at Ceske Budejovice; Colonel Josef Prokopec, Czech Air Force officer in charge of training at the base in 1948; Uri Bialer, Israeli historian and academic at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem; and Zdenek Klima, Czech historian who researched the subject for his Ph.D. thesis.

The panel focused on the contribution of the Czech Air Force and foreign volunteers in training and qualifying pilots on the Czech-built Messerschmitt and the Spitfires destined for the IAF. Dr. Bialer and Dr. Klima reviewed the significance of the Czech military assistance in the light of Israel's isolation in 1948 as the arms embargo was imposed on the region. As a result, the equipment and arms were acquired at premium prices at a time when few other sources were readily available. The equipment and materiel made available to Israel besides the fighter planes included a substantial quantity of small arms, mostly rifles, light and medium caliber machine guns and ammunition.

George Lichter recalled the 'cloak and dagger' nature of his recruitment as a Machalnik, his own training to fly the Messerschmitt and his work instructing other fighter pilots to fly the plane. In between trips to Israel, he also trained pilots on the newly purchased Spitfires. He described the hazards of flying the reconfigured Me-109 Messerschmitt that was prone to flip and nose-over. He spoke of the concerns in working behind the iron curtain and the scramble to get all personnel out in September 1948 when the, heretofore, supportive stance of the Communist regime turned about-face. He remembered Sam Pomerance, a key organizer and trainer from the U.S., who lost his life ferrying one of the Spitfires to Israel over the Yugoslav mountains. Sam flew ahead of the Spitfire group, in spite of severe bad weather, to meet the sched-

ule at the Yugoslav refueling site for the group.

Colonel Josef Prokopec recalled the challenge for the Israeli cadets who went through the program with little previous aviation experience, compelled to qualify in a minimum time frame dictated by the stormy political situation as official support from the Czech regime blew hot and cold.

The panel stressed the paramount importance of the Czech military assistance in providing Israel with the wherewithal to defend itself and eventually gain the upper hand over the invading Arab armies.

Tokens and certificates of appreciation were exchanged and special recognition given to George Lichter, Al Schwimmer, Colonel Prokopec and Consul General Gandalovic as expressions of gratitude to the Czech nation.

Concluding the program, Al Schwimmer, founder of Israel Aircraft Industries, emphasized the importance of the Czech assistance at a time when Israel had its back to the wall. He pointed out that while Israel continues to face tough political and economic challenges today, its position is stronger than ever. Israel has built a sound economic infrastructure and an advanced technological base. It has one of the best armed forces on the globe. Israel will overcome its current political challenges as well.

CZECH ASSISTANCE TO ISRAEL IN 1948: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1948 was the year the U.S was facing off with the Soviets during the Berlin Airlift and the Cold War was heating up. In February, the Czech Communist party took power in Czechoslovakia. The main strategist in this power grab was Rudolph Slansky, who became Deputy Premier and Communist Party Secretary. Slansky was Jewish, but it is not known whether that influenced his outlook regarding the creation of a Jewish State. Nevertheless as a loyal Communist, he followed the Moscow party line. The Soviet Union had supported the notion of the emerging Jewish State consistent with its own geopolitical calculations, although they reversed course, when the outcome did not turn out to their liking later in the year.

On May 15, 1948 the State of Israel was declared and the Arab invasion followed immediately. The IDF was formed on May 28. The arms embargo was enforced by

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U.S. government officials in 1948, even after the U.S. had recognized the State of Israel and with full knowledge that the embargo favored the Arabs and would leave Israel defenseless. Some U.S. officials feared that a prolonged Israel-Arab conflict would give the Soviet Union a pretext for entering the fray and getting a foothold in the Middle East.

When the Arab invasion began, Israel had a small number of light planes under the command of Hagana's Sherut Avir. These were used mostly for supply and communications flights and as primitive bombers. The Egyptians alone had two squadrons of Spitfire fighters and two squadrons of American C-47 Dakotas converted into bombers. Syria had another full squadron of fighter planes poised for battle.

The Messerschmitts were acquired from the Czech Skoda Works that produced fighter planes for the Luftwaffe during World War II. The Czech-built Me-109 was known as the Avia S-199, reconfigured to operate with an older bomber engine that was still available. The engine was heavy and underpowered, leaving the aircraft unstable and difficult to handle during take-off and landing. In action, the machine guns would frequently jam and went out of synchronization with the danger that the pilot would shoot off the airplane's propellers. The Czech pilots had no desire to fly the machine. The plane was facetiously nicknamed the "Czech knife" and the Israelis called it "Sakin" (knife). Twenty-Five Messerschmitts were flown to Israel between May and July of 1948 in sections and assembled upon arrival. Only six were still operable by the end of the summer of '48.

The Spitfire deal consisted of a squadron of fighter planes the British government allowed the Czech pilots to fly home as a gift for their service in the RAF during World War II. Israel then purchased them from the Czechs in July of 1948. The Spitfires were comparatively easy to handle and experienced pilots required minimum instruction to fly them. The problem was getting them delivered to Israel, 1500 miles away, as the flying range of the Spitfire was only 600 miles. George Lichter tells that the planes were jerry-rigged to boost their range by removing

armor and radios and mounting additional gas tanks under the wings. With a refueling stop in Yugoslavia, the aircraft could now reach Israel. Six Spitfires took off for Israel in September but only three made it. In mid-December, 15 Spitfires were flown to Israel of which ten arrived intact. In one of the flights, Sam Pomerance, who had been the mastermind in converting the Spitfires lost his life in the Yugoslav mountains attempting to reach the refueling site under hazardous weather conditions.

The first wave of six trainees arrived in Ceske Budejovice in early May of 1948. Five of them (two Israelis and three Machal) became qualified fighter pilots on the Messerschmitt and returned to Israel on May 20 in time to strike at the Egyptians who had broken through the Southern defense lines and were advancing on Tel Aviv. (Four disassembled planes followed in transport aircraft by May 23).

The training and checkout at Ceske Budejovice continued through the summer of 1948 on the Messerschmitts and subsequently on the Spitfires. By August, the training course became untenable because of deteriorating political developments behind the iron curtain. In total, seventy pilots were trained or checked out in Czechoslovakia by the time the program was aborted in September of 1948. Many were Machalniks. The Americans who went through the program were vulnerable on two counts. They could be arrested at the whim of any Communist functionary in Czechoslovakia and they risked losing their citizenship upon their return to the U.S. for joining the armed forces of another country.

The initial five pilots who qualified on the Messerschmitts formed the first squadron, known as 101, with a number of ground personnel. Others joined them as they completed training in Czechoslovakia or arrived directly in Israel. After the war a plaque was mounted at the Hatzor base honoring 42 fighter pilots who served in 101 squadron during the War of Independence. Of these, 3 were Israeli; Ezer Weizman, Modi Alon and Sandy Jacobs, (2 KIA); 22 were from USA (3 KIA); 7 came from South Africa (2 KIA); 5 from Canada (1 KIA); and 5 from Britain (1 KIA). On a typical day during the War there were 20 fighter pilots active in the squadron. The 101 squadron plaque also gives recognition to three key Machal ground crew members for their involvement in

keeping the planes operational.

Note: According to Eddy Kaplansky, of the 193 WWII pilots in the IAF over the same period, 171 were Machal and correspondingly, of the 33 IAF pilots killed or missing during the War of Independence, 19 were Machal.

Small arms shipments from Czechoslovakia commenced in April of 1948. By the Fall, the arms deliveries included Mauser rifles (46,800), light and medium caliber machine guns (6,100), and ammunition (circa:80 million rounds). The significance of these shipments in the field can be appreciated considering that in April of 1948 the weapons available to the Yishuv consisted of around 10,000 rifles of assorted makes, caliber and vintage; 2,000 home-made submachine guns and a few hundred light machine guns and mortars. The arms shipments from Czechoslovakia provided the fledgling IDF with the capability to mount the early defenses and later that year stage the offensive vanquishing the enemy forces in the field. No other sources for small arms were available at the time because of the arms embargo.

Materiel was flown to Israel by the ATC (Air Transport Command), operating in the USA as LAPSA (Lineas Aereas de Panama) to acquire ten C-46 Curtiss transport airplanes and three C-69 Lockheed Constellations. An estimated 60 Volunteers, mostly Americans, served with ATC, and several lost their lives in crashes while ferrying equipment and supplies.

The operation was directed out of Zatec (Zebra) in Czechoslovakia. ATC transported cargo from Zatec to Israel starting in May and ceased operations in August of 1948 due to US State Department pressure. Afterwards, much of the transport continued by rail and sea.

What prompted the Czech Peoples Republic to render military assistance to Israel? In the early stages it was, no doubt, the support and encouragement of the Soviet Union, who had voted for partition in the preceding year and recognized the State upon its founding. The Soviet Union's support however began to wane in the summer of 1948. In July, Washington began exerting pressure on Czechoslovakia to enforce the arms embargo. In August, the ATC was 'invited' to leave Czechoslovakia, but arms shipments to Israel continued by rail and sea. By September, the training at various air bases ceased and the instructors and trainees were transferred because of the looming
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danger. In spite of all that, the delivery of many of the Spitfires that year took place in December and continued into 1949.

In the midst of the agitation and obfuscation that ensued, the Czech Communist regime enjoyed the hard currency the deal was generating in the difficult post-war economic period. But the Czech people who participated in the program did so with enthusiastic support for the State of Israel. They stuck to the program as long as it was tenable and extended a hand to a friend in need.

Note: Israel paid in excess of \$40,000 for the Messerschmitt fighters. The Spitfires, later on, went for \$23,000 each at a time when surplus P-51 Mustang and P-47 Thunderbolt fighter planes were selling for \$4000 each in the U.S. Training of pilots cost \$10,000 each.

At the conclusion of the program, a Machalnik in the audience, Murray Greenfield, commented that the important role of the foreign volunteers in Israel's War of Independence has been largely overlooked. He recalled that 119 foreign volunteers, including 19 fliers gave their lives during the War of Independence.

The Czech military assistance played a role not to be minimized. Without this help, the outcome of the war might have been different. At the same time the Machal role in getting the materiel to Israel and providing some of the first fighter pilots to fly the Messerschmitts had a colossal impact in galvanizing Israel's military strength as it faced numerically superior Arab forces. The first air strike was carried out on May 29, 1948 by four of the Messerschmitts flown by Israelis Modi Alon and Ezer Weizman, and Machalniks Eddie Cohen from South Africa and Lou Lennart from USA. Eddie Cohen was shot down and killed on that raid. The action had an immediate effect in demoralizing the Egyptian troops advancing on Tel Aviv (32 kms. away) opposed by only a few under-manned and under-equipped platoons of the Givati 51 Battalion.

The overall Machal contribution has been subject to benign neglect in official circles over the years, both in Israel and abroad. including the epic of the volunteers who ran the British blockade on the Aliyah Bet ships, and those who served in all the military branches. An estimated

3500 Volunteers from abroad served in Israel's War of Independence, and of those over 1000 came from the U.S. and 230 from Canada.

Note: Special thanks to Shoshana Dagan, George Lichter, Mitch Flint, Aaron "Red" Finkel, Eddy Kaplansky, Hal Livingston, Sidney Rabinovich, and Tev Zimmerman for their input.

Other Sources:

Prof. Uri Bialer, "Czech Military Assistance to Israel in 1948" (Circulated document).

Eddy Kaplansky, "The First Fliers", and various research projects on the IAF.

Harold Livingston, "No Trophy, No Sword"

Leonard Slater, "The Pledge"

Ehud Yonay, "No Margin for Error"

The Testimony of Two Historical Studies: One Israeli; One Egyptian

In November 1997 the History Branch of the Israel Air Force published

gesher aviri l'atsmaut (Independence: A Bridge in the Sky) by Maj. Avi Cohen. It records the history of the Air Transport Command from 1947-1947. Almost all of the personnel, flight crews as well as ground crews, were overseas volunteers, primarily American and Canadians. It is a thoroughly and competently researched work covering the establishment of an airline with Panamanian registry, the acquisition of equipment including a C-46 and a Constellation, the participation of its crews in bombing Egyptian troops in the Negev and transporting military supplies from a base in Zatec, Czechoslovakia. Following are translations (by the editor) of a section on the motives that led the new Czechoslovakian Peoples' Republic to assist Israel and then a section on the reasons for termination of the assistance.

From pp. 35-36

Between 1947-1948 Czechoslovakia was dealing with the revolutionary turmoil of changing from a democratic state to a "People's Republic," in the orbit of the Soviet Union. Among its non-Communist leaders were loyal friends of the Jewish people, the most prominent being Thomas Benes and Jan Masaryk (the son of Thomas Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovakian Republic and its first president). Nevertheless, its Communist leaders took a positive position toward

requests of the Yishuv's supply mission: there was also Soviet interest in the establishment of the Jewish State and in pressing Britain to abandon the region. But, principally the Czechs were responding to the economic situation in their country, which was a result of the structural problems, associated with the transition from a private to a centralized-collective economy. The order of priorities in production and foreign trade, as these were dictated by the Soviet Union, caused a downslide in the Czech national product and a decline in the scope of foreign trade.

Against this background, Israel's need for military supplies and airplanes came at the right time from the Czech perspective. Czechoslovakia was, at the same time, providing military equipment to the Arab states. In his study, Amitsur Ilan, dealt with this problem among others: "There was a good measure of mutuality in the motives of the two parties: On the Israeli side—its desperate situation respecting armaments...and from the Czech side,—the desperate financial situation of the Prague government. The meshing of these two motives produced a strong symbiotic cement which bound the two countries in trade in armaments and military services...yet, somewhere in the background of this situation were Soviet strategic interests which, apparently, were never clearly defined...but it was absolutely clear that the crucial issue directing most of this military aid to Israel was not the aim of giving Israel a critical military advantage but it was Israel's role as a helpful customer for the Czechoslovakian economy."

The next excerpt tells us that a few months later, Czechoslovakia was pressured to terminate this military trade which had been named 'Operation Balak.'

From pp. 218-219

American pressure on the Czechs to interrupt the sky train was continuous: the question, however, is why at this particular time, 11 August, did the Czechs succumb to the pressure and issue an instruction to terminate Operation Balak and demand the rapid clearing out of the crews and the planes.

According to one of the sources, more and more facts about the operation were being leaked, "sometimes by informers and sometimes by lack of caution in the exchange of letters of personnel at the

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Etzion (code name for Zatec) airbase with their families in the United States, and this was the case primarily on the part of the Gentiles among them. However, in a later report of the censor of the unit it was written, "in letters sent overseas, without an indication of who the sender was, particulars were given on the composition of the flights and types of planes in our service.." Yet, the explanation does not clarify the issue of the timing and immediacy of the expulsion. The explanations offered by Benjamin Kagan, one of those active in the Czech supply mission, also fail to clarify these issues. According to him, up to that time the Americans had photographed the base at Zatec and the American State Department presented photographic evidence to the Czechs on the air operations of the American crews observed there. And also threatened to bring the issue to the attention of the United Nations; beyond this, according to Kagan, they even hinted that were the operation to be terminated, some of the limitations on American exports to their country would be lifted.

No doubt, ending of the flying out of the Messerschmitts and the transport of most military supplies would make things easier for the Czechs. Nevertheless, this does not provide a complete explanation since there were still negotiations on the acquisition of additional Messerschmitts and the issue still remained regarding the air transfer of 50 Spitfires that had already been purchased. One may only speculate that the pressures came from the emerging Berlin crisis and the intensifying Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union....

Support for this interpretation of events comes from a cable sent in "real time" on August 10 at 18:00 by Shimon Orenstein to Rami Taiber "to delay the instrument pending an instruction from Judah. The situation in Etzion (Zatec) is tense, Sammy (the American ambassador) wants to visit the place. A summary of the matter is expressed in a cable from Briger to Meridar:

"There was intense intervention by the American ambassador to Czechoslovakia and threats to bring before an international forum the fact of engagement of American planes and flyers on Czech territory for carrying out an illegal action.

Tomorrow at 11:00 the ambassador will meet with the Czech foreign minister to deliver an official protest. The Czech authorities demanded that we get all the aircraft, as well as the American flyers, out before that time because they do not have the ability to defend them against their confiscation by the Americans because they have a partial list of our people and evidence about all of them."

A study was published in 1993 in Egypt alquwa aljowiyya bayna alsyisa almusriyya wa-allisra'iliyya : 1922-1952 (Air Power in the Midst of Egyptian and Israeli Politics) by Jaber Ali Jabar. The work traces the evolution of the Egyptian Air Force, its organization, personnel and equipment. The entrance of Egyptian air power into the battle for Palestine after May 15, 1948 and the subsequent air operations are described against the emergence of the Israeli Air Force. The writer is sensitive to Israel's acquisition of aircraft in Britain, the United States and Czechoslovakia and the recruitment of air and ground personnel from abroad. The first excerpt below charges the Israelis with illegally importing air equipment and personnel during the June 1948 truce which, the author holds, was forced on Egypt by the UN and other nations. The translation is by the editor.

From pp. 286-287

Contrary to the Egyptian Air force, which did not add to its strength as set by the truce limits during the second stage of the war but rather reduced the number of its planes—despite its past deficiencies—military personnel and equipment of the Israel Air force were greatly increased during this stage. The Israel government did not refrain from arming its air force but even increased the number of flyers and technicians from among Jews with military training from abroad, foreign volunteers, or mercenaries. Their arrival in Israel became increasing frequent as the war became publicized until their number reach 150 flyers before the beginning of the third and last stage of the war.

As Ben Gurion said, "We have already obtained manpower of the highest quality including flyers, volunteers from South Africa and other countries in this period. The number that arrived from South Africa during the truce has reached 70 individuals.

The official Israeli review of the 1948 war described the volunteers and merce-

naries as follows:

At that time there arrived in the country (Israel) many volunteers 'mahal,' (Volunteers from abroad) from all parts of the world. These people had great expertise in air operations. Very quickly they entered the work as flyers and aircraft technicians. These Anglo-Saxons were knowledgeable about aircraft armaments from both the operational and organizational sides.

The text mentions the appointment of Aaron Remez "the young flier trained in the Royal Canadian Air Force" as chief of the Israel Air Force and then laments the improvements in Israel's air capacity as a result of the recruitment of foreign volunteers and the Czech connection.

From p. 411

There is no doubt that the position of the Israel Air Force was improved at the end of the second stage of the battle from what it was at the beginning of the declared war with respect to armament, manpower and even operationally. Yet, until the second truce Egyptian air power still stood its ground despite suffering from shortages.

Despite everything the level that Israeli air power achieved—despite its shortages and complete dependence on the volunteers and the mercenaries—it must be considered a great achievement for the Israeli government considering the conditions under which it built that power. Its dependence on volunteers and mercenaries with specialized knowledge was consistent with their needs and the existence of active Jewish organizations in many countries of the world. It would not have been able to form cadres for an air force from the Israeli population of but a few years before. And they could not have gotten together to protect a government in time. Much was owed to the vision of Ben Gurion in exploiting all the possibilities available to him to put together an air force.

From the assessment of the author, the cooperation with Czechoslovakia came to a halt at the urging of the Soviet Union, not the intervention of the Americans.

From p. 442

Arms and planes continued to flow into Israel under the eyes and ears of the United Nations observers. Throughout the whole of August five Beaufighters and ten Spitfires reached Israel (from Great Brit-

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ain). The flow of armaments and planes also continued by means of the air bridge from Czechoslovakia (Operation Balak) until the Czech government decided—based on Soviet instructions—in October to stop that bridge and liquidate the Israeli base in its territory. In accord with an export arrangement with the Israeli Minister of Defense, fifteen more Messerschmitt's were delivered by means of this air bridge. Their purchase had already been finalized before the second truce. The operation continued with maximal energy for another few weeks and in this period the remaining Messerschmitts, a quantity of armaments and ammunition were delivered.

David 'Mickey' Marcus Memorial

Some fifty members of AVI and their families, guests and members of the Jewish War Veterans gathered at West Point on May 19 to recall the service of Colonel David Marcus to the establishment of Israel. This annual event began this year with a service in the Jewish Chapel and concluded with an observance at the graves of David and Emma Marcus in the West Point military cemetery.

Following a presentation of colors by members of the Jewish War Veterans, Cadet Daniel Helmer lighted a memorial candle. The entire assembly sang the Star Spangled Banner and Hatikvah led by the Shapiro Family Choir. Chaplain Carlos Huerta offered an Invocation and welcomed the guests to the Point. He spoke of the future leaders being trained there. Simon Spiegelman greeted the assembled in the name of the AVI. Paul Kaye addressed the group under the theme of Remembering '48. He recalled the contribution of those who served in Aliya Bet to bringing the Displaced Persons to Palestine and those who served in the Army, navy and Air Force. Lola Sprinzeles spoke of her return to Israel in 2002.

Lukas Brenowitz, Information Officer of the Consulate General of Israel in New York was the guest speaker. He spoke of the heroism of the volunteers and the debt that all Israel and Jewry owe them for answering the call.

Latin American
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dreds of Holocaust survivors, awaiting transportation to Israel. This was our first moving encounter with the living history of the Holocaust. We left for Israel in small groups, by plane and ship. The "Hashomer Hatzair" comrades were placed in the Givati brigade headquartered at Kibbutz Negba and they participated in the heroic defense of the region, stopping the Egyptian tanks in their advance on Tel Aviv. Many of the members of "Dror" went to the Mansura camp (near Megiddo) and the rest joined in forming a Latin American unit under the command of Captain Pataqui. Pataqui was a Hungarian Jew who resided in Nicaragua and a close friend of the Dominican President Trujillo. He convinced Trujillo to ship weapons to Israel and possibly asked for the command of the Latin American Company in recognition of his achievement.

Our basic training was "completed" in Tel Litvinsky (now Tel Hashomer) under the command of a sergeant major who gave orders in five languages (no Spanish). The Latin American group became part of the 91 Battalion and saw action in the liberation of the Galilee. In its ranks were young volunteers from Peru, Costa Rica, Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and an "adopted" member from Turkey. We were issued rifles mostly and occasionally a light machine-gun. In spite of the lack of weapons, morale was very high and each person performed his duties faithfully. A Chilean group joined a company that had previously been part of the Palmach.

We had losses in the South American contingent. Among the fallen

were Dvora Epstein (Uruguay, 19 years old) and Yacov Kroch (Argentina) both killed in the defense of Nitzanim. Abraham Gueler (Uruguay) fell in the Negev. In remembrance of these three volunteers a kibbutz in the area was named "Ein Hashlosha". Enrique Rotschild (Chile) also fell in the Negev; Mordechai Wainerman (Argentina), Iasha Guianesin (Chile) and Ernst Muller (Chile) fell in the defense of Negba. It is also fitting to remember two young Cuban volunteers who did not make it in joining the fight and fell on the ship that brought them to Israel, the Altalena. They were Daniel Levy and David Mitrani.

In tribute of all the fallen Machalniks who came from all over the world, a monument was erected at Sha'ar Hagai at the approaches of "Bab el-Wad". It was a cooperative effort between Machal and JNF. The incumbent Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin Z'L inaugurated the memorial site in 1993 honoring the 119 Machal volunteers who gave their lives for the birth of the State of Israel.

Fifty years after the War of Independence, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a resolution on April 30, 1998 honoring the international groups of volunteers known as "Machal" who served in Israel's War of Independence. Also on the fiftieth anniversary of the State of Israel, President Ezer Weizman sent an invitation to each Machal member to meet with him in Jerusalem. Seven hundred Machal veterans from all over the world attended this reunion in May of 1998.

Rafael Seroussi
English translation: Si Spiegelman

The group adjourned to the military cemetery where a cadet Color Guard met them. Members of the AVI held aloft the organizational banner and read the names of the Mahal comrades who died in action. Sidney Rabinovich read a poetic tribute which he entitled Reflections. Following a musical interlude by the Shapiro Family Choir and the reading of a Psalm by Chaplain Huerta, Mr. Brenowitz and Chaplain Huerta laid wreaths at the headstones of David and Emma Marcus. The Choir rendered the memorial prayer of K'el Maleh Rakhmim. A cadet firing squad fired a six gun salute and Taps was played. The ceremony concluded with a Discharge of Colors

REFERENDUM

At the last meeting of the AVI Executive Committee a proposal was introduced to open AVI membership to Americans and Canadians who served in any of Israel's wars. The Executive Committee decided, without a recommendation, to submit the question to the membership for a vote. Following is the proposal as drafted by David Gutmann and three comments by Sol Jacobs, Simon Spiegelman, Eddy Kaplansky and Samuel Klausner. Following these you will find a ballot form with instructions for returning it to AVI headquarters.

David Gutmann: PROPOSAL FOR MEMBERSHIP EXPANSION

Chaverim,

Eli Bergman, our dynamic new AVI president and my one-time shipmate, has appointed me Director of Planning, and has asked me to sketch out a plan for AVI's survival. Some thoughts follow:

The AVI newsletter has, for some time now, resembled the obit pages of the Jewish Daily Forwards. Our numbers diminish at an accelerating rate, and with them, the future prospects of this worthy organization. These dark trends will continue until the day, not too far off, when the last surviving AVI member will elect him or herself president, dun him or herself for past dues, write, edit and publish the last copy of the AVI newsletter, and - if he or she can remember his or her address - mail it off to him or herself. So what if anything, is to be done? There are those chaverim who say that AVI, like the Grand Army of the Republic, or the Roman Legionnaire's Benevolent Association, should be allowed to die, along with its membership, a natural death. These might say that Israel's War of independence marked a unique event in Jewish history, and that it should be memorialized by an equally unique (even if short-lived) veteran's organization. But there are others, myself included, who don't share this wish for exclusivity, and who want the AVI to continue beyond the lifetimes of the founding membership.

Accordingly, I propose to open the AVI membership rolls to ALL U.S./Canadian veterans of the IDF from any war, or any term of service.

To those who would oppose this re-organization, on the grounds that we, the veterans of the Independence War and Aliyah Bet should have our own private organization, I say this:

1. We of the AVI don't really belong to some special, private war. Israel has been in a state of chronic struggle ever since its founding; our war never really ended. Thus, to set off "our war" as special and unique is to impose artificial distinctions on a continuing conflict. The IDF is fighting the same foes today, and for pretty much the same reasons, that it faced in '48. All IDF veterans are our comrades.

2. Perhaps most important, this is not a good time for an organization of Jewish fighters to disappear from the American-Jewish social landscape. Israel is hard-pressed, and needs all the resources that can be mustered. This is particularly true now, when the American Arabs are mobilizing in militant support of the Palestinians, while American Jews are becoming bored with (or ashamed of) Israel. Thus, our organization should persist, so that it can represent the ideals of service, sacrifice and Zionism, not only in the present, but to future generations of American Jews as well. A vital AVI can continue to remind our co-religionists that some American Jews do not cancel their Israel tours when a bomb goes off in Nahariya. Instead, they volunteer, and push to the forefront of the battle.

That's my position. We have nothing to lose. If we agree to take the "expansion" route, the organizational details can be worked out later.

Respectfully Submitted,
Dave Gutmann

Sol Jacobs of Ramat Gan, Israel supports the proposal Haverim:

I would vote 'Yes' if the proposal included the option 'I agree...be opened to American and Canadians who serve(d) as volunteers in any of Israel's

wars. The rationale being that Israel's War of Independence is still raging and could continue indefinitely beyond our ('47-48 veterans) lifetime. Future volunteers should be inspired by our example. They would help defuse boredom, despair fatigue and a sense of isolation in the Yishuv and be a visible symbol of the unity of the Jewish people everywhere, in what may be a long struggle. Our freedom is precious and will not come easily. It could, too, despite some insularity and disinterest in the diaspora, reside only in the survival of Israel, functioning in a role its renaissance anticipated.

Sol

Simon Spiegelman—OPENING THE AVI MEMBERSHIP ROLLS: MUSING OVER THE PAST AND FUTURE

In 1989 and 1993 several attempts were made to organize American veterans of the IDF who served after 1948. Both attempts failed. While Gutmann recommends acceptance of the vets as AVI members, the 1989 attempt aimed at forming a distinct organization with its own board, treasury etc. It was named A.V.I.D.F. (American Veterans of the IDF) The two groups would organize joint activities and programs. AVI provided 'seed money' to get the recruiting off the ground. The 1993 effort was more ambiguous and the Board opted for a joint committee to study alternatives and propose an appropriate structure for affiliation while keeping the two units separate. Following is a synopsis culled from my files:

1. Sometime in 1989 the AVI board voted to set up an affiliated group named A.V.I.D.F with the objective of organizing American Veterans of post-1948 service in Israel. Murray Weisberg, Adrian Phillips and Sam Alexander were involved in the recruiting effort at different times.

2 Under the leadership of Mitch Chupak and Craig Frank (IDF vets of post '48 service), a nucleus of some twenty members (roster available upon request) was formed. They advertised in the Jewish press which generated a substantial mailing list of interested vet-

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erans The organizers had several meetings, that early on seem to have been vibrant and enthusiastic but soon were marred by much infighting. There was no bond between AVI board members (especially those opposed) and the new 'kids on the block'. After a year the attempt went into a sleep mode.

3. In 1993, under my earlier presidency we decided to revive the project and formed a membership committee toward that end consisting of Paul Kaye, Marvin Libow and Adrian Phillips. In August 1993 We met with Mitch Chupak and David Litwinsky of the new A.V.I.D.F. embryo and formulated a plan of action starting with a joint Hanukkah party to honor the post-48nicks. But the effort did not collect the critical mass needed for success. The project expired soon thereafter and so did the A.V.I.D.F.

4. In line with our efforts to organize the post 48 vets, we contacted Gen. Uzi Narkiss as well as the military attaché in Washington, consular representatives in New York and Washington, and the IDF records division in Israel to obtain official rosters. No one came up with information on the U.S. born IDF veterans who returned home after completing their service.

5. From my talks with the vets and others I sensed that their perception of how they were viewed differed significantly from that of the AVI people. The AVI veterans saw themselves as volunteers who came to Israel as part of the larger Machal and Aliya Bet recruiting effort. Their self-perception was that they were sorely needed and played a significant role in the creation and survival of the State. This shared view created strong organizational bonds within AVI. The AVIDF vets from all indications did not share this self-perception. Each was inducted into the IDF as an 'oleh' and not as a 'volunteer' from abroad and completed his service like any other conscript and then left the country. In any event, the two groups failed to amalgamate.

Our Machal West comrades opened their membership rolls to IDF veterans living in the U.S. West who served post

'48. Reportedly eight people joined and two of them are serving on the board having added muscle to their operation. But the attempt has not generated the critical mass for large scale recruitment of the vets. Ironically, ten years from now Machal West may just consist of eight people known as Machal veterans who by definition did not serve as Machal. But it's true as David Guttmann implies that it won't make much difference at that point to the current AVI or Machal West membership.

In short the prospect of regenerating a viable and dynamic organization strong in numbers to carry forth our torch is very slim as observed from the perch of past experience. The best one can say is that it may give us a few hands to help run our organization as we ride the ebbing tide. We can also take comfort that possibly someone will be around to write an obit to the last surviving AVI member in some Jewish newspaper. At least that's worth something. No, the JWV, VFW and American Legion are not models we can aspire to.

As an alternative we can think of other veterans organizations such as the Jewish Legion, Hebrew Brigade and in the U.S, the Flying Tigers and Doolittle Raiders and a host of other groups who served in a given war or special phase of it. They joined in camaraderie, did their stuff and left the fold one by one mourned and remembered by their comrades. They left their story behind in archives and written chronicles. There is nothing immoral or indecent with this model as there is no law that requires us to assure our perpetuity at all cost and in any form. It looks a whole sight better and 'noble' than a wild scramble to chase an impossible dream of perpetuity and locating a few good souls to keep us pumped up. It tells us... "you were special, so just Relax and Enjoy!!!"

Si Spiegelman

Eddy Kaplansky: The Word from Israel

Rabotai:

Yes, time is indeed running out for us Machalniks and the AVI will be ex-

tinct before much longer. Rather than let that dreadful thing happen, David Guttman urges AVI to "open our membership books to ALL American//Canadian veterans of the IDF from any war, or any term of service."

In support of that move, David argues that; "this is not a good time for an organization of Jewish fighters to disappear from the Zionist landscape. Israel is hard-pressed, it needs all the friends it can get, thus we should continue to uphold the ideal of service and sacrifice"

Perhaps timing is indeed everything, but it beats me how the AVI's demise could possibly reduce the number of Israel's friends. Nor can I visualize how an open-to-all-comers reincarnated AVI could personify the ideal of service and sacrifice. After all, its membership would consist largely of expatriate Israelis who became Americans or Canadians only after their IDF service; and they had no choice under Israeli law but to serve in the IDF, in sharp contrast to the Machalniks and Aliya-Betniks who voluntarily put their lives on the line for the cause.

It therefore seems to me that an AVI reincarnated as David suggests would hardly be a fitting and proper memorial to the Machal role in the War of Independence. It is also well to ask if there really a need for yet another 'monument' to Machal. As I see it, the World Machal Memorial at Sha'ar Hagai, the AVI Memorial plaque nearby, the Machal Archives, the Machal Streets in several Israeli cities, the many books on the subject in different languages, etc, adequately guarantee that the Machal story will live on long after we are all gone.

So with all due respect to David Guttman, I see little if any value in his AVI reincarnation proposal.

Eddy Kaplansky, Haifa

Samuel Klausner: AVI and the War of Independence are unique

I am grateful that David Guttmann, has given some thought to the future of AVI but am surprised that his proposal was not built on a historical review of our membership and its earlier

planning decisions. He seems unaware that his proposal to open membership to Americans who served in any of Israel's wars has been debated and rejected by the Executive Committee on more than one occasion. The last time this proposal was considered and rejected was in the spring of 2000. One may certainly revisit an issue, but this entails a responsibility for engaging the earlier concerns. Here are some of those concerns and I believe they remain valid.

1. US/Canadian Veterans of the IDF of wars subsequent to 1948 were not volunteers but were Israeli citizens fulfilling their national obligation. The 1946-1948 volunteers responded to the needs of the DPs and of the Yishuv, not yet a state. This was a unique experience and drew a unique population. Some of the volunteers made *aliya* but for most of Machal, and certainly for those who sailed the ships of *aliya bet*, this was a hand extended by diaspora Jewry and Christian friends of the Jewish people. The core of our group is our shared re-living of that unique experience. Since we bring together people from the whole political spectrum, AVI is non-political and not the primary vehicle for its members support of Israel.

2. There is a legal issue. Our incorporation in New York State embodies the notion of veterans of the War of Independence. This could, of course, be changed but it is somewhat bizarre Gutmann to suggest that those who would remain within our historic framework should form another organization.

3. The issue arises at this time as we face our individual deaths and that of the organization. Had opening membership to veterans of other wars been a good idea why did we not do so at the time of Suez or the Six Day war? In doing so we affirm that we will close shop leaving as our unique memorial the AVI archives, Israeli historical records and the memories of our families and friends. In this sense we are more like the Abraham Lincoln Brigade, the Americans who volunteered in Spain than the VFW that represents veterans, draftees and volunteers, of all official overseas campaigns.

4. Of course, the Gutmann proposal has no meaning unless there are American IDF veterans waiting to join. Our California comrades opened their ranks to veterans of other wars and, over several years, found eight new members. Even eighty would not guarantee the survival of the organization. The lowest critical number for organizational maintenance is nearer 200-300. I do not believe we have the faintest hope of achieving such a number.

5. If you agree with the position that we represent something unique you will vote no on the proposal. If you support the Gutmann proposal, you might still vote to table it until evidence is presented of a population of veterans ready to associate with us.

6. Since I believe that there is no significant group of applicants out there and, anyway, believe in preserving our "uniqueness," I find Gutmann's proposal more a "tech fix" rather than a real planning. The real needs of the organization are to sustain a leadership that can meet the needs of members and help guarantee the survival of the message contained in our experience.

Samuel Z. Klausner



BALLOT

Check one of the three following options:

I agree that membership in AVI should be opened to American and Canadians of any of Israel's wars.

I vote to table this motion until it is demonstrated that a significant number of Americans who served in the IDF after the War of Independence have an interest in joining AVI.

I oppose the motion to open membership to veterans of other wars.

Comments:

Print your signature

Return this ballot either by mail or e-mail. By August 30, 2002 to
Sidney Rabinovich
108-26 65th Ave.
Forest Hills, NY 11375-1420
ESLRR@aol.com