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**Sent:** Thursday, May 18, 2006 4:20 AM

**Subject:** FADING AWAY IS NOT FOR THESE OLD SOLDIERS

Something I just wrote you may find useful:

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### **FADING AWAY IS NOT FOR THESE OLD SOLDIERS**

On Sunday, May 21, starting about 10 a.m. the security posts at the U.S. Military Academy overlooking the Hudson will begin encountering cars headed for the West Point Jewish Chapel. The autos will arrive at irregular intervals, most individually but a few in caravans of two or three vehicles. The young sentries will peer into each car to check on its occupants and their identifications. The security officers will soon notice that virtually all the cars with that destination include octogenarians among their occupants. That's because the war in which these aging veterans fought took place nearly six decades ago. The U.S. wasn't in it but these Americans were. It was Israel's War for Independence in 1947-49.

The American Veterans of Israel will reassemble, though their ranks be depleted by the toll of years, for their 40th annual West Point memorial services honoring all their comrades-in-arms no longer among the living. They will especially honor the only West Pointer ever buried in the academy cemetery having been killed fighting under a foreign flag. He was U.S. Army Colonel David "Mickey" Marcus, also known as Israeli General "Michael Stone," the cover name under which he trained and led Jewish troops in the Jerusalem sector of the conflict.

Among the estimated 1,000 American volunteers in the 1947-49 war, perhaps Marcus must be considered the most celebrated. His name adorns a playground in Brooklyn, a rest home for Israeli Army personnel in Haifa, a housing development in Tel Aviv, a kibbutz, a library at the Command School in Israel, lodges of B'nai Brith and the Knights of Pythias, and units of the Jewish War Veterans and the Disabled American Veterans. His was

the kind of life and death that Hollywood makes into a movie; and did -- 40 years ago. It was called "Cast a Giant Shadow" and starred Kirk Douglas. Certainly Marcus had a storybook career -- graduate of Boys High School, West Point (under Superintendent Douglas MacArthur), Brooklyn Law School; Treasury Department staff attorney, Assistant U.S. Attorney, Municipal Judge, NYC Correction Department First Deputy Commissioner and then Commissioner under Mayor LaGuardia.

Even before WWII broke out, he re-entered active U.S. Army service as Lt. Colonel and Judge Advocate. Marcus was promoted to Colonel in 1943. His legal and political skills were put to use negotiating several important international treaties, some related to the emerging United Nations. Though not a trained paratrooper, he wrote himself orders that enabled him to parachute into Normandy in 1944 as part of the D-Day airborne assault and saw action. He also saw first hand the horrors of the Holocaust in still smoldering but liberated Dachau, and he headed up the Army's war crimes division setting up the Nuremberg trials.

His return to civilian life in 1947 was brief; a matter of months. Ben-Gurion's representatives in America asked Marcus to help bring professional military organization, discipline and strategy to the forces fighting for a Jewish state. Because of his recent high level of international involvements, particularly in UN matters, use of another name while in Israeli service was deemed advisable. Thus he became "Michael Stone."

On May 28, 1948, Ben-Gurion signed the order that began, "Brigadier General Stone is hereby appointed Commander of the Jerusalem front . . ." That is said to have made Marcus the first Jewish soldier to hold that rank in 2,100 years since Judas Maccabeus. Within a month Marcus was dead but not before his masterminding and leading a road building, blockade-busting breakthrough giving strategic support to Israeli claims for Jerusalem.

The noon service at the Marcus gravestone that reads "Colonel David Marcus--A Soldier for All Humanity" is sure to be impressive with West Point Honor Guard cadets marching, flags flying, "Taps" being played and guns salutes being fired. But most striking may well be the two dozen or so old men silently standing as ramrod straight as their health permits yet still keeping faith with the vision of their youth.

Some will need the help of a cane or a walker, the hand of a caregiver, to negotiate the steep paths and roads from the chapel to the cemetery below. But they will do it. Though not with movement as sprightly in their Israel combat days, still they will do it with the same doggedness.

They were determined to make a difference then. They are determined to do so now, if only by their silent, steadfast witness, even as nuclear challenges loom ahead for the Israel whose national existence they, Marcus and thousands of others helped to win on the battlefield six decades ago. Fading away is not for these old soldiers.

Watching these particular visitors' cars depart the academy, the young West Point sentries may wonder what drew these octogenarians out of the comfort of their homes. The sentries' wondering would be historically appropriate. Part of the answer was a fatal miscommunication nearly 60 years ago between a nervous young Jewish sentry who spoke little English and an American who was his Commander but spoke little Hebrew.

--- By Tom McCarthy

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