

AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

UNITED STATES & CANADIAN VOLUNTEERS

136 East 39th St., New York, N.Y. 1001

Winter 2001

Messages from President Spiegelman and Vice President Kaplan

From the President

To all Chaverim and Chaverot:

First a word of thanks to our outgoing National President, Sam Klausner, for his zealous dedication to AVI and remaining at the helm for an additional year and a half to provide the leadership in formulating a new approach to running our organization and our presidential succession. Sam has volunteered to continue as the editor of the AVI newsletter for which we are grateful. The institution of a rotating one-year presidency comes of necessity, as the years creep up on us. The idea of bringing regional representatives more to the fore as members of AVI's National Executive Board again reflects the need for more members to participate in running our organization as well as to assure continuity as our numbers diminish.

For many years we have dealt with the obstacles of time and a changing world around us. On the way we lost many comrades and more losses are imminent, but we continue on the path we set for ourselves some fifty years ago when AVI was founded, and over fifty-five years ago when some of us served on the ships of Aliya Bet and, a bit later when others of us dedicated ourselves to the defense and survival of the State of Israel.

In 1963 we wrote into the AVI articles of incorporation our purpose:

To preserve and strengthen a spirit of comradeship among its members; to assist worthy comrades; to perpetuate the memory of our dead and to

maintain and extend the institutions of freedom; and to foster good will between the United States of America and Israel.

Our task is far from done and we ask all our members and friends to become fully involved at the regional level in support of the above and therefore:

1. Participate in the functions and special events that commemorate our bonds of friendship and strengthen these bonds with our comrades wherever they are.
2. Reach out to comfort our less fortunate members who are sick or destitute or have suffered grievous losses.
3. Collect and help preserve the archives of historically valuable material relating to the role of Machal and Aliya Bet in Israel's War of Independence.
4. Encourage members to solicit speaking engagements and publish historical material that tell of the contributions of Machal and Aliya Bet in the struggle for Jewish Statehood.

We look forward to your total support and close AVI activities and wish everyone a good and productive year 2001.

Shalom

Si Spiegelman, National President

David Kaplan, National Vice-president

David Gerard, National Treasurer

Lola Sprinzeles, National Secretary

Reports from the Regions

New York, Northeast Region

Members and their guests joined in our annual Chanuka affair which began at noon Sunday December 24 with a sumptuous lunch prepared, as usual by Dave and Arlene Gerard and assisted by Ellen Kaplan and Helen Libow. Early arrivals were treated to traditional and modern Israeli music in the tastefully decorated auditorium of the B'nai Zion building where we have our national offices. Following the Call to the Colors, we sang the Star Spangled Banner and Hatikvah. The third Chanukah Candle was lit by Sam Alexander and was followed by a minute of silence in memory of our 21 comrades who died in this past year: Jack Hurtig, Elihu Harris, Al Raisin, Joe Warner, David Drutz, Elliot Polansky, Robert Eisen, Murray Weisberg, Max Alper, Zvi Brenner, Allan Burke, Hy Brody, Hal Paiss, Benjamin Sturrey, Gordon Levett, Rudolf Patzert, William Steiner, Lee Harris, Rudy Augarten, Myron Goldstein and Arthur Braver.

David Kaplan, AVI V.P., spoke of outgoing President Sam Klausner's accomplishments in his two and a half year tenure, the establishment of the National Executive Board, the Northwest, Southwest, Midwest and Northeast regional groups, the use of modern technology in the form of teleconferencing by which the National Executive now meets with full representation of our nationwide membership, the liaisons established with the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., The Jewish Heritage Museum and the Jewish Historical Museum in New York, his development of the one year rotating Presidency utilizing members of the Executive to carry AVI through the next ten years in the

face of our declining numbers and who are willing and able to accept that responsibility, and at the same time successfully assuming the editorship of the Newsletter.

Sam Klausner then thanked the membership and executive for their support and spoke of the need for wider participation of the membership in the day to day responsibilities of the organization. He then introduced the incoming President, Simon Spiegelman. Spiegelman spoke of the future of AVI and its continuing contribution to Israel.

David Gerard, National Treasurer, asked each attendee to introduce Himself or herself mentioning the areas in which they served and then introduced Mrs. Hilit Lavi, Director of Donor Relations of the Friends of the Israel Defence Forces. The annual A.V.I \$500 contribution was presented to her. Mrs. Lavi, in accepting, spoke of her schooling in Israel through which she learned of the aliya bet and machal effort that made possible the establishment of the State of Israel. She thanked us for making it possible for her to live in the beautiful land and for our continued support of the Friends of the IDF.

V.P. David Kaplan then introduced the guest speaker, Mr. David Nekrutman of the New York Israeli Consulate who discussed the context in which Israel is attempting to establish a means of living with unfriendly neighbors in a "bad" neighborhood. There was a question and answer period in which members expressed their concerns for the future of the State.

Nat Nadler introduced his guest, George Venturini, who had painted the aliya bet ship "Exodus" which he wanted to donate to the Clandestine Immigration and Naval Museum in Haifa. We applauded his effort and thanked him for exhibiting it at our celebration.

Treasurer David Gerard then introduced our own Ruth Gruber who spoke of her early experiences with the Jewish refugees, from the original

Exodus to the 1000 allowed into the USA by President Roosevelt and placed in the Oswego, New York holding facility for two years. She also spoke of her book, and a film based on the Oswego experience, which is soon to be released.

The remainder of our time together was spent socializing and enjoying each other's company.

David Kaplan

Southeast Region

The Florida "contingent" of AVI reports a very light season so far. Our attempt last year to have a get together prior to the National Reunion was not too successful due to a poor response. However, it is a new year and a new millennium and, hopefully, our "snowbirds" are back in Florida in good health. We will try again for a reunion in the very near future. Unfortunately, we Floridians are not venturing out too far since we are unaccustomed to the "cool" 40 degree weather so our plans are temporarily on "ice" until the weather changes. We will have more news in our next report.

Len Shaffron and Bill Gelberg

Midwest

We have all wanted to do something as Machal chaverim about the situation in Israel. As for myself, I accept speaking engagements from the Israel Consulate in Chicago. They cover \$75 for expenses, which I then contribute to the Cancer Fund for Children's Health and the UJC. We have been asked by the Consulate to speak with representatives of the media about the situation. I feel we should have a conference call, prepared three or four days in advance, about the current situation in Israel. I have just read about Iraq's collecting arms and volunteers to fight in defense of the Palestinians. We cannot sit back and do nothing.

We have not been meeting too often because of the heavy snow storms in our area. I do, nevertheless, stay in contact, sometimes personally and sometime by telephone, with chaverim in the Chicago area.

Above all, we of the Midwest region of AVI want to thank Samuel Klausner for his leadership as Macula president. There have been others but you were the best. When my turn comes to serve as the one year rotating president, if I am still alive (I am now eighty) I will do my best.

Be well and let us all do our best with our minds, as we did with our bodies and brains some years ago. Warmest regard and good heal to all. I hope God leads us to a peace between Israel and its neighbors. The whole world seems to forget that some fifty years ago five Arab countries tried to expel us from our Holy Land.

Ben Hagai Steuerman

Canadian Machal

First, for the Canadian Machal; I wish everyone Happy and Healthy New Year. With the cold weather and lots of snow this year, most of Toronto Machal become snowbirds ending up in Florida. (Of course, oddly enough, there has been cold and a bit of snow there this year too.)

At our last meeting, we moved to making contact with Gahal now living in Toronto. It was felt that as we are losing members, we need to replenish our rank. If there are more of us, we can accomplish more. We are trying to raise funds for the charities we wish to support in Israel. This Yom Zicharon, we hope to have a remembrance ceremony at the Royal Canadian Legion, General Wingate Branch 256 Cerataph in the Mount Sinai Cemetary. One section is dedicated to Machal. We plan to invite next of kin of those who fell in 1948. Also, the relatives of all deceased Machal living in Toronto. We hope this will mark the beginning of yearly Remembrance Ceremony. We also hope to include the Israel Consul and Jewish Community here.

Jerry Rosenberg

Northwest

AVI Northwest Chair Bailey Nieder announced an AVI/Machal conclave scheduled for Victoria, BC in April either prior to or after Passover (date not yet set.) The

purpose is to assemble AVI and Machal West members joined by AVI members from elsewhere in the U.S. and Canada for a weekend of programming and bonding in one of the most lovely and unique cities in North America. The details including schedule and hotel will be provided in a special announcement as soon as possible in time for members to consult travel "good deals."

Nieder said: "We want to continue the warm get-together we enjoyed in Las Vegas, where we renewed our ties, and discovered new chaverim; little formal programming but much time for bonding. We hope that AVI from all over the country and the large Machal West contingent in California will attend."

In continuing on AVI Northwest activities Nieder added: "We have undertaken an ambitious project to reach any Aliya Bet and Machal veterans in the Western States outside of California, which is so adequately covered by Machal West. Fortunately our Vice-Chair Syd Abrams travels the Western States in his work; they include Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Alaska, Hawaii, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. And we will work with our Canadian Chaverim in British Columbia and Alberta to include veterans from those provinces.

Finally Nieder remarked: "With all our Aliya Bet and Machal Chaverim we mourn the loss of Sol Lester, who served as First Engineer on PRESIDENT WARFIELD/EXODUS. Sol passed away in Tacoma on Oct. 29, 2000. And we join with all in AVI/MACHAL in mourning the loss of another PRESIDENT WARFIELD/EXODUS sailor, our Past President and active and warm Chaver Murray Aronoff in December 2000. We wish the families comfort in their loss."

New York Canuka Event: President Si Spiegelman and Dr. Ruth Gruber

Messages from President Spiegelman and Vice President Kaplan Continuation

From the Vice President

Shalom-

I want to publicly thank Sam Klausner for his exceptional presidential tenure these past three years. For someone who is deeply involved in scholastic research, publishing papers and now involved in a book, his dedication to AVI as president and editor of our Newsletter was a remarkable tour de force. We have faced, in this time, with many serious problems affecting the viability of AVI, and its relationships with other Israel veteran groups. Sam was able to deal success-fully with all of these with calm, considerate and wise approaches. His organizational skills gave AVI a firm grip on the foreseeable future and for this alone he has earned our respect and gratitude. Personally, it has been my privilege and pleasure to work with him and look forward to continuing close joint effort as he remains our Editor and National Executive Committee member.

David Kaplan

Newsletter of the American Veterans of Israel

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Obituaries

Murray Aronoff, former president of AVI

Murray Aronoff, president of AVI in 1987-88, died on December 30, 2000. He succumbed after a long struggle with Alzheimers. Members recall him as a vigorous and dedicated leader of the organization, a man of spirit and energy. Nat Nadler and David Gerard delivered eulogies at his funeral. His son, Keith, said that he was the kind of man who exuded strength and confidence. He walked into a room and everybody knew he was there.

Murray was a crew member of the Exodus 1947 on its aborted voyage to transport 4,500 Jewish Displaced Persons from France to Palestine in 1947. The ship belonged to the Haganah, the defense force of the Yishuv. During that journey, the British, who, acting under the 1939 White Paper limiting the influx of refugees to Palestine, boarded the ship in international waters in an attempt to prevent their landing. Murray assembled a group of about 400, which took the name of Murray's Marauders, to resist the British boarding of the ship. During that hand to hand battle, Murray was wounded.

Bernard Marks of Cincinnati was the first officer. "Murray's Marauders defended the ship," Bernie said, from 1:30 AM to 6:00 AM on July 18, 1947 as the British tried to take the ship. "They had side arms, machine guns and tear gas," he said, "and we had canned food and potatoes and rocks." The refugees were taken to Germany, but most eventually made it to Palestine.

Murray was born in Worcester, MA, where his father was a house painter and an active Zionist. Murray, who shared his father's Zionist passion, could not fight in World War II because he had had polio as a child, his son said. His son said that, as a boy, he overcame his disability and went from a wheelchair to walking with a slight limp.

Until his mid-thirties Murray was a professional speaker for the United Jewish Appeal and for Israel Bonds, his son said. He worked for years in New York City's garment district as a salesman and part owner of a factory, and lived in Bethpage most of his life. In the late 1960s he was active in raising \$500,000 to rebuild the Bethpage Jewish Community Center, which had burned. In his later years he helped lead several trips with college students that retraced the route of the Exodus.

In addition to his son Aaron, two other sons, Keith and Craig, two daughters, Faith Aronoff and Andrea Aronoff and nine grandchildren survive him.

Condolences for the family may be sent to

Aaron Aronoff

3059 Seaview Lane

Bellmore, N.Y. 11710

*Information above adapted from New York
Times 01/13/01*

Arthur Braver, Veteran of Israeli Navy

Arthur Braver, 77, a Silver Spring resident who was a federal administrator until the early 1980s, died December 14 at Washington Hospital Center after a heart attack.

Born in New York City, Arthur moved to Washington, D.C. at age 4 and graduated from Theodore Roosevelt High School. After serving as a pharmacist's mate in the U.S. Navy during World War II, aboard ships in the Pacific Theater, he graduated from George Washington University and went to work as a historian at the National Archives.

In August 1948, he quit his job to join the Israeli Navy during their War of Independence. Paul Schulman had recruited him. Mort Levinson, who served with him, recalls him as the leader of their group. His daughter, Elisa, recalls that serving in the Israeli armed forces was illegal for an American citizen. She also says that on August 18, 1948 he was asked to report for duty by August 22. At that time her mother, Annette, and her

father, Arthur, had been going together for about a year and now decided to marry. They married on August 21 in Virginia. His first mission was to lead a group of American and Canadian volunteers as they transported a shipload of Jewish refugees from France to Israel. David Gerard reports that he served on Kuf 26 also known as the Noga/Yucatan. Elisa remembers him saying that he needed to calm frictions between European refugees and North African Jews. When there was an epidemic of diarrhea aboard the ship he inventively used opium as a therapy. He then served as a ship's medic in the Israeli Navy, as well as volunteering in a kibbutz. David Hanovice, who served with Arthur, says that Arthur was well liked and respected by the entire crew. He also recalls visits by Arthur's wife Annette waiting for him at the dock when the ship returned from engagements or patrol duty in the eastern Mediterranean. During this period, his daughter Elisa says, she worked for the Israeli government in a statistical and finance capacity.

Arthur once described for his grandchild's Bat Mitzvah class how frogmen from his ship attached explosives to the Egyptian ship, King Farouk, and succeeded in sinking it.



Arthur Braver, recently

He returned to the United States in 1949 and worked at the National Archives, U.S. Coast Guard, and then the U.S. Department of Labor until his retirement. His responsibilities included computer systems analysis, manpower planning for national emergencies, and investigating white-collar crimes committed by federal employees.

He was a member of Ohev Sholom Talmud Torah Congregation in Washington, D.C. and volunteered for the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, B'nai Brith, and the Hebrew Free Loan Association.

His wife of 50 years, Annette H. Braver, died in 1998. His youngest son, Philip Y. Braver, died in 1997 and his other son, Daniel E. Braver, died in 1984. Survivors include his daughter, Elisa R. Braver of Silver Spring, and two granddaughters, Rachel and Miriam Doyle.

Condolences may be sent to

Elisa Braver

9508 Clement Rd.

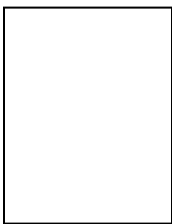
Silver Spring, MD 20910

703-247-1567; Home: 301-565-2079

ebraver@ihs.org

Solomon M. Lester, Exodus Crew

Sol Lester served as Engineering Officer aboard the Exodus transporting Displaced Persons and running the British blockade. Originally trained as a machinist, he had served in the United States Merchant Marine during the Second World War.



Sol Lester

Sol died of complications caused by an infectious disease on October 29, 2000. He had been suffering from Alzheimers and was 83 at his death. During the 1930s he had worked in the Civilian Conservation Corps doing in East Coast forests and went to Israel in response to the need for seamen in 1947.

Two of his crewmates have alleged that he pointed out crewmen to the British boarding party. Yet, according to an obituary in the Bellingham Herald (November 2, 2000), "Israel recently issued a

postage stamp to commemorate his and his crewmate's bravery on behalf of the Jewish nation." His comrades in the Northwest region of AVI, Eli Bergman and Bailey Nieder, remember him fondly. Bergman, having researched the events aboard the Exodus after it was boarded, commends Sol for averting the explosion of the unattended boiler by descending to the engine room and instructing a British officer, Ravenscroft, as to how to turn off the plant and run the ship on her own power.

Later in his life he moved to San Jose, CA where he raised a family and worked as a distributor for the San Francisco Chronicle. Survivors include his wife, the former Irma Stone, his son Steve Lester, daughter Sara Adler, stepson Harvey Stone, sister Sarah Sukhov, brother Nat Lester, eight grandchildren and two step grandchildren.

Condolences to the family should be sent to

Irma Lester

2818 Old Fairhaven Parkway #117

Bellingham, WA 98225-8276

360 752 9643

Myron Goldstein, Exodus Sailor

Myron Goldstein sailed on the Exodus hoping to bring Displaced Persons to Palestine and running the British blockade. Later he served on the Hamored as an officer and on the deck crew of the Hannah Senesh of the Israel Merchant Marine.

Myron died at the age of 72 leaving his widow Bertha. Ralph Lowenstein reports that he brought back a flag from on the ships of Allay Bet. His friends nicknamed him Mincha Maariv and Mincha Myron. He returned to the United States in 1951.

Condolences may be sent to

Bertha Goldstein

80 Esplanade

Mt. Vernon, NY 10553-1112

914 668 4015

Cy Weinstein, Made History During the "Battle of the Exodus"

Cy Weinstein, third mate on the Exodus, has died at his home in Belfast, ME leaving his wife Katherine. Harold Leidner writes that he will be remembered affectionately by his friends and adds, "he was part of the history and he made history during the now legendary 'Battle of the Exodus'." Leidner says that the British boarding party clubbed and shot its way into the wheelhouse where the second mate, Bill Bernstein, was mortally wounded. The other officers and Captain, Ike Aranne, Bernie Marks and Cy Weinstein then made the great decision to disconnect the steering wheel from the bridge and to steer the vessel from the aft steering wheel. Cy took over that wheel and kept the vessel underway for a full four hours despite all efforts of the British destroyers to halt the ship by ramming it. That created the full measure of time to ensure the resistance and the victory of the Exodus. Leidner closes his tribute saying, "The dwindling number of crew members salute and honor Cy." David Gerard adds, "He was a great guy and a terrific boatswain's mate..."

Condolences may be sent to

Katherine Weinstein

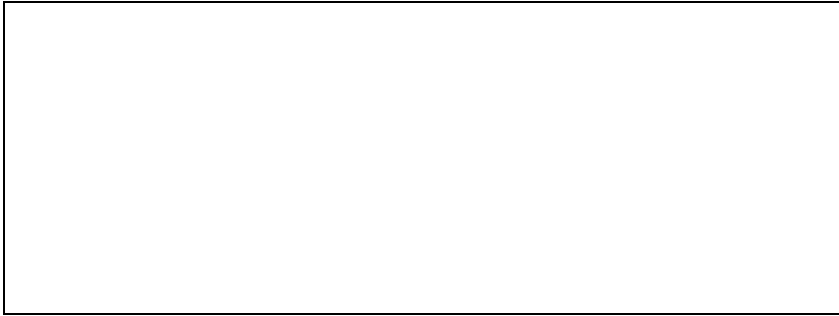
32 Bayview Street

Belfast, ME 04915

207 338 2594

Herbert Fischbein, Served in Tank Corps in 1948

Herbert Fischbein of Maplewood, NJ, operated tanks during the Second World War. The New Jersey Jewish News of May 14, 1998, in an article on "local heroes who fought for Israel" reports Fischbein as saying matter-of-factly, "I went to Palestine to join Israel's armored forces." Ralph Lowenstein says that at age 22 he went to Israel in July 1948 and served in the 79th Army Battalion of the 7th Brigade until March of 1949. In January 1949 he suffered leg wounds in combat in Rafa.



Herbert Fischbein, then

Herbert died on November 6, 2000 after a long battle with cancer. He was 74 at the time of his death.

According to the Jewish News, his early interests were in theatre and, especially, playwrighting. After returning from Israel he worked as a real estate broker.

He went to Israel via Marseilles and sailed on a refugee ship. Apparently his mother became concerned with his safety and sent an inquiry to his commander. We have a letter from the Israel Ministry of Defence if February 2, 1949 in which his mother is assured of his well being and saying they had asked him to write home. His Israel military identity booklet bears the number 224815 and has him born in New York on January 30, 1926 listing his occupation as theatre administrator.

His wife, Gillian; a daughter, Ruth Wilner and a son Michael and two grandchildren survive him.

***Send condolences to
Gillian Fischbein
665 Prospect Avenue
Maplewood, NJ 07040
973 763 3482***

WHO DOWNED THE EGYPTIAN SPITFIRE?

On May 15, 1948, several hours after the declaration of the State, the Sde Dov area was attacked by Egyptian Spitfires. The engine of one Spitfire was hit by ground fire. The pilot, son of Cairo's Mayor, made an emergency landing and was taken prisoner. This was the first downing of any aircraft during the War of Independence. Who

downed it, with what type of gun, and from where was the shot fired?

Numerous versions have appeared during the 51 years since the event, but only recently has the mystery been solved.

The original article, by Lior Schlein, appeared in a recent issue of the IAF magazine Bitaon Chail HaAvir. It was based on research conducted by Eddy Kaplansky for the IAF History Branch. The following text was excerpted and translated by the editor of the AVI Newsletter.

On Friday, May 14, 1948, members of the National Council met in the Museum on Tel Aviv's Rothschild Boulevard from where the establishment of a Jewish State in Eretz Yisrael, the State of Israel, was soon declared. Several hours later, at 5:30 on Shabbat morning, Egyptian Air Force fighters attacked Sde Dov and the adjacent Reading Power Station. The four Spitfires dropped eight bombs from a height of about 300 feet.

Sde Dov suffered much damage in that first of five similar attacks that day on the area. During the second attack, about two hours later, the engine of one of the enemy Spitfires was damaged by ground fire. The rapid loss of oil and engine coolant caused the engine to overheat and soon fail entirely. The pilot, Lt. Mahmoud Baraka, was forced down on the beach near Herzliya and captured. The extensive damage suffered by Sde Dov that day added doubt to the chances of the young Jewish State's survival, which were already not rated very high. In this difficult atmosphere no one thought of recording the details of that downing. This historic event was mentioned only casually in a report on the

Egyptian raids written three days later by Adam Shatkai, a former RAF pilot who doubled as Sde Dov's Intelligence Officer. Unfortunately, his report does not even suggest who might have fired the lucky round which downed Mahmoud Baraka.

What happened subsequently is interesting, strange and entertaining at the same time. Many versions have appeared over the years giving credit for the Spitfire's downing to different people, either from the claimants or through others. Who downed the plane? Moshe Hof, Yakov Sperling, Yarden Brahm, Menachem Axsmith, Max Alper, Victor Katz, Shlomo Chelouche, Yosef Ben-Avraham, Shlomo Rubinstein, or Sam Rose? With what weapon; a rifle, machine gun or anti-aircraft cannon? From where was the shot fired; Machane Yonah, Tel-Litwinsky, Sheikh Muhanis, Sde Dov or perhaps from a ship at sea?

Three Comrades, Three Versions.

On Tel Aviv's seashore, where the Hilton Hotel now stands, stood Machane Yonah in 1948. The camp had few people, and even fewer weapons. "Altogether we had one rifle, not more than that," recalls Dov Presberger. "Later, at Latrun, the situation improved considerably. To ten people they gave two Sten guns and three grenades and told us 'go fight.'"

Otto Dov Presberger arrived in Palestine on the Aliya Bet ship Theodor Herzl. Two of his good friends, Moshe Hof and Yakov Sperling, were with him on the ship. They were also with him at Machane Yonah. The three were interned at Atlit until September 1947, and later joined the army. "I remember everything as if it happened yesterday," Presberger said. "The Egyptian plane came from the direction of the sea and fired on the camp. Moshe grabbed the rifle, the only rifle we had, and fired once. We saw the plane sway to and fro and then descend and fall. We were convinced that somehow Hof's bullet had downed the plane or, at least, hit the pilot. We did not see any smoke nor did we see the plane hit the ground. But

according to its direction of flight it fell somewhere near the port or perhaps Reading or perhaps a bit further north where Ramat Aviv is today. I do not recall the time but I am telling you that even if Hof did not hit the plane, he hit the pilot. I saw this with my own eyes."

Major Chaim Levine was then administrative officer of 8th Brigade. A document he signed on March 7, 1949, almost ten months after the incident, gives a slightly different version. "Subject: Recommendation for issuing Medal for Excellence to Moshe Hof, ID 35936. Early in the morning of May 15, three Egyptian planes circled in the sky above Tel Aviv near the Reading Power Station and dropped a few bombs. The above then took an MG 34 machine gun and waited for the planes. When they approached again he aimed his machine gun at one of them and fired several bursts, one after the other, until he noticed that one of them was spewing unusual smoke. An hour later his commander informed him that the airplane he had fired upon fell near the beach at Herzliya. In my opinion such a deed took a high level of expertise, considering that this was the first plane downed by our forces."

Yakov Sperling thought differently. "I am the one who fired," he related years later. "I downed the plane. Hof and I were on the roof of Machane Yonah with a Chateau machine gun, a French version of the Bren. I was at the gun and Hof helped. Shortly before breakfast time the plane approached, after striking Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station. Presberger was not with us on the roof at the time. Perhaps this is why he believed that Hof was the one who fired and perhaps why he thinks we used a rifle. Anyway we did not think that it was our bullets which hit the plane. We had difficulty believing it, an hour later, when we were told that the plane made a forced landing near Herzliya."

With My Own Eyes

On Friday, the day on which the State was declared, David Hecht finished a four-day course and was appointed Haganah district commanding officer. "That evening," he said, "I reached Tel-Litwinsky and

the next morning at 5:30 while on my way to the shower, a bomb exploded near me killing several people. Immediately after that the Egyptian planes arrived. Our armaments were in storage and the keys were in possession of one of those who were killed. Yarden Brahm, who was a pupil with me in nursery and primary school, took the keys from the dead man's pocket, opened the storehouse, took one of the two Beza machine guns, set it up and readied it for firing."

"Hecht stood next to me and filled the ammunition belt," relates Brahm, "while the others took shelter in a ditch. When the plane approached very near, again from the south, I began to fire in its direction."

"With my own eyes I saw that the plane was hit, black smoke came out and it fell," Hecht says. "I saw that it was a Spitfire. I do not know if it was the first, second or third plane that was hit. I can say that it was hit and fell in north Tel Aviv, around Reading."...

The Volunteers Arrive

I Am My Brother's Keeper is a book about the role of American volunteers in the War of Independence. The Weiss brothers, authors of the book, did not skip over the downing of the Egyptian Spitfire. But for their part, the one who downed it was an American volunteer, Max Alper, who was at Sde Dov as an aircraft mechanic.

"Shortly after the first attack," the Weiss brothers write, "a truck arrived with some arms, basically pistols, rifles and a machine gun with a tripod. As Alper was the only one trained in operating the machine gun, he took it and cleaned off its grease with the help of one of the trainees. He instructed him in loading the ammunition belt and waited.

"During the second attack, Alper fired at the Spitfire which soon began to emit smoke. It crashed near Herzliya and the pilot was taken captive. Alper's shot brought down the first enemy fighter plane in the history of Israel."

Alper himself agreed, in general, with the description. He was asked, "Why are you so sure that it was your shot that brought down the

Spitfire," and he responded, "Because the chances that a bullet from a machine gun firing along the flight path are greater than a gun with a single shot."

The volunteers in the War of Independence were not only from the USA. About others too were books written. South Africa's 800 by Henry Katzew, for example, tells the story of the South African volunteers. Katzew too writes about the downing of the Egyptian Spitfire, but as expected credits a South African volunteer, Victor Katz, who was IAF armorer at Sde Dov.

"Later on the same day," Katzew writes, "A Spitfire was hit by a round from a 20 millimeter anti-aircraft cannon fired by Victor Katz from Johannesburg." Thusly is it written.

"I was awakened very early that day by the first explosion," confirms Katz, "and went to the field to help. From the armory I took a machine gun, not an anti-aircraft cannon, and went to a trench where I was joined by a Canadian named Joe Siegel.

"Our position was north of the runway, about thirty yards distant. The Spitfire came in from the east. His altitude was not more than about 1000 feet and he dived almost parallel to the runway. I opened fire when he was about two miles away, and continued to fire until he was almost over us but very soon he was out of range. I believe I fired continuously for about six seconds, about 45 rounds."

From the Sea perhaps?

Shlomo Chelouche was commander of the 4th brigade of the Haganah Home Guard. On Wednesday before the State was declared he was made responsible for North Tel Aviv. The next day he was sent to Sde Dov to organize its defense against expected enemy air raids.

At 7:15 on Saturday morning, when the second raid began, Chelouche was busy cleaning his Lewis. "I was ready and waiting for them. I aimed the Lewis in the direction of the Spitfire, set the lead to ten degrees and fired a long burst and this burst hit the plane." As evidence Chelouche produced a warning notice that had been attached to the Egyptian Spitfire and which he retains to this

day. "Aaron Remez, who flew the Egyptian pilot back for questioning, gave it to me as a memento of the first downing of an enemy plane."

Yehuda Broshi also argues that the Spitfire was downed by a machine gun, not a Lewis but a Beza. Not from Sde Dov but from Sheikh Muhanis, and not by Chelouche but by two instructors whose names nobody recalls. Broshi, then called Brodsky, was in Sheikh Muhanis on the day the State declared to take a course for communications officers. "At approximately eight next morning, perhaps a bit later, two instructors took a Beza machine gun from the course headquarters building to a nearby grove to examine the gun and practice firing it. An Egyptian fighter plane appeared above. A short time later the two returned and told everybody that they had fired at the plane, hit it and downed it."

Menachem Axsmith was in the Navy during the war, and later worked at the Reading Power Station for the electric company. Shmuel Cohen, who worked with Axsmith between 1963 and 1967, relates that; "All members of our work crew knew that Axsmith was the one who fired on and hit the Spitfire. They all talked of this and he confirmed it. He said he was on a navy ship, saw a plane bombing Tel Aviv, fired on it and hit it."

And Now to the Heavy Guns

So what do we have? A rifle, machine guns of various types, or maybe gun-fire from a ship. Now the time has come for the heavy guns. Eight 'Hispano-Suiza,' 20 millimeter anti-aircraft cannon were acquired by the Haganah and reached Palestine from Switzerland before the declaration of the State. Yosef Ben-Avraham says; "We assembled them in an abandoned industrial plant that had produced alcohol, and we were enclosed in a veil of secrecy. After all we were the first to receive more modern military equipment. Don't ask what level of skill we achieved. We leaned to load its magazine and to press the trigger. A Machalnik came and tried to teach us in a few minutes how to aim it visually.

"I commanded the team of one of the cannons south of Reading,

about fifty meters from the power station. In the morning when the Egyptian planes attacked there was a great deal of confusion. We thought that perhaps one of the planes was ours. We were confused. In the first attack one person in my team became hysterical and started to scream. I removed him from the gun position and sat there myself, not that I was a great expert since I was then but 17 ½. The Spitfire attacked Reading flying east to west, right out of the sun, at about a height of 100 meters. As I remember it, I hit the plane. A chaver from the special company, near the area, arrived and raised me joyfully in the air."

In the course of the war. Yosef Ben-Avraham was transferred to the field battalion. After the war he returned to study at the Technion.

Shlomo Rubinstein was sitting at another cannon, also at Sde Dov, at the very same time. He too fired in the direction of the Egyptian plane and was surprised that it went down. "I stood alongside him and fed ammunition," Abe Machlis reports. "The plane dived in the direction of the field, we aimed at him and Rubinstein fired. The first burst did not hit him but five shells of the second burst hit the plane; smoke appeared and he lost altitude. This is how the Egyptian plane was downed."

Perhaps the income-tax assessor?

Zev Cohen was commander of one of the three other Hispano-Suiza anti-aircraft teams set up that night in Sde Dov. He chose Sam Rose to be gunner because of his vast WW2 anti-aircraft experience in the British army.

"When the Spitfire attacked, from the east, Rose aimed and fired several rounds. We could clearly see the shells making their way to the plane and we saw a small explosion as it was struck. The wings rolled before the plane disappeared over the Power Station. A yell arose from the chevreh: 'we hit him, we hit him.'"

Sam Rose joined the British army in September 1939, and served right through WW2. He was trained in the use of 3.7 inch anti-aircraft cannon, height-finders and predictors.

He arrived in Israel in 1948 as a volunteer.

And the Winner is...

When the Egyptian Spitfire landed on the Herzliya beach everyone rushed to reach the pilot. But what attracted Joe Schmelz, a former RAF aero-engine mechanic, was the airplane. He hoped to salvage spare parts, but almost nothing was re-usable as the Spitfire had been immersed in sea-water. Schmelz was a member of Freddie Ish-Shalom's team that built the IAF's first Spitfire with parts taken from wrecked Spitfires left behind by the departing British. What Schmelz was able to document was the that plane was struck by a fair-sized shell of about 20 millimeters. This evidence voids all claims that the plane was downed by rifle or machine gun fire, and limits the number of candidates.

The bottom line of all the claims, evidence and stories is that Sam Rose was the only one trained in the use of anti-aircraft cannon. In addition, his position was in the most advantageous location. He is the only one who truly saw the plane up close. And his commander, Zev Cohen, supports his version.

A wide ranging research was recently concluded by the Historical Branch, and the mystery has finally ended. An official letter by the IAF credits Rose with downing the Egyptian Spitfire, the first downing in the history of the State of Israel, insofar as is possible to reconstruct the event after 51 years.

CALL TO DONATE MEMORABILIA AND ARTIFACTS FOR PRESERVATION

AVI, under the direction of Ralph Lowenstein has been collecting material of historical value for the special AVI archives located at the Libraries of the University of Florida in Gainesville. Included in the collection are tape recordings, photos, journals, anecdotal material illustrating and documenting the Aliyah Bet and Machal contribution in the creation of the State of Israel. The archive, as the record of the American and Canadian Machal volunteers and sailors of Aliyah Bet, is of

great importance to historians, scholars and researchers as well as to the publishing of the AVI newsletter and asa memorial and resource for our descendants.

Recently, the American Jewish Historical Society. has offered to retain and preserve and, possibly exhibit artifacts of historical value dating to activities of Aliya Bet and Israel's War of Independence. Specifically these items include uniforms, caps, insignia, and similar OBJECTS, which have not been part of our archival collections at the University of Florida. If the artifacts are suitable, the Museum would sponsor a traveling exhibit in major cities in this country.

Again we are asking all our members to donate or lend all historical material of the types mentioned above. If they stay in your closets, desks, dressers or mounted on your walls they will most likely be discarded some day. Arrange now to donate these items to these archives so they can be preserved and treasured by future generations.

- If you have passports, official papers, or other documents, please contact Ralph Lowenstein (352) 372-5699 or rlowenst@jou.ufl.edu. These items will be photocopied and returned to the owners.
- If you have three-dimensional artifacts, please contact Si Spiegelman (212) 685-8548 to or spiegelsi@aol.com to discuss all such items in your possession.

Letters to the Editor

On the Machal Memorial in the Yizhak Rabin Park

Excerpt from a letter to Yehiel Leket, World Chairman, Keren Kayemet L'Yisrael dated 11 September 2000.

.....The latest Catalogue of Projects, published by the

KKL.....is informative...however, it is deeply disturbing to see that there is not one picture of the Machal Memorial or of its location on the map.....The Machal Memorial was, in fact, founded by Machal organizations in Israel and world wide.....Natan Sas, Director of Projects Division wrote to me on 30th September 1997, "We are planning signs, information, publication of the entire Park. Included in these plans and within their implementation, we will include the Machal Memorial and its historic importance....."

I sincerely hope that appropriate steps be taken to remedy the present situation and give all 1948 Veterans and their Memorial a rightful place so justifiably deserved.....

Stanley Medicks
Coordinator, British and European
Machal Association

On Israeli Patriotism

Excerpt from an "Unpublished Letter to the Editor" which was published in an advertisement by "Women in Green."

.....I wonder if old-fashioned patriotism in Israel is dead. All I read about in the Israeli press is the fear Israelis have of the Palestinians. I remember in the 1948 War of Independence we took on five Arab nations and whipped them. The fear of losing the war never crossed our minds. I did over 50 bombing missions against the Arabs, and never once did I feel we would be defeated.....

William Lichtman, Chicago

SONG OF THE VOLUNTEERS

The following song was composed in 1948 on board the San Antonio II on the Mediterranean on the way to Israel with a cargo of about 460 souls, mainly from DP camps in Europe. A few English speaking volunteers were aboard. The song was composed by Aaron Baranan, with another American and two English volunteers. Since Aaron Baranan had started keeping a journal, these words were written into the back of his journal. It is sung to the tune of The Vagabond King. It is offered here as a 'period' piece.' It would rare today for Jewish young people to parody these anti-semitic caricatures of Jews.

**OH, YOU SONS OF MOSES,
WITH YOUR CROOKED
NOSES,**

**FIGHT, FIGHT,
FIGHT FOR ISRAEL.
IF YOUR NAME IS ABIE,
JOIN THE STAR OF DAVY,
FIGHT, FIGHT,
FIGHT FOR ISRAEL.
BROTHERS, BROTHERS,
VICTORY IS IN SIGHT,**

**FORWARD,
FORWARD, ONWARD
WITH THE FIGHT.
YEARS AND YEARS
WE'VE WAITED, NOW
OUR STATE'S CREATED.
FIGHT, FIGHT,
FIGHT FOR ISRAEL.**