

WINTER 2007



AMERICAN VETERANS OF ISRAEL

VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

UNITED STATES & CANADA VOLUNTEERS

136 East 39th Street, New York, NY 10016

Message from the President

I am honored by this opportunity given to me by the executive of AVI to be the next President of our organization. I hope I am equal to the task. This is not just another title for me - for someone who fought in the Negev 58 years ago for the creation of the State of Israel. This is a milestone.

My joy, however, is overshadowed by the possibility that I may be the last, or perhaps next to last, president of AVI. We are a dwindling group. Many of us have passed on. In time, all of us will. What has not passed on, however - what is still very much alive among

PRESIDENT continued on pg. 11

AVI TRUSTEES MEET OCTOBER 22 IN NY

The AVI Trustees took up the challenge of forming a "shadow board" for the AVI at their meeting in New York on October 22, 2006. The meeting was attended by four officers of AVI: Simon Spiegelman, Naomi Kantey, Arthur Bernstein, Dave Gerard and Samuel Klausner in addition to twelve newly appointed trustees. Sam Klausner, as the Trustee Liaison for the AVI Board, opened the meeting sketching the history of AVI and the functions of

TRUSTEES continued on pg. 11

November 1948: American Aircrews to Israel Air Force—Keep Promise or We Quit!!

Beginning early in 1948 the Haganah and later the IDF exerted a major effort to recruit military veterans from the allied armies who had served in aircrews in the battle against the Axis. Serving with the IDF's fighter, bombing and transport echelons they played a critical role in Israel's victory in the War of Independence. The following material is excerpted from a study conducted by the Research Division of the IAF. The researcher and writer was Avi Cohen, then an officer in that division. The report deals with the relation between the aircrews of the Air Transport Command and the higher echelon officers seeking to integrate them into the new air force. The re-

port displays two different conceptions of the role of the aircrew members. The difference is symbolized by the shift in their designation from Gahal (Recruits from Abroad) to Machal (Volunteers from Abroad). This translation from the Hebrew was made by myself (editor), Miriam Steuerman and Mordecai Chertoff. The following is a selection from the report. The full text is available on-line (www.IAF.org). On the home page in the search space (top, right) type, "research historical." Scroll down to the sixth paper whose title begins "ma'ha'atam shel anshe hagahal..."

PROMISE continued on pg. 13



Present at New York Meeting of Trustees: L-R seated, Naomi Kantey, Si Spiegelman, Art Bernstein, Dave Gerard. L-R standing, Sam Klausner; Donna Parker, Arthur Kiron, Augusta Gooch, Daphne Genyk, Michael Flint, Jeffrey Margolis.

American Veterans of Israel
136 E. 39 Street
New York, NY 10016-0914
Officers and Executive Board

President
Joe Warner
416 497 0140

Vice President
William Gelberg
561 278 7392

Executive Director
Simon Spiegelman
212 685 8548
spiegelsi@aol.com

Treasurer
David Gerard
631 499 4327
dgerard007@optonline.net

Regional Vice Presidents
USA

Northeast: Ira Feinberg
201 886-1188

Southeast: Irving Meltzer
561 637 5874

West: Bailey Nieder
206 722 8197

Midwest: Ben Hagai Steuerman
773 935 0802

Canada: Jerry Rosenberg
416 787-7632

Israel Liaison: David Baum
rdbaum@netvision.net.il

World Machal: Zipporah Porath
Zip@netvision.net.il

VP/ Directors
Newsletter, Internet and Trustees
Committee: Samuel Z. Klausner
215 473 6034
sklausner@comcast.net

Archives and Museum
Ralph Lowenstein
352 392 6525
rlowenst@jou.ufl.edu

Public Relations: Paul Kaye
(718) 428-2465
pkaye3@nyc.rr.com

Speakers Bureau: Naomi Kantey
201 489 3809

Events and Activities
David Hanovice
Arthur Bernstein
Louis Laurie
Adrian Phillips
Norman Schutzman
Lola Sprinzeles
Charles Weiss

Machal West- Liaison
Max Barchichat
President-Machal West
(818) 982-2712

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

ISRAEL EMERGENCY CAMPAIGN- UPDATE

In response to the emergency in Israel accompanying the Lebanon II war we raised \$10,473 among AVI members and friends. Of this total, \$5,370 was donated to the American Friends of the Magen David Adom and \$4,773 went to JNF. The donation to Magen David Adom was earmarked for the Ramat Gan Blood Service Center and the JNF contribution toward reforestation of areas in Northern Israel.

In addition, \$5000 was donated directly from the AVI treasury distributed among Machal 2000 in Israel (\$2500), Friends of the IDF (\$1000), Friends of the Disabled Veterans (\$1000) and Migdal Teperson (\$500) for field kits and supplies.

The gifts came from the heart and many participated in the campaign. The contributors' list follows below:

Leila Alexander
Prosper & Ella Anselm
Doris & Stewart Auerbach
Aaron & Marianne Baranan
Joseph & Alethia Becker
M. Behar
Michael Bernet
Arthur & Evelyn Bernstein
Israel & Gipsy Bichachi
Harry & Ernestine Bieber
Leonard & Yona Binder
Phyllis Block
Herbert Bornstein
Shifra Boxer
Marvin Broder
Albert & Ruth Brownstein
David & Amy Burgert
Mordecai Chertoff
David & Liz Cohen
Daniel & Fern Cohen
Carl & Caroline Contiguglia

Michael & Kathryn Corgan
Randall & Kimberlee Crane
Ira & Yaffa Feinberg
Cecile Feldman
Miriam Finard
Annette Fingeroot
Sidney & Selma Firth
Gillian & Herbert Fischbein
Flaherty & Crumtine
Herbert Friedman
William & Denise Gelberg
David & Arleen Gerard
Max & Hilde Goldberg
George Goldman
Sandra Goodman
Sherrell Gordon
Edward & Elaine Gotlieb
Robert & Gail Gray
Martin & Barbara Gross
Barry & Sandy Halpern
David & Rose Hanovice
Judith Hessel
Roberta Hodes
David & Patricia Hogan
Adah Jaffer
Yale Joffe
Joram & Maria Kagan
Max & Jacqueline Kahn
Eli Kalm
Naomi & Jack Kantey
Cyril Kaplan
Paul & Susan Kaye
Frank & Maureen Keating
Frank & Sophie Kettner
Samuel & Roberta Klausner
Gertrude Klorman
Nat Krotinger
Ellen Kurtz
Augustine Labaczewski
Robert & Peggy Leeds
Jay & Judith Leiboff
Ralph & Bronia Lowenstein
Philip & Rose Marmelstein
Benjamin & Sophia Meyer
Paul Mitchell
Daryl & Sarah Nanes

EMERGENCY continued on pg. 11

Thank-you for Allowing Me to Be Your Historian

I have enjoyed the editorship of the AVI Newsletter for ten years. This tenure, though it seems long to me, is shorter than that of my pioneering predecessor, Sid Rabinovich. I have tried to support a national and international community of those who shared the machal experience by reporting on celebrations and memorials in the several regions of the United States, as well as events taking place in Canada, Israel and other countries. Often photographs accompanied these reports. I am pleased that I have been able to bring to our members articles relevant to Machal translated from Hebrew, Arabic, French and Yiddish. The Newsletter has also tried to create community by its active Letters to the Editor section and from time to time published boxed notes regarding people searching for people. Unfortunately the number of regional events to report has declined over the past few years as our membership has declined.

I have considered the obituaries as both a tribute to the deceased and as a historical record of their deeds and relationships. We lose about twenty to twenty-five members each year. I am sure that I do not learn about all of them. Some of our members would have preferred a simple listing of names and service identification. I persisted with the full obituary and photo. The construction of an obituary usually involves research and discussions with family and friends of the deceased, a somewhat time consuming effort. I regret that I was never able to attract a person to assist with this important task.

I take some pride in the series of historical studies of battles, fighting

units and aliya bet stories that have appeared over the years along with a number of personal autobiographical reminiscences. As the news of activities dwindled I allowed myself to fill more pages with this personal and historical material.

I am pleased that Arthur Bernstein, Elizabeth Appley and Naomi Kantey have agreed to edit the AVI Newsletter from here on. I congratulate them in the hope that they will derive the same satisfaction from the task that I enjoyed.

Samuel Z. Klausner

The Pans, Perils of Passage, and Paul Shulman

Recap of Part One: A far-better shipping company.

In January 1947 Danny Schind, mastermind of the Mossad le Aliyah Bet's ship procurement project, had found two refrigerator ships for sale by Waterman Steamship Company. The 360-foot-long, 4,570-ton Pan Crescent and Pan York had served United Fruit Company for more than 30 years. Their climate-controlled holds could be modified to accept up to 15,000 thousand

refugees. The ships were attractive to the Mossad for another reason: their main decks were high enough above the waterline to forestall any attempt at the ships being boarded. Also, each ship had derricks that could be swung outboard, to ward off British warships should the vessels be intercepted while crossing the Mediterranean Sea – as they most likely would be. To handle the ships' purchase Schind set up yet another dummy corporation. Paul Shulman was named president and given the honor of naming the company, "F.B. Shipping." Because the vessels could not be registered legally under a U.S. flag, they were registered under Panama's maritime "flag of convenience." Shulman helped recruit a volunteer crew to sail the vessels from their port in Louisiana to New York, where they were readied for the Atlantic crossing. In late May and early June 1947 both ships took on commercial cargoes and sailed for Europe.

Part Two: From Sabotage to Success

Shortly after the Pan Crescent and Pan York were making their way across the Atlantic, carrying their cargoes to European markets, ***PANS continued on pg. 11***

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR SPRING 2007 EVENTS

Purim 2007. The December 2006 Hanukkah gathering was pre-empted by a Purim celebration scheduled to take place on Sunday, March 4, 2007 at the renovated Bnai Zion community hall- 136 East 39th Street, New York city. Time: 12:00 noon. Please bring family and friends.

Salute to Israel Parade will take place on Sunday, May 6th, 2007. March or ride with us down Fifth Avenue as in past years.

The 41st Mickey Marcus Memorial event will be held at the West Point Military Academy on Sunday, May 20, 2007. The focus will be on the participation by Jewish youth in our program. Please bring family and friends.

Letters To The Editor

To the Editor:

Have you read my book, "The Time of the Burning Sun: Six Days of War, Twelve Weeks of Hope"? [see <http://www.mem-ber.net/work3.htm>] It is a highly current book, giving perspective to the events that led to Israel's occupation of the contended areas (West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights) in the war of 1967; a unique "I was there" recounting of those events, in the words of civilians and combatants on all sides. It movingly tells of the euphoria, among Jews and Arabs alike, the hopes for an equitable and lasting peace that then seemed readily attainable--until the hopes were dashed, twelve weeks later, by the Arab League. The book serves as a valuable tool when you find yourself caught up in arguments about Israel's "aggression," and alleged refusals to make peace.

You can order my book directly at mBernet@aol.com at US\$15.00 a copy. Postage in USA, 10-day delivery, \$2.40 each; priority postage \$4.50 for up to three copies to one address. Overseas: US\$5.00 for priority postage one volume; \$10.50 for two or three. Send the appropriate payment (from any credit card) through www.PayPal.com together with your request, and names/addresses of recipients. Payment to mBernet@aol.com. You can read comments and look through the book at www.amazon.com.

Michael Bernet

To the Editor:

I was distressed to learn that you are indeed planning to retire from the Newsletter and that it may mean the end of the publication. I am sure

I am not alone in recognizing: 1) the importance of the Newsletter as a link with your buddies in AVI and World Machal; 2) the effort required to produce a quality Newsletter periodically; and 3) the need to continue publishing it for as long as possible.

I, for one, have always fully appreciated your editorial skills and, as you may recall, on many an occasion I wrote to say so, with a spontaneous: "Great read. Kol Hakavod." Knowing that you were at the helm was the main reason I also tried to cooperate, whenever called upon and whenever possible, to supply write-ups for your readers about events in Israel.

I only regret that I did not respond earlier to your announcement about your intentions and say what I am saying now.

I hope you change your mind. I assure you if I were living in the States I would pitch in and extend a helping hand. I sincerely hope that someone closer to the scene does that before you fold the tent. Hopefully, the wise men of the AVI Board will find a solution and come up with a bright idea. Incidentally, do any of the devoted Machalniks have children or relatives working in the field of publications / journalism who might be persuaded to get involved?

Yishar Kochacha! Shanah Tova u'mevurechet to you, to my friends at AVI and to all the House of Israel.

Zipporah Porath

To the Editor:

Thank you for another excellent issue of the AVI Newsletter. As with previous editions I learned a great deal and found it both interesting and enjoyable. Beside the obituaries there was one other very sad item – the announcement of your retirement from the editorship. The amount of effort and skill you have put into the Newsletter is not measurable. I know I speak for the great majority of the subscribers in saying that though we may not have expressed ourselves previously we know that your work has been a major force in keeping the AVI a viable organization. Together with Si, Ralph, Dave and the presidents both past and present you deserve credit for keeping the organization alive and functioning.

Your wise mixture of scholarly historical articles, news items, reminiscences and obituaries have produced a memorable worthwhile publication. It will provide a valuable reference for future historians and the descendants of our membership. While we all can appreciate your work, none of us can fathom the countless hours that went into your production of the Newsletter.

Thanks again,

Bailey Nieder

To the Editor:

"Every Israeli Schoolchild knows the name of "Mickey Marcus" is the first sentence in Aaron Hecht's bit about non-Jewish Machal (AVI Newsletter, Fall 2006, p. 12). How I wish that was true!!

In my village I have asked:

1. Some fifteen schoolchildren aged 12 to 17 including three of my

grandchildren.

2. Four teachers, including a daughter-in-law and another whose subject is history.

3. Five mothers waiting to collect their children from the village nursery school, one of them has a regular army officer husband.

4. The Youth Counselor employed by our village.

5. A number of other adults.

Except for two of the other adults, no one had heard of Mickey Marcus. Of these two, one has a doctorate in modern Jewish history; the other had just read the Hebrew version of our Machal booklet loaned to her by myself. My youngest son, aged 41, is still involved in military matters as a reserve Major in an infantry outfit, got the period correct, but not the job – he said “that famous Pilot of 1948”.

So you see, Aaron, Mickey Marcus as well as Machal, is virtually unknown in this country. To quote Henry Katzew, author of the book “South Africa’s 800”, “You had been involved in big history, in major and minor roles without being aware at the time how big this history was”, so we can all be justifiably proud of what we had done. But let’s face it, Guys and Dolls, let’s not live in a world of fantasy, as do many of our Israeli political leaders. Not only is Machal unknown, but also the vast majority of the population here know very little of the 1948 war.

In the materialistic world of today, no one really cares, and this applies to Diaspora Jewry as well. Most the upper strata of Israel Society are busy getting richer; the lower ones battling bureaucracy and trying to make ends meet.

This summer there were some 7,000 young participants from the Diaspora on the Birthright program here in Israel.

One of our Machal ladies, resident of Jerusalem, lectured to numerous groups from this program. In personal discussions with many individuals, she found that all of them thought that prior to the Six Day War of 1967, there was a viable and flourishing Palestinian State on our borders!

This lack of basic history of our modern State (and this also applies to much of the youth in this country) could cause us to disappear from the map of the world, long before the new Hitler of Teheran drops his nuclear bomb.

Concerning your non-Jewish Machal, please be advised that the late Eddy Kaplansky’s book “The First Fliers” does not record the name of Robert Leeds, and according to the former Chief of Air Operations in 1948, there were never any missions to bomb Lydda Airport. It was never used by the Transjordan Arab Legion as an air base.

After Lydda was abandoned by the British about the end of April, until captured by our 8th Brigade on 10th July during Operation Dani, no aircraft took off or landed at Lydda Airport.

Joe Woolf

Ilaniya, Lower Galilee

P.S. – By the way, I still love being here, and would not change it for anything.

To The Editor:

I have just received your Fall 2006 AVI magazine and noticed that as a stalwart editor you are retiring. You have exemplified your position and I am sure that everyone will wish you well and a pleasant relaxing future. May I comment on Harold Shugar’s and my friend Lee Silverman’s letters. Harold writes that we “were

some 1200 American Jews who volunteered in 1948. The largest number of volunteers came from South Africa, some 800. South Africa has always had a large number of dedicated Zionist adherents. I remember discussing with the late Eddy Kaplansky some time ago and we calculated there were 650-700 volunteers from North America. I volunteered from Kenya and brought with me two of my friends. I was a platoon commander in the Seventh Brigade. We were a Zionist family, my uncle leaving Gura Kevallia In Poland, which was the home of the Gerre Rebbe. My uncle attended Herzl’s 1st Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. Herzl was thwarted in trying to establish a Jewish homeland in Palestine then under Ottoman rule. However, British Foreign Secretary Joseph Chamberlain told Herzl to consider establishing a homeland In East Africa. the Uganda Project. My uncle, however, traveled to Kenya in 1907 followed by his brother, my father, in 1920.

Both Harold and Lee criticized the article by Raphael ben Joseph who said that “the AVI was a relic and that they did nothing extraordinary.” May I remind Raphael of what Ben Gurion said. “Machal forces from the Diaspora were the single most important contribution to winning the war.”

Settling In the newly created State of Israel was a personal matter for Machalnicks. Others with responsibilities returned. Nevertheless everyone who volunteered to fight for the State of Israel in 1948 is proud in having done the right thing at the right time.

I got married, lived In Jerusalem and worked as a plumber. It was my contribution. However, I had to leave in 1951 as my father’s health deteriorated and I was needed to run

the family business.

I have very much enjoyed running my Machal Association since 1998. The Ot Hakomemiut and Ot Lochme Hamedina medals have been awarded to over 200 Machalnikim. My membership was a high of 362 members from the UK and Europe. It is always distressing to lose members of my "Machal family" and also to read of the passing of my American colleagues and others. Instigating the Machal Memorial at Sha'ar Hagai on the Burma Road together with the assistance of the JNF was one of my highlights. The 1993 Inauguration of the memorial with Yitzhak Rabin and other dignitaries was a profound affair. This memorial commemorates the 119 Machalnikim who paid the supreme sacrifice. Two were from my platoon. There were also 11 from Canada and 29 from the United States.

Finally I have very much enjoyed reading the AVI magazine, which has always been very Informative. May it continue to prosper.

*With warm regards & best wishes,
Stanley Medicks*

To the Editor:

Three highlights of my life are worth remembering: my family, my marriage and my eligibility for membership in the AVI. I hope to project these three experiences beyond my life by establishing a family endowment fund that will annually award grants to social and cultural causes meaningful to us, including the AVI.

Secondly, by assuring minimal problems for my spouse by careful planning. And lastly, a provision exists for a percentage of my estate to go to AVI. All of this gives me a sense of having a bit of immortality.

Anonymous

Machal-Nachal Reunion October 10, 2006

On October 10, 2006 in Pardes Chana former members of 1948 Machal and 1956 Machal-Nachal renewed acquaintanceships with former comrades in arms. Some had not seen each other for about 40-50 years.

About 180 former volunteers as well as family members and guests participated. Entertainment was provided by an enthusiastic dance group from the Tel Aviv Scout movement. Among several moving speeches, Smoky Simon gave an overview of the vitally important contribution made by Machal in the War of Independence. He quoted Ben-Gurion who said, "the Machal Forces were the Diaspora's single most important contribution to Israel's survival" and Yitzhak Rabin's words "You came to us when we needed you most, during those dark and uncertain days in our War of Independence. You gave us not only your experience, but your lives as well. The People of Israel and the State of Israel will never forget and will also cherish this unique contribution made by you, the volunteers of Machal".

Colonel Miki Edelstein, Commander of the Nachal Brigade, who had participated in the recent Lebanon war told us about his very positive experiences with volunteers from abroad and mentioned that Machal is still very much alive. Many single soldiers from all over the world are today serving in Nachal. Jewish Agency chairman Ze'ev Bielski and Telfed director, Sid Shapiro delivered warm messages.



Left to right: Maurice Ostroff - Machal 1948, Smoky Simon - Machal 1948, Abe Abramowitz - Machal/Nachal 1956, Sidney Shapiro - Director of South African Zionist Federation

Obituaries

Sam Back *Turned Training Planes into Bombers*



Sam Back

Sam Back was born on June 23, 1924 in Philadelphia to Joseph and Frieda Back. He died in Philadelphia on April 5, 2006. His father Joseph was fifth generation Palestinian who emigrated to the U.S. in 1921. Reb Yisroel Bak (the English spelling was changed later) a printer along with his family and 70 Hassidim moved to Palestine in 1830 from the Ukraine. Back's great grandfather, Reb Nissan Bak raised the funds, deigned and helped to construct one of the two largest synagogues in the Old City of Jerusalem. Tifferet Israel, known as the "Nissan Bak



Sam, Yaffa and Nathan Back, Jerusalem 1948

shul," completed in 1872.

Sam Back and brother Nathan sailed to Israel on the converted troopship S.S. Director without American passports after both were denied Passports by the State Department. This was September 1948. Arriving there they met their sister Yaffa who had made aliya in May 1948. The ship was renamed the Galila, flew a Panamanian flag and had an Italian Captain, a Norwegian Crew and 45 American volunteers. The ship was converted to increase its capacity from 300 to 1200 en route to Los Palmas, the Canary Islands. to refuel and then Marseilles, France where it picked up concentration camp survivors, paying a bribe of \$500 for each. Upon arrival in Israel Sam was assigned as an aircraft mechanic to the Israel Air Force.

Sam Back had served as an electrician in the United States Army Air Corps. He said to a reporter for a Philadelphia Newspaper, "I was working as an electrician in an airfield outside of Tel Aviv. We used advanced trainers for bombers. I used to wire up the bomb racks, and we put six hundred pounds of bombs

on the planes the pilots used. The pilots used to bomb Gaza. They had just enough fuel to flay to Gaza and back

"One day a pilot was coming in from a mission, and he still had a bomb which he hadn't dropped. But he didn't know it. The wiring must have gone wrong, or he would have dropped the bomb over Gaza.

"The Israeli and I saw

him coming in with the bomb.. The officer shouted and waved at him not to let the wing flaps down, but the pilot didn't understand. He lowered them. It jarred the mechanism, and the bomb went off. It made holes in every part of the plane. But the pilot walked away unharmed. All I could think of was, I hope I didn't wire the thing..."

On January 28, 1950 he married Laya who bore him four sons. Sam managed to provide a Yeshiva education to each of them. His wife of 56 years and his sons Hanan, Simha, Eliyahu and Reuven survive him. He leaves 28 grandchildren and two great grandchildren. For many years he was an active member of the Young Israel congregation of Wynnefield, later of Lower Merion, in Philadelphia. Some of the leading orthodox rabbis of Philadelphia eulogized him citing his many fine character traits, his integrity and efforts to serve others.

Samuel Z. Klausner

*Condolences to
Laya Back
218 Stoneway St.
Philadelphia, PA, 19004*

Hal Auerbach *Pilot with Air Transport Command*

Harold Auerbach, a mainstay of the Air Transport Command, died on October 9, 2006. He served in the. Naval Air service as a PBY pilot during World War II. He left the service with the rank of Lt. Commander. Later he worked as a CAA



Hal Auerbach and his DC-5

flight inspector. Al Schwimmer recruited him in early 1948 for Service Airways, which became LAPSA, the Lineas Areas de Panama, Sociedad Anonyme. He was one of the few truly qualified multi-engine pilots and served as a senior captain and check pilot for several months. Hal also assisted Schwimmer in acquiring aircraft for the Haganah. In Panama he was Chief Pilot and led a group of recruits from there to South America and then to Zatec, Czechoslovakia.

In Israel, he was assigned to the



*Hal Auerbach in El Al Uniform
(Courtesy of Harold Livingston)*

ATC and flew as part of the Balak airlift between Israel and Czechoslovakia bringing in arms from the Skoda works and transporting disassembled Messerschmitt's in the holds of larger planes. He was the captain on the very first El Al flight (given the Hebrew name of "Hillel Bahir" for the benefit of his distinguished passenger, Dr. Chaim Weizmann).

Aside from transport duty, he participated in bombing raids on Egyptian occupied towns in the Negev and around Gaza. On October 17, 1948 he was dispatched on a mission to bomb El Arish, a town on the edge of the Sinai desert. Noting an Egyptian Spitfire above him he diverted to Gaza where he dropped his bombs. A couple of days later he bombed Majdal and dropped leaflets to encourage the Egyptian troops occupying the town to surrender.

In January of 1950, the Commander of the Air Force, in a speech, said that without the contribution of the ATC and especially that of Hal Auerbach and Leo Gardner the battle of the Negev would not have turned out the way it did with an Israeli victory.

Hal Auerbach had hoped to remain after the war in Israel and build Israel's civil aviation. In November 1948, a high level meeting with officers of the Israel Air Force and representatives of the Ministry of Transportation regarding the formation of an Israel commercial airline to be called El Al. It became clear the board of that corporation would be Israeli while some of the pilots could be drawn from the American cadre. When this organizational form became set Hal chose not to remain

with El Al -- or in active aviation -- opting instead for a successful career in investment banking.

Hal is survived by his wife Doris, a daughter, Rita and two sons, Hal, Jr. and Bill.

He was one of a kind, a uniquely modest man, respected and admired by all with whom he came into contact, and endlessly proud of his Machal experiences and, as he said, grateful for the opportunity to help create the Jewish state.

Harold Livingston

*Condolences to
Doris Auerbach
3238 Taylor Ave.
Carmel, CA 93923*

In 1998 Harold Auerbach penned the following reminiscence of his journey toward battle in Israel. It reflects his late memory of the spirit of the young man he was then.

SAYING KADDISH FOR YANKER PASHA THE BAGEL LANCER

*An American Volunteer Pilot in the
1948 Israel Air Force Remembers*

Background: In March 1948 I was one of about 100 American Jews -pilots and aircrews who flew in the World War II U. S. Air Forces --who volunteered to go to Palestine to help fight for Israel's birth and survival With money from the Jewish Agency for Palestine, ten C-46 Curtiss Commando cargo airplanes were purchased war-surplus by a masquerade airline named Lineas Aereas de Panama Sociedad Anonymia (LAPSA) based initially at the Burbank, California airport. Officially LAPSA was a commercial

airline. In reality we were a pre-natal transport squadron of the not-yet-born Israel Air Force. In April 1948 with the Panama flag on our tail we flew in stages to Mexico Panama, Dutch Guiana, Brazil, across the South Atlantic to Africa, Sicily and through the Iron Curtain to a prearranged airstrip near Prague, Czechoslovakia. The airstrip became a secret loading port for arms. Ammunition and fighter planes the Haganah bought from the Czechs. Beginning May 15, 1948 when Israel declared itself a nation we flew disassembled German Messerschmitt fighter planes inside our big C-46 cargo ships, their guns, ammunition, bombs, and other firepower to the embattled Israel army-- 5000 mile round trip flight, We arrived at an ex-British air base south of Tel Aviv about midnight, unloaded, and departed before dawn. There, other volunteer pilots -mostly Jews but some Christians -who were veterans of the U. S. and other World War II air forces. -- flew the reassembled Messerschmitt fighters in combat. That was the beginning of a fighting Israel Air Force - strangely flying Nazi-German WWII fighter planes.

In June 1948 the State of Israel - then one month old and under attack by six invading Arab Armies- was an unlikely place to meet an old friend from California I hadn't seen in decade, a Douglas DC-5 twin-engine passenger airliner. I was fond of that airplane because I helped manufacture it in 1939-40 when I was a Douglas Aircraft Company employee in California. I was determined to fly it as soon as I returned from a scheduled C-46 round trip flight to Czechoslovakia.

“Our return flight from Czechoslovakia to Israel was a strange experience. With a disassembled Messerschmitt fighter plane, its guns

and ammunition inside our big C-46 we flew south over the Austrian Alps and entered Italian airspace at 16,000 feet. Waiting up there to intercept us was an Italian Air Force Spitfire fighter plane. Moving into formation 20 feet off our wing. The Spitfire pilot signaled by hand and landing gear we should follow him down.

With no cloud cover to hide in and persuaded by four nasty looking machine guns bristling from his wings, we accepted his invitation. He forced us down to a runway at the Italian Air Force base near Treviso, a few miles north of Venice. The Commandante there told us we were under arrest on suspicion of smuggling arms to Communists inside Italy and we might be part of a Soviet plot to overthrow the Italian government. We assured him we were not but were reluctant to disclose our destination and the cargo we were carrying.

After several hours of interrogation the Commandante permitted us to phone our Haganah contact in Rome. In one way or another our contact convinced Italian Air Force Headquarters we were on innocent passage to Israel; we were not supplying arms to Communists inside Italy; we were no threat to the Italian government; and that we should be permitted to depart with our cargo.

Our relationship with the Commandante then became warm and cordial. He put us up in a hotel overnight. At our request he drove us to the wholesale food market where we bought almost a ton of food not available in Czechoslovakia or in Israel -whole sides of beef (not strictly kosher I must confess), cases of butter and eggs, bags of sugar and flour, and cartons of fresh and canned goods. Loaded with groceries, some stowed in the Messerschmitt cock-

pit, the inside of our airplane looked like a butter-and egg delivery van. The Commandante had our plane refueled and waved us off with a friendly “Thumbs Up.”

Arriving safely in Israel. We found the two-month old nation was hanging onto its life by a toehold. Arab artillery was pounding the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway- Israel's north-south lifeline holding the country together. To keep the road open, Israel's three B-17 bombers were ordered to bomb the Arab artillery.

In those desperate weeks anything that could fly and drop bombs was pressed into desperate survival. Eager to fly the Douglas DC-5 for any reason, I asked Ray Kurtz, the B-17 Nose Commander, would he mind if we flew it as a back door bomber inside his three plane formation. Ray said OK, he would arrange for bombs and bomb chucks for the DC-5. Bomb chucks were immigrant soldiers who knew little English but hopefully understood enough sign language to heave live bombs out the back door without exploding them inside.

In World War II flight crews often gave their airplanes colorful names. In that tradition and to add a little schmaltz to an otherwise tense mission we named the DC-5 Yankee Pasha The Bagel Lancer. Rendezvousing with the B-17s we elbowed our way into their formation. When we saw them drop their bombs, out the back door went ours. After that bit of mishugas we were told the Haifa-Tel Aviv highway remained open.

On landing back at Tel Aviv Yankee Pasha's brakes failed and she kept rolling at high speed towards a crash at the end of the runway. Fortunately we were able to steer her into a low sand dune where her wheels plowed in to a safe, gradual stop. I

kissed Yankee Pasha goodbye, took a last sentimental look back at her sitting knee deep in the sand, went back to my C-46s, and that was the last I ever saw of her.

Years later we learned that, with her wings removed she was trucked to the Technion at Haifa and never flew again. We also learned that ours was the last flight of the last DC-5 's left in the world.

As the swift seasons ran and bold pilots grow old they tend to get sentimental about their favorite airplanes. I am no exception. Of the roughly 50,000 miles. I flew over five continents as a volunteer helping the birth and survival of the State of Israel, my fondest memory is flying with Yankee Pasha The Bagel Lancer.

Now, on Israel's 50th birthday, I stand and say Kaddish for this noble airplane who brought us home safety from the skies over Israel.

*Shalom, Yankee Pasha
Hillel Bahir*

Max Schwartz ***Crew of Aliya Bet Ship Haganah,*** ***1946***

Max Schwartz sailed on one of the earliest ships bringing Displaced Persons from Europe to Israel, the Haganah in 1946. Max died on October 20, 2006. He was born to Sarah and Yitzhak Schwartz in New Haven, CT on December 20, 1920. He served with the United States Army Air Corps during World War II. His wife, Enid, wrote a memorial letter to David Baum outlining his life after the War of Independence. Following is the text:

“Dear David:

I am sending you a short version of Max' life from the time he landed in Israel. He went to Kfar Blum and remained about a year. He left with some Americans, South Africans and Israeli youth to establish Kibbutz Ma'ayan Baruch in the Galilee. We met in 1949 when I visited there from South Africa and we married at the end of that year. In 1951 our eldest son was born. Unfortunately, I became ill and we left there in 1954 and went to South Africa where he worked as a lithographer.

“We returned to Israel in 1965 with three sons and settled in Beit Yanai for a year. We built a house in Michmoret and moved there in 1966. He continued working in lithography until he reached the age of 65.

“In the meantime, as a hobby he started growing vegetables. At first this was just for ourselves. As the years went by he grew more and more. Since we had a three dunam plot he was able to supply a number of friends and neighbors with fresh vegetables. This continued until 2004 when he got multiple myeloma, a cancer of the blood, in 2001. He slowly got weaker until October of this year when he died.

“He was man of simple needs and a very honest and upright man. I don't think he has an enemy in the world. He left three sons. One lives in Neve Shalom, a multi-national village near Latrun. The second is a builder in Saratoga Springs and the third a park ranger. Max has three grandchildren and we all miss him very much.”

Max is survived by his wife, Enid, and sons Shai, Michael and Yonatan.

Condolences to

Enid Schwartz

HaPardess 3

Michmoret 40297

PRESIDENT continued from pg. 1

American and Canadian Jewish youth - is the deep sense of personal involvement and responsibility that drove each of us to put our normal lives on hold six decades ago for the chance to help make a 2,000 year old dream come true. The legacy we established has been carried on through two generations, including the 180 young Americans and Canadians currently doing 15-month service tours in the IDF at this very time.

They are fighting in Israel 58 years later to insure its preservation. They see the importance of preserving that historical link but they are few. We need to present the case with the excitement and imagination it deserves. Machal, for the most part, is still an untold story - a story of commitment and self-sacrifice worthy of at least one Hollywood movie. The historians can argue about our battlefield accomplishments but there can be no debating the fact that we changed the face of Diaspora Jewry at a time when it had very little to be proud of. The Machal Archives and Exhibit in Gainesville and the exhibit in Los Angeles are part of delivering our message. We also deliver a message with our organizational activities. Sadly, our regional events have all but disappeared. I hope we can rededicate ourselves to reviving our memorials and celebrations in Canada, the South and Midwest and sustaining the ongoing assemblies in the Northeast.

I wish all of you and your families good health and I look forward to working with you in the months ahead.

Joe Warner

the Trustees as a “shadow board.” In the coming months they would become familiar with the various organizational records and procedures of the group. He then turned the meeting over to Jeffrey Margolis, Chairman of the Trustees.

Arthur Kiron raised a series of questions about the legal status and practical future of the AVI Archives at the University of Florida. A lawyers committee consisting of three Trustees who are attorneys, Henry Lowenstein, Jeffrey Margolis and Elizabeth Appley, was appointed to explore these questions along with the AVI Archivist, Ralph Lowenstein.

Si Spiegelman plans to introduce Donna Parker to the organization's database, to prepare August Gooch to assume her role as information officer and review organizational financial records with Jeffrey Margolis. Ralph Lowenstein, in addition to discussing the above issues will familiarize Henry Lowenstein with the order of files and catalogues of the Archive and arrangements for the AVI pictorial exhibit now housed at the University of Florida Hillel. Pending an appointment of a Newsletter editor, the explanation of that task, to be assumed by Daphne Genyk, Michael Flint and Elizabeth Appley, was deferred.

At a subsequent meeting of the AVI Board it was decided that the Trustees would assume their role on Israel Independence Day, 2008, the sixtieth anniversary of the War of Independence.

Bailey Nieder
Ben & Sheila Ocopnick
Shelly Orringer
Sydney & Regina Osten
Sharon Pagan
Judith Dyer Presswood
Maurice & Josephina Prins
Sidney & Edith Rabinovich
Baruch & Estelle Rabinowitz
Nathaniel & Marcelyn Ratner
Leon & Francoise Reinharth
Torah David & Aviva Reznik
Ellis Robins
William & Emilia Roll
Ben & Lillian Rottenstein
Robert & Dorothy Rubin
Milton & Claire Sackin
Eugene & Lillian Sanjour
Shirley Saunders
Arnold & Frances Schutzberg
Len & Hilda Shaffron
Jacques & Rachel Siboni
Martin Silver
David Silverman
Paul Silverstone
Sam & Betty Singer
Simon & Celina Spiegelman
Lola Sprinzeles
Doris Sprung
Ben Hagai & Miriam Steuerman
Phillip & Ursula Strauss
Leon Suissa
George Tzizik
Joseph & Barbara Warner
Ron & Pearl Weinstein
Avrum & Lila Weinzweig
Marcia Wolman
Saul & Muriel Joyce Wosk
Arthur Yadvon
Ralph & Naomi Yodaiken

Paul Shulman was sent to Europe, and a greater involvement with the Mossad le Aliyah Bet. After being briefed at Mossad headquarters in Paris he was given a second-class rail ticket to Marseilles and the Mossad's maritime operations center there. From here the Mossad coordinated the departure for Palestine of vessels jammed with refugees as well as volunteers from abroad -- the Machal.

The British were putting increased diplomatic pressure on Italy to not cooperate with the Mossad. Yet, an increasing number of vessels jammed with refugees continued to depart from small Italian ports and fishing villages including La Spezia, Molfetta, and Bari. The Royal Navy's so-called Palestine Patrol, now backed up by long-range patrol planes, routinely spotted and intercepted the refugee-carrying vessels before they could reach the shores of Palestine. The immigrants were transferred to British prison ships and sent to internment camps on Cyprus. The Aliyah Bet vessels were interned in Haifa harbor in a backwater nicknamed “Rotten Row.”

To circumvent British interference, the Mossad planned to sail the two Pan ships to Costanza, a port and industrial complex on the Black Sea. There the ships could be converted into refugee carriers, safe from the Royal Navy, which had neither diplomatic nor military rights with the Communist-controlled Romanian government, and were denied right-of-passage through the Turkish-controlled Bosphorus Straits. All the Palestine Patrol could do was steam around in circles in the Mediterranean, waiting for the ships to make their dash to Palestine. British Intelligence knew the true mission of

the two Pan ships. London viewed the possibility of their success with dread: even if neither reached Palestine, their human 'cargo' of up to 15,000 refugees would overwhelm British internment camps on Cyprus.

Pan York offloaded its cargo in Morocco and proceeded directly to Costanza. Pan Crescent developed engine trouble and headed for a ship-repair facility at Venice, Italy. The vessel arrived in August 1947. Paul Shulman was dispatched from the Mossad's Italian operations headquarters near Milan to Venice to oversee repairs to the ship.

In Venice the Mossad's Italian chief, the redoubtable Ada Sereni, was unable to find a commercial repair yard to undertake repairs to the Pan Crescent: no shipyard was willing to incur the wrath of the British. Instead, Sereni persuaded the owner of a private boat yard to do the job, on a cost-plus basis – cost-plus much more! The 4,570-ton Pan Crescent barely cleared bottom of the channel leading to the boat yard, which was located on the Venetian island of Sacco Fisola. That was not the Mossad's only problem. The boat yard shared the waterway with a British naval station, whose personnel took exceeding interest in the vessel.

Among those with an interest in the ship was Commander Crabbe, the "famous" (or infamous) Lieutenant Commander Lionel Kenneth Philip Crabbe, RNVR, OBE, St.G. Crabbe achieved renown in World War II as Great Britain's foremost underwater saboteur. In 1946 he was posted to Palestine to clear mines in Haifa harbor. Now, in 1947 he was assigned as the Royal Navy's Principal Diver for Northern Italy, in charge of clearing Venice lagoon of World War II mines laid by the Germans.

AVI member Charles Weiss made the Atlantic crossing with the Pan Crescent. In Venice he served as a security guard. But, as he told this author, security was lax. So lax, in fact, that an Italian ship worker had apparently been bribed to place a mine inside the ship's hold. Very early on the morning of September 3, 1947 a huge explosion shook the neighborhood. The former banana carrier settled into the muck.

"Esplosione Su Un Peroscafo In Cantiere Alla Guidecca" screamed the headline in *Gazzettino di Venezia*. It was the kind of sabotage that immediately caused tongues to wag and fingers to point. The news account, quoting "official" (that is, British) sources, accused "Palestina Araba" for the sabotage. The Mossad accused the British of being behind the explosion. Whatever, or whoever, the Mossad now had one vessel that was not about to take anyone anywhere.

The Mossad hastily convened a meeting to assess damage and determine what to do. Ada Sereni and her "naval aide," Paul Shulman, declared that the vessel was not worth saving. Mossad leader Yehuda Arazi thought differently, and in characteristically blunt terms declared: The ship will be refloated. The ship will sail. The mission will go on.

Emergency repairs temporarily sealed the hole and the hull was pumped dry. Sereni now employed all her charm with her Italian friends in high places, and was able to get the Pan Crescent into dry dock. The British Legation in Venice, in a panic to keep Pan Crescent from sailing, demanded that Panama, under whose flag the Pan Crescent was registered, rescind its papers. The Panamanian consul replied that because the vessel had broken no international maritime laws, Panama had

no reason to lift its certificate. But then, a physical problem also arose: once repairs were completed how could the freighter make it into open waters, as long as a certain British warship was anchored in the way?

Sereni is said to have persuaded an Italian admiral to host an elaborate party for the ship's officers. While good Italian wine flowed into British officers into the early hours of the morning, water flowed into the dry dock. Pan Crescent cast off lines, and made her escape into open waters on October 25. She reached Costanza a week later. There, Romanian yard workers installed upwards of 7,500 sleeping shelves, reconfigured the ventilation system, installed latrines, cooking and food storage equipment, and made her ready for to take on immigrants.

The newly installed Communist government in Romania was making the Pans' presence in Costanza untenable. So, after the ships had been reconfigured they steamed to Burgas, a Bulgarian port on the Black Sea, and made ready to take on their passengers. For months, the Haganah organization known as Bricha had been organizing convoys of refugees from all over Eastern Europe. They flowed by train and truck to staging areas and then, finally, to the ships for boarding. Ultimately, more than 11,000 men, women and children were boarded for the voyage across the Mediterranean, to Palestine.

The idea of two very large ships carrying thousands of potential immigrants to Eretz Israel seemed like a monumental, powerful, "in-your-face" political challenge to Britain's highly restrictive immigration policies. Yet, as the date of the ships' sailing approached, Ben Gurion's ambivalence increased. His intelligence operatives informed him that the United States opposed the

sailings. Secretary of State George Marshall was fearful that among the thousands of refugees would be hundreds of Communist agents, who would advance the aims of the Soviet union in the Middle East. At the last minute Ben Gurion decided to call off the sailings. He did not want the ships to face an armed encounter with British warships. He did not want to risk a possible repeat of the Exodus 47 debacle earlier that year.

Cablegrams and telephone calls flew between Tel Aviv, Milan, Paris and the New York headquarters of the Jewish Agency for Palestine. Paul Shulman is said to have sent a cablegram, on his own, to Moshe Shertok (later Sharett), head of the Agency's political department: Maybe it would be possible to have the crews of the two ships stage a mutiny, Shulman suggested; that way, the Mossad could claim that it was not responsible. Shulman, still nominal head of F.B. Shipping, also faced the threat of a different sort of revolt: the Italian ship captains and crews demanded double pay for the short voyage in the likely event the vessels would be intercepted before reaching Palestine.

In fact, the ships were. But their captains had radioed to the British warships that there would be no armed resistance. They would allow themselves to be escorted to Cyprus. At the Eleventh Hour Ben Gurion was pressured by Mossad leaders to endorse the sailings. On December 26, 1947 the two ships sailed from Burgas on the afternoon tide. On deck thousands of hopeful, soon-to-be-immigrants sang "Hatikva." The ships passed through the Bosphorus Straits and the Dardanelles and entered the Mediterranean Sea, where they met the British naval escorts. In all, seventeen British warships accompanied the vessels to Cyprus.

Finally, Ben Gurion sent a radio message to the ships; they would adopt Hebrew names. Pan Crescent would be known as Atzmaut (Independence). Pan York would be called Kibbutz Galuyot (In-gathering of Exiles). But in a fit of pique, perhaps, Ben Gurion would not let the ships call themselves Haganah Ship.

Post Script: After the State of Israel was proclaimed in May 1948 both ships remained in Famagusta Harbor, Cyprus, until July 1948. They were among the first ships to reach Israel, carrying legal immigrants.

By J. Wandres

For additional reading: Voyage to Freedom, Ze'ev Venia Hadari and Ze'ev Tsahor, London, Vallentine, Mitchell; 1986. From Catastrophe to Power: Holocaust Survivors and the Emergence of Israel, Idith Zertal, Berkeley, CA; University of California Press, 1998.

J. Wandres is writing a biography of Paul Shulman. He welcomes comments and questions at jperiod@optonline.net. This article is Copyrighted, © 2006 by J. Wandres.

NOVEMBER 1948 continued from pg. 1

Protest by Ultimatum

Removing Group Boundaries and Suspicion About Commitment

At a staff level, the Command's (Air Transport Command) vision of the nature of Israel's civil aviation critically influenced the struggle of a significant part of its aircrews against certain external institutions. These

included the Ministry of Transportation, Aviation Corporations in Israel and even the Air Force itself. The airmen believed they were entitled to preferential access to positions in civil aviation. Other tensions resulted from struggles with the aircrew society. These were reflected in angry outbursts between the Command's Israeli and American crews. The Americans believed that the lack of training on the part of the Israelis would diminish their chances of working in civil aviation. Munya Meridor, of Air Force administration said, "At the outset the Machal crewmembers expressed some suspicion and reticence about integrating Israelis into the Air Transport Command and into training. They saw in this a violation of their territory and possibly undermining their preferred position—principally with respect to their future in Israeli civil aviation." The matter even led to blows. On November 17 a quarrel broke out between Uri Brier, an Israeli, and Larry Raab, an American. The latter had come to be measured for a uniform for civil aviation and was very angry that he had been placed in the third crew. In Brier's letter to the commander of the ATC he pointed out that this was the second time that Raab had attacked him.

The external struggle regarding the preferential status of the ATC crews for civil aviation was more serious. In the first three civilian flights the ATC aircrews demonstrated great enthusiasm, professionalism and skill moving towards the goal that "the day is not far off when a national airline will be established which, if not for all the personnel, at least for a significant number of them will take part in that establishment." But, it was becoming clear that a new perspective was taking over in the government of-

fices of transportation and at a staff level in the Air Force, which led to an absolute change in the picture. It became clear the preparations for civil aviation were well underway and without involving them at all. This caused enormous bitterness—especially for those aircrews who believed they had an agreement that they were to head any civil aviation corporation or, least, constitute, its backbone. For this group—the core of those who had established Lapsa (Lineas Areas de Panama, a corporate cover for Americans serving in this foreign military)—this was written in one of the source documents:

“There were many privileges for those who acquired the airplanes you brought to Israel and your past work for the Israel Air Force.” Further, these were the individuals who conceived of a national airline while they were still in their native countries. They had also received certain promises regarding their participation in such a corporation and now they were indignant at the way things developed. They also publicized this opportunity among the remainder of the aircrews before the matter was clarified and they drew hasty and far reaching conclusions about their participation in civil aviation.

As a result for there not being a clear line as to what civil aviation included and also against the background that “there was no clear contract between the Air Force and the aircrew members” became embittered.

Civilians or Soldiers?

The move from Zatec to Eqron (airfields in Czechoslovakia and Israel, respectively) did not calm matters: many had been promised that their activities would center in Europe—not in Israel. This transi-

tion was from a relatively easy life to the more difficult and disciplined life in a military context. As they learned from the operations termed Avak and Yoav, life was not at all easy. At the same time this did not cloud their motivation. They worked day and night flying passengers and freight to the Negev. In this way they made a critical contribution to resistance in and later liberation of these areas.

Doubtless, one of the reasons for this high motivation, as demonstrated in the three operations of Balak, Yoav and Avak, was that they were to be founders of civil aviation in Israel and therefore their organization and implementation of the Command’s civil flights, especially, Operation Shazar (flying President Chaim Weizmann to Israel), proved their ability to conduct civil aviation. Aharon Remez, Commander of the Air Force, expressed appreciation of their contribution. He pointed out that following the success of the ATC in these civil aviation tasks and the “development of the State,” the government would show increasing interest in the establishment of civil aviation.

Yet, in a short while, their hopes were dashed. In a letter written by the Adjutant of the Command, Ya’akov Feldman to the staff in charge of the Command on October 6 the bad feelings of those working within civilian aviation. He advised, “planting in the hearts of the aircrews that they are participants in this activity and that they will be at the core of the corporation in the future” should be complemented by including them in discussions and planning meetings. He says, “Already at this time there is a feeling that they have completed their tasks and are free to return to their homes. Now, we should be concerned that that home will be

in Israel.” He added that these individuals they experience sense of contempt towards them as if they are not needed for anything beyond their daily work. Feldman emphasized, “Among these individuals are not only first-class professionals but are also those whose hearts love and yearn for Zion whom we may persuade to remain with us not only to build civilian aviation but to build the land of Israel.”

In addition there were problems of conditions of service, which were not consistent with those promised at the time of recruitment. These arose from the lack of clarity of their legal standing.

Is their standing that of soldiers who are integrated in the military formations or are they civilians? From what you say I gather that the intent is that they be included among other recruits and they should be perceived in this light. In my opinion this approach is the most efficient and should facilitate work in the future and the earlier this is accepted the many problems, which lead to work difficulties, will disappear. This question is directly related to that of levels of pay for each occupational specialty.

Most of the aircrews recruited in the early days in the United States for the ATC never saw themselves as soldiers in the Israel Defense Forces. This topic was on the agenda of the Ministry of Defense on several occasions. The General Staff and the Air Force leadership considered this an issue of principle: Should they be sworn by the Oath of Loyalty to the IDF? Because of the military situation and the many pressing problems this issue was never resolved and underlay increasing bitterness among the aircrews. But as long as the war continued on its several fronts and the IDF itself, in general, and the Air

Force, in particular, was in the process of transition from the Haganah to a regular army, immediate and temporary solutions were implemented for these problems. With systematic organizing of the IDF in August the question appeared again on the agenda. Thus, a meeting of the Commanding Officer of the ATC with the Commander of the Air Force on October 29th it was decided that all members of the ATC would be considered regular recruits to the military and would receive identification cards according to special arrangements that were developed at a later time. This decision did not include the Swedish aircrews and American aircraft mechanics who had written contracts signed in their countries of origin. They were considered civilians and there was no intent to militarize them. There were a few ATC aircrews that had been militarized and had already received military identification numbers.

The Air Force needed to make decisions regarding several policy issues: determination of salary levels; clear instructions about bringing family or other relatives to Israel; decisions regarding housing families (there were actually five such cases) who were currently living in the Bristol Hotel a matter affecting others living there (all the other hotels effused to house families); the salary advances needed to provide for the families that were paid in the United States (meantime 8 Israeli pounds was paid for each wife and 4 for each child); who is responsible for support of the families and in what style. Meanwhile the families were being maintained in the Bristol Hotel and received 15 Israeli pounds as a supplement for 8 of the children; who is responsible for medical care for the families when the Medical Service of the Air Force does

not provide such health care; the expenses for laundry for the bachelors cost about 4 Israeli pounds a month; who is responsible for kindergarten expenses (the cost of which is about 3750 Israeli pounds per month and, finally, who covers the costs of clothing for the aircrews.

The Administration Officer spelled out these items in a very detailed letter to the Gahal Section of the IAF, and repeatedly emphasized that “the absence of definition of the matters leads to a great deal of unpleasantness, many work problems and a growing bitterness.” Echoes of this bitterness have reached as far as Beverly Hills, California in the U.S. In a detailed letter from Fineman to Teddy Kollek on November 1, he was asked if he was “aware of the change in the American volunteers and their depressed morale.” As he put it, “the American volunteers do not feel wanted. In fact, the opposite is the truth; they have the feeling that they are not wanted.” He noted that the commander of the IAF brought them all together and told them that “they are serving in the IAF only temporarily, and that they are needed for only as long as it takes to train Israelis to replace them. If any of them is displeased by this, he is free to leave.” Following this statement, 40 of the 150 present stood up and said that they want to go home. He added that the volunteers’ passports had been taken for others to use. In addition: They were instructed to swear allegiance to the State of Israel, which could lead to their losing their citizenship. Back in the U.S., they had all been told that this oath would not be necessary. Similarly, all of the documents they had been required to sign were in Hebrew; this time they were so suspicious that they were not willing to accept the official English translations as reliable.

The authorities, sometimes actually headed by Americans, insistently distanced themselves from the financial arrangements agreed upon with the volunteers before they left the U.S. When they protested, they were told that they were now in Israel, and they must take what they were given, or else. They were also told that the authorities did not accept the obligations undertaken by “their agents” in the U.S.

The officer also criticized the way they were recruited: some were told to wait in various hotels until they were contacted, and it sometimes took weeks. He conceded that “some of these complaints appeared trivial, and perhaps they were not avoidable in a new organization.” However, what particularly upset the people involved was “less the fact that these things happened but the fact that no-one seemed to care. All this led to a feeling, by those who returned to the U.S., of insult, confusion, and complaint.

Fineman emphasized in his letter:

An American who leaves his job, his friends and his family to fight for Israel, and endangers his life, is most certainly entitled to every possible consideration. The fact that he asks for adequate remuneration to support those who need it should not make a difference. I am certain that what the average American volunteer wants is to feel wanted and to be received with thanks. If he is greeted warmly when he arrives, and if he is given the feeling that he belongs to the “family”; that he is coming to help at a critical time; he will ignore the kind of unacceptable situations, which he had encountered often enough in the American army.

On November 4, the Air Force

crews affected met to deal with the problems of the conditions of their service, the level of their pay, and their ultimate absorption in the civilian airline of the State of Israel. As already noted, in June they had been promised that the pay scale and service conditions would be officially announced, but it was not done. While since then there had been any number of discussions at Air Force Headquarters, dealing with these matters, and some drafts had been drawn up, they never reached any clear resolution with the Department of Defense. Matters were left unresolved, and given only temporary solutions.

This memorandum began with the statement that the signer thereof “volunteered of his own free will to serve in the IDF and agreed that upon his arrival in Israel he would put himself at the disposal and under the orders of the IDF and that for the duration of his service he would act in accordance with the regulations, directives and orders obligatory on all those who serve in the IDF.” It was also noted that the only difference between the undersigned and all others serving in the IDF would be the length of service – a period of just one year. The rules governing any cessation of service – whether at the initiative of the undersigned or of the Ministry of Defense – were spelled out in detail; rules regarding travel expenses to and from Israel; the handling and financing if the volunteer desires to move his family to Israel; a detailed payments list setting up the level of his pay-scale in accordance with his expertise and his family status – including damages for dismissal. It had also been decided that he would be provided with upkeep, housing, uniforms and minor supplies “as accepted in the IDF.” The accompanying letter from

Levi Eshkol and Yosef Yisraeli from the Ministry of Defense emphasizes:

This memorandum may be signed by – and only by – professionals invited by the Army or the Ministry of Defense for specific assignments. It does not apply to any other volunteers who opt to serve in the IDF. We are working on regulations for the latter and will promulgate them as soon as possible.

To sum up: In the memorandum, the crews affected saw a flagrant violation of all of the commitments which, they aver, were made to them when they volunteered to serve in Israel. After a lengthy discussion they formulated an ultimatum to be delivered to the IAF Command, and many of the group signed it. They stated their position negating unconditional recruitment and demanded that pay-scale regulations be publicized by November 7, without which they would return to their countries of origin. The ultimatum was to be delivered to the IAF Commander by Al Schwimmer, Director of the Maintenance and Engineering Division of the squadron, and Steve Schwartz, head of the IAF Gahal Department.

The following day, November 5, there was a comprehensive discussion of the State of Israel’s civilian aviation with the participation of Hy Issachar, Aharon Remez, Dov Kinnarti, Munia Meridor, Daniel Shimshoni, Al Schwimmer, Hal Auerbach and Leo Gardner. Issachar presented the proposals regarding civilian aviation and the representatives of the various bodies in the company to be established. In response to these proposals Al Schwimmer complained that policy at the highest levels was set by people with absolutely no understanding of flying. He would, therefore, like to meet

with Ben Gurion, to suggest to him an alternative which he thought was more likely to succeed. Leo Gardner also objected that many steps were taken without their being advised, and he too wanted to meet with Ben Gurion. Remez was against all they said. At 3:00 p.m. there was another meeting, where Issachar concluded that the entire matter, including the proposals made by Schwimmer and Gardner, would be discussed by the Civil Aviation Committee. It was also decided that David Yehudah, Commander of Operations, would represent the interests of the South Africans. The conclusions of the Committee would be brought to the Government for approval.

It appears that after these discussions Schwimmer and Schwartz presented the air crews’ ultimatum to Hy Issachar and Heiman Shechtman who, as noted, had been active at the beginning of the year in acquisition and recruitment in the U.S. and knew, up close, those who created LAPSA (Lineas Areas de Panama) and participated in the Yekum Purkan program (Code name for the creation of the IAF, taken from the Sabbath morning service: Let deliverance – or redemption – come from heaven). Upon seeing the demands, Issachar said “this is no question”, and that “the pay-scale had been determined by the Government.” Schwimmer and Schwartz saw the pay scale and rules of service, which had been prepared by the Ministry of Defense – documents with which Air Force headquarters had not yet dealt. Schwartz read the documents to one of the Gahal squadron staff meetings, and Schwimmer advised the participants that they were the response to their demands of November 4, and that “if they did not sign (on the rules of service as well) – they would not be paid (according

to the pay-scale).” While the pay-scale was acceptable to the crews, the rules of service, which were attached to the pay-scale and which they were required to sign – “that he was in the IDF and would obey every order” – was not acceptable. Schwimmer felt that “they were dissatisfied for two reasons: 1. unacceptability of living conditions; 2. lack of faith in the high command.

They were also angry at the rules of service – they had properly fulfilled their obligations, and now they were being required to fulfill additional obligations!

Upon their request, the Commander of the Air Force met with representatives of the strikers, and did not deny the rumors regarding the rules of their service and the intention of having them sign on for military service. In the course of their discussion, it became clear that Shechtman had simply not transmitted the text of the ultimatum to the Commander. When he finally did so, the Commander was enraged and stormed out of the room. As a result the crews met again on November 8 and set up a committee, including Kurtz and Moonitz, the pilots, and Livingstone, the radio operator. Forty men signed this document, the “Second Ultimatum,” for the IAF Commander. It stated that “with reference to civilian aviation,” as the head of the squadron stated, they demanded that their pay considerations not be tied to obligatory military and other service conditions. Otherwise, they would refuse to fly as of 5:00 p.m. the following day. On November 9 the committee, and Al Schwimmer, met with the Commander, who told them that “the conditions were set by the Government, and had to be carried out with no changes.” According to Schwimmer the Commander was angered by

the ultimatum, threatened them with court-martial, and ordered them to leave the room. He would not see them again until each and every one of them signed a revocation of the ultimatum. Against this background of events, the request of the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, David Ben Gurion, arrived – to set up the squadron’s future civilian aviation organization.

Al Schwimmer argued that the crews were wrong to present the ultimatum, but “felt that this degradation (their having to sign a declaration canceling the ultimatum) was unnecessary. As a result he presented his resignation that same day as Director of the Maintenance and Engineering Committee. The air crews recognized the weakness of their position and that there had been no justification for this step, as some of them put it: “We played poker with you, we bluffed, and you demanded to see our cards – and we had nothing.” That same day, then, a full crew was organized to fly Yigal Yadin (to the U.S.), named “Operation Victory.”

Crew preparations were completed by the time specified for Yigal Yadin and Meir Sherman to board the plane, which took-off at 02:18 (a.m.; local time) on November 12. Thanks to the accurate weather forecast of the Meteorology Officer, Yuri Schwartz, it was a calm flight: he had forecast stormy conditions above the Greek coast, and the captain by-passed that area. About three hours after passing Crete, Kurtz found that there was an urgent need for oil in the left engine, and concerned that they might have to make a mid-course landing in Rome, he maintained a course to Rome. When they reached Italy they were helped by “an excellent tail-wind” and realized they could reach Ajaccio in bet-

ter time than they had ever made it in this model plane. In fact, they arrived at 11:01. While the plane was being refueled the crew and their passengers ate, and the plane took-off thirty minutes later. Midway between Marseille and Lyon “we became aware of a knocking in the left engine, and minor shaking,” but nevertheless continued to fly toward Paris. About four hours after the take-off from Ajaccio at 15:41, the plane landed at Le Bourget. Unlike previous occasions, “our agents” were waiting for them, and the captain of the plane testified that “the maintenance in Paris had been noticeably improved, and the arrangements were satisfactory.” Once the two travelers had left the plane it was moved for examination to the Air France hangers. A thoroughgoing examination revealed a number of defects, including, among others, a number of “defective bolts, as well as minor defects in the compass and the cylinder”. These were repaired by the company in the course of a few days, while the crew lodged in a hotel in Paris until the work was completed. The crew then prepared for the flight back to Israel.

“The army requires discipline”

Meanwhile, spirits were raging at IAF and squadron headquarters. In view of the clear connection between the ultimatum and the matter of civilian aviation. At the request of the Minister of Communications, Issachar and Meridor promised to provide, in writing, their agreement that Meridor be appointed director of the new “El Al” flight company. Meanwhile, the matter of the Nov. 13 ultimatum was brought to the attention of the Prime Minister/Minister of Defense, David Ben Gurion, who noted in his diary: “Munia, Hy,

Aharon Remez -regarding the dispute with Al Schwimmer.” At the IAF headquarters discussion that same day they dealt with the question of pay scale and rules of service for members of Gahal. They also dealt with their professional classification, and it was determined that most of them would be granted just one classification.

The form prepared for those who brought up the ultimatum was said: “it is understood that with your refusal to cancel the ultimatum mentioned above, your service in Israel is completed and you will be returned to your country.” Until November 15th, the committee discussed with 35 persons (five were absent – on a mission abroad); Solomon Jacobs and Hershel Davis were not approached by the committee and their names were erased from the list due to the fact that there were written declarations that their signatures had been falsified; Four of them (Leopold Feldman, Norman Moonitz, Gordon Levett and Harold Livingston) refused to sign the withdrawal of the ultimatum.

On November 12th, Livingston was given a second chance to change it, but once again he refused. Therefore, he was asked to get ready to travel back to the States the same day. In his letter, the managing officer of the ATC wrote to the force commander that Harold Livingston “is released from his assignment starting as of this letter is to be returned to his homeland.” That same day, they came to the Bristol Hotel to transport him to the airport for immediate departure. Al Schwimmer was there and said “Livingston is not leaving. The Air Force can oust him but not send him out of the country.”

Schwimmer announced he was acting against the commander’s de-

cision and was “going to meet the Minister of Defense that same week and wants all persons involved in this affair to be present.” As a response, Schwimmer and Livingston were invited to appear before the committee. Livingston was asked if he read the declaration that he was supposed to sign – and he admitted that he did not review it. He was told again, that if he doesn’t sign the declaration, he would be released from the service. Livingston replied:

“I contributed much to this country and am not prepared to be dismissed in this manner. I request a couple of days to reexamine this entire situation. Al Schwimmer asked me not to go – and I get instructions from him. He hired me and he can fire me. You can all discuss it with him. Why were others who refused to sign not dismissed from the service?”

In reply he was told that whoever refused to sign would also be dismissed from the service. After that, he was asked to leave the room and Al Schwimmer was asked to enter. The conversation was conducted in English and the case was discussed in Mr. Kanarti’s office, assistant commander of the air force.

Karnarti: He (Livingston) said that you (Al Schwimmer) asked him not to leave.

Schwimmer: I feel that expelling people from this country is not democratic.

Karnarti: Do you think that you have the authority to cancel the decision made by the committee regarding aviation (Air Council) matters.

Schwimmer: I see here a higher issue in the policies of the Committee on Aviation Affairs. My position on the matter is clear, I challenge your authority to expel someone from this country. This is beyond your juris-

diction. I offered my resignation from the air force, it was not accepted. During this interim period, I am going to use all possible measures, including contacting Ben Gurion.

Meridor: In which way do you (Schwimmer) think the air force should conduct itself?

Schwimmer: My past actions speak for themselves. I am not sure that your way of building the air force is wrong and my way is right. There is no doubt in my mind that the way to build the air force is not by downgrading people who have served and serve. The Air Force must be based on honor awarded to its people.

Karnarti: Do you think that Aharon Remez knew that you were going to oppose the decision?

Schwimmer: I told him (to Remez) that I will not execute the committee’s decision regarding aviation matters – and will approach higher authorities to deal with the matter – going as far as Ben Gurion. Again, I dispute the authority of the Aviation Committee to expel someone from this country. It is a serious matter that a worthy person, who served and continues to serve the country honorably, should be thrown out. Is this the best way to express thanks for good service?

Karnarti: I believe it was proper to give him the chance to sign the contract instead of dismissing him from the service.

Schwimmer: I oppose expelling someone from this country because he refuses to sign. He may want to remain here as a citizen. My opinion is that you may throw him out of the Air Force – but not out of the country.

Shimshoni: Is this the way you spoke to the Air Force Commander?

Schwimmer: I was not aware of this incident. I also could not believe that someone would act this way. I

fought for the principle. Maybe I am wrong, but this is how I feel.

Karnati: But this was an order.

Schwimmer: I don't recognize unconscionable orders. Livingston contributed so much. It is impossible to just throw him out. I don't know who is the psychologist in this Aviation Committee, but I can say this much. This decision will have great influence on the morale of others.

Part of this incident was brought to the attention of the Air Force Commander in an angry letter to Al Schwimmer. He emphasized that "the headquarters decision to discharge people from the force and send them home – should they refuse to sign their cancelled ultimatum in front of the Chief of Staff and receive his confirmation." The Commander wrote.

A. It was brought to my attention, that you are giving instructions to Air Force men whom you have no such authority over. This is against my orders and the decisions made by headquarters.

B. In the conversation with the special committee today, you falsified elements of our conversation regarding your resignation. Not only didn't I agree that a headquarters officer acts against a headquarters decision, but I advised you in a clear manner, that the only thing that I could agree to do was to arrange your meeting and that you will get a notice of the date.

Al Schwimmer replied to the Commander that he did not act against headquarters' decision, but explained to them that there was no authority for someone to be expelled. He repeated and emphasized his stance that he had explained at the meeting where people were asked to

sign the ultimatum. In the end, he added, that he did not request the Air Force Commander to arrange a meeting with "Mr. Ben Gurion" – but the Air Force Commander volunteered to do so. And since the commander changed his mind, he is going to arrange for the meeting himself.

In this exchange of letters, it is obvious that Al Schwimmer and his men did not consider themselves subject to the rules and regulations that were accepted in most military situations. And therefore, this miscommunication happened.

And so on the 16th of November at 19:00, Ben Gurion met Al Schwimmer in his headquarters office. Al Schwimmer told him that he recruited 400 pilots and he also acquired 40 aircraft. Shlomo Shamir and Teddy Kollek organized this acquisition. In the beginning of his recruiting activities, Schwimmer advised the recruits that they would receive only their expenses and not more. However, in his words, due to the difficult conditions of the service, they arranged during the month of June a meeting wherein Aharon Remez and Hyman Shamir promised them "better pay – according to their skills" But, according to Schwimmer, the promise was not kept. "Many found themselves in difficult situations, no proper housing, etc." Therefore, they met again, this time the whole air force crew, expressing their dissatisfaction concerning the fact that they still had no schedule of payments, and poor living conditions. In his words, they understood, that they were wrong and changed from an ultimatum and felt that there was no need to sign. In his words to Ben Gurion, Schwimmer concluded that the basis of the problem that he and his group, do not want to continue as soldiers, they would teach Israelis the job and leave."

Ben Gurion framed the conversation with Al Schwimmer as a "Jew to a Jew" and advised him not to leave the air force before the end of the war. In his words, "the cooperation of sons of America, Canada, and other countries in our war, is not only about manpower but also about the solidarity of the Jewish people" and therefore, leaving the service before the end of the war is a moral defeat to American Judaism and to us." And, he added, "there are misunderstandings that happen when two different worlds meet such as that of American Jewish Youth and Jewish Israeli Youth. We shouldn't minimize this serious situation. And with all of that, Ben Gurion emphasized that "in the army there has to be discipline because a soldier may not like the commander, but he still has to listen, otherwise there is no army. Ben Gurion concluded that "without knowing all the details, it seems that there were many mistakes, but no ultimatum is allowed to be given in the army. In his words, maybe we did not take enough care with Gahal and we should correct the situation as much as possible. Our people over here appreciate the activities of the American young men." Therefore he proposed:

That all of the "documents" that dealt with the relations between the sides: the ultimatum, the rejection of the ultimatum, the resignation of Al Schwimmer will be treated as if it did not happen, and then we will deal with the fundamental issues. As long as Al Schwimmer and his companions accept two principles: 1. No one leaves the air force before the end of the war and 2. Discipline is crucial in any army. Then, I will be prepared to address the problems and seek solutions as satisfactory as possible. Al Schwimmer agreed.

Schwimmer withdrew his resignation. And on November 18 transmitted all of the “documents” associated with the matter under discussion to the Prime Minister and the Minister of Security. Thus, he attached the “second ultimatum” and said that the first was “nullified.” He attached a copy of the conditions of service and a table of salaries.

A Separate Group That Does Not See Itself As Part of the Air Force

In the meantime an Air Force committee completed and circulated a detailed report based on the testimony of most of the crews associated with ATC. The committee concluded that “a portion of the complaints expressed in the ultimatum were true but, at the same time, few of the complaints were justified. The report clarified that the Air Force does not recognize groups within it but only individuals and the “action carried out was an actual rebellion.” Rejecting the ultimatum was a matter of principle. It does not constitute punishment and has no relation to the conditions of service and to the salary scale, which, meanwhile had been considered by the Air Force command. The committee recommended offering an additional opportunity to Norman Moonitz, Gordon Levett and Leopold Feldman (as was previously given to Livingston) to consent by signature to withdraw the ultimatum.

The members of the committee explained that the tendency to consider the ATC as a separate group not part of the Air Force is a consequence of the way recruitment in the United States proceeded. The report continues that from the outset the members of ATC had complaints. But instead of bringing them before the commander of ATC they would

go directly to Al Schwimmer. The technical officer, Steve Schwartz, the head of the Gahal group and other operational officers in ATC, that is, all those involved in recruitment in the United States had promised things that were, in practice, not authorized. It was suggested that Schwimmer would become the general administrator of ATC and that the small group in the operations division of ATC would allocate positions in civil aviation.

The committee clarified that the ATC was part of the Air Force and that their conditions of service did not differ from those in the Air Force, in general. They added that they will do all in their power to assure possibilities in civil aviation for the members of ATC equal to those of personnel of the Air Force. In sum the members of the committee recommended that those refusing to withdraw the ultimatum would be returned to their homelands should they not choose to remain in Israel. They aimed to remove those they considered subversive elements and to establish conditions so that the personnel of ATC have direct contact with staff level officers and immediate action against those who used their official positions in the military to deviate from Air Force policy.

Morris Kaufman, a lead pilot of the ATC, requested that the requirement that Livingston withdraw the ultimatum be lifted. He said that Livingston was among the most talented of aircraft radio operators in ATC had much experienced in commercial flying and that enforcement of the order would lead to the loss of some 50% of the ATC personnel. Meridor argued that because of Livingston’s refusal he should be ushered out of the Air Force while the fate of the two others (apparently Moonitz and Kurtz) was still under

discussion. Livingston did leave without signing though he did admit that it was not proper to present the Air Force with an ultimatum. In later years he wrote two books on ATC actions during the War of Independence in which he treated this issue as some length.

A Very Painful and Complicated Event

The echoes of this crisis around the Gahal personnel reached Teddy Kollek while he was heading an IDF mission in the United States. On November 19 Kollek wrote to Hy Issachar regarding the ATC, the differences of opinion and the crisis he wrote:

I now turn to a very sensitive matter. I have heard about dissatisfaction between the American group, Al, Leo, Steve and others, Yehuda Artzi had told them that they would have a role in the national airline that was to be established. Now it appears that these opportunities have been offered to South Africans and the American group has no part in it. From a distance it is difficult for me to judge the situation, I also cannot evaluate professional characteristics, which may have emerged in the course of work. I just have a few things to say to you for consideration: 1. In general it is a good idea to keep promises. The recruits had considered the promises of Yehuda as authorized. 2. These individuals took a great risk. They are not able to return home for some time. 3. It would be unfortunate to lose them. This would have a negative affect on the Americans and Canadians who are still with you.

Hy Issachar responded that the administration of the national cor-

poration has not, in any way, been transferred to South Africans. The quarrel between AI and the general staff has very deep roots. He said that he himself opposed the proposal to appoint AI Schwimmer as one of two representatives of the Air Force on the El Al board. We had concluded that in our current situation and in the light of the role that AI plays in our organization as Commander of the Engineering and Maintenance Division we should not impose any other task on him. Both he and Munia Meridor expressed their readiness, at the right time to resign and pass the responsibility to AI Schwimmer. Issachar concluded by writing:

This is a complicated and painful event. On the matter of promises it is not just a matter of negotiation. Nobody denies that the men are right. I am very sorry that they did not fully understand the situation here. We are trying to overcome their disappointment and set things right.

A letter to the Minister of Security and to the Chief of Staff on November 23, from the IDF mission in the United States reflects the crisis as it appears to them there. Over time the personal differences between the recruits and our military will be overcome. However, according to the information that individuals who have returned from Israel brought with them the impression is that the split between the Americans and the Air Force has become deeper so they decided collectively to leave the military and return to America. It is clear to them that among recruits from the United States were undesirable types of individuals. Most volunteered as a matter of conscience and in many instances this involved personal sacrifice. The IDF mission said:

When they were recruited they were promised a role in the development of civil aviation as a compensation for their participation in our Air Force. We understand their disappointment that civil aviation was developed without their participation. They are hurt, more than anything else, by the fact that civil aviation opportunities were given to those who did not participate in the war while they suffered both in Israel and the United States.

