



1948 War of Independence  
**My Small Contribution**  
By Dennis Rudnick



*My story is dedicated to the fallen Machalniks  
and IDF soldiers who gave their lives for the  
establishment of the State of Israel.*

*I would also like to acknowledge my wife  
Edna, for her untiring efforts, collaborating with  
me to compile my story.*



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## Journey to Israel

At the age of 21, I had the privilege to be in the right place, the right time, to enable me to take part in a momentous event in history: the establishment of a Jewish State, and a homeland for Jews from both the concentration camps of Europe, and the diaspora.

I am so fortunate to be able to tell you about my amazing experiences as one of the few remaining 4500 worldwide Machalniks, the acronym for overseas volunteers from fifty-eight countries, both Jews and Gentiles, who responded to the appeal from the World Zionist Federation in 1947-1948.

My participation in the Betar youth movement led to my involvement in the revisionist party, which then introduced me to the South African Zionist Federation (SAZF). In the latter part of 1947, the SAZF began arranging for volunteers to be sent to Palestine to help fight in the battle for the establishment of the State of Israel.

In July 1948, My brother Joe Rudnick, together with Harold Cort, David Magid, Leon Rosen, and I left from Palmietfontein Airport in South Africa. We flew on a Twin Engine Dakota airplane, and landed in Rome, Italy. We were immediately transported by train to Villa Farragiana on Lake Maggiore in Milan, belonging to a former nobleman.

The Villa was used over a period of time to train volunteers and refugees, including our group. We then spent approximately three weeks training, including the use of explosives, small arms and hand grenades. At the end of our training we were transported by train down to the Port City of Naples, South of Italy.

Arriving in Naples we were met by members of the Irgun, who prepared us for the sea journey from Naples to Israel. Our group of five South Africans travelled on the Caserta, which was due to arrive in Haifa on 12th September 1948. By the time I arrived, there was no longer a British blockade.

The SS Caserta, captained by an Israeli named Shlomo Mizrachi, began what was to be our journey to reach the shores of Haifa. Already on board were survivors from the concentration camps Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, Buchenwald, Treblinka. This list goes on and on.

Nothing in our wildest dreams prepared us for the shocking sight of these poor, underfed, malnourished holocaust survivors. Compared to the appearance of the 400 refugees who were on board, the five of us stood out like sore thumbs.

We sailed into the Port of Haifa as hundreds of new immigrants aboard the Caserta gave their heartfelt thanks to the Captain and raised their voices as one to sing “Hatikvah”.

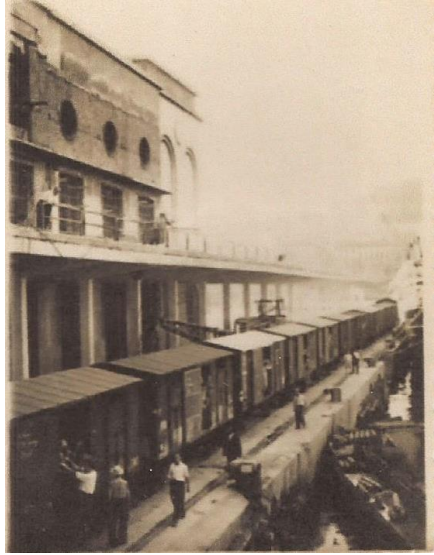
I cried with joy and excitement at having set foot on the ground which had become a homeland for both the survivors from the camps, as well as Jews from the Diaspora. As we got off the boat in Haifa, a representative from the Irgun whisked us away by bus to the large Tel Litwinsky absorption camp, now renamed Tel-Hashomer, where we were joined by the hundreds of volunteers from fifty-eight countries including Australia and South Africa.

We spent a few weeks at the base undergoing intensive training in military combat. The commander and officers of the base issued each volunteer with a rifle and forty bullets. Commanding Officer Yakov made it very clear to us, and explained that each rifle was of a different variety, from a different country, which had a specific type of bullet that could not be interchanged with any other rifle.



We were strongly advised to treat each bullet as a diamond, because the availability of bullets was very scarce within the Israeli army. Each bullet had the value of a diamond, more importantly a drop of water in the Negev had an even greater value. The five of us were then placed in the 88<sup>th</sup> heavy mortar and infantry battalion, consisting of fifteen crews of four men, each responsible for manning a three-inch mortar.

On May 15, 1948, a day after Ben Gurion declared Israel's Independence, the fledgling country Israel, with very little arms or equipment to defend itself, was attacked by five well equipped Arab armies, namely Syria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Iraq. Against tremendous odds Israel won the war. This was to become known as the 1948 "War of Independence".



Passengers arriving by train to the  
port of Naples



Crew aboard the Caserta



Other passengers aboard the Caserta



David Magid, Harold Cort, Leon Rosen, Joe and Dennis Rudnick, and other Machal volunteers at the Tel Litwinsky base camp



Sitting in a Jeep back at Tel  
Litwinsky base camp



In Bayt Oulin, Netanya, taken early September 1948,  
shortly after arriving in Israel. L - R: Dennis, Leon  
Rosen, Joe Rudnick, David Magid, Harold Court



Training with a rifle



The 88<sup>th</sup> battalion. Dennis is sitting bottom left

## Beersheva

Several units including ours were deployed on the 18th October 1948 to endeavour to capture the Egyptian town of Beersheva, also considered the capital of the Negev. It involved four battalions, two from the 8th Brigade, our 88th Mortars and Infantry with the 81st Tanks, plus two from the Palmach Haganah including their 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion. This fortress was a stumbling block leading to the main junction towards Jerusalem.

The battle began on the 18<sup>th</sup> October with a diversionary attack from the direction of Hebron in the north, while the main force approached Beersheva from the west. This operation was carried out by having half of the regiment going around the right flank, and the other half going around the left flank. This culminated in both the left and right regiments encircling together to completely surround the fortress. Several hours later after fierce fighting, victory was ours with enemy soldiers surrendering to the Israeli Defence Force.

Upon entering the captured fort, the platoons were amazed and stunned to find that the fortress was in fact a huge British quartermaster's store, laden with arms, ammunition and brand new British uniforms. One cannot imagine how thrilled all the Machal soldiers of the various platoons were when each soldier was issued with a complete brand new uniform. Our uniforms were starting to look very grubby, therefore there were many grateful thanks to the British Army.

It is amazing to me, that what was once a barren piece of land in the middle of the Negev with a solitary police fortress in 1948, is now the fourth largest city in Israel at a population of over 200,000.



Wearing the British uniforms found in the  
fortress in Beersheva





Beersheva in 1948 compared to today

## Iraq-El-Suweidan - Metzudot Yoav The Monster on the Hill

On our way down south into the Negev desert, we were involved in a number of skirmishes against Arab villages. It was the Chamsin wind blowing season in the extremely hot, dry desert which also had a critical water shortage. Whilst fighting in the Negev Desert, because of the Chamsin I wore a Kaffia, an Arab head-dress worn to keep the desert sand out of my eyes, nose and ears.

Our second major battle was to capture and secure the Egyptian held fortress. Our 88th heavy mortar battalion was one of the several other battalions involved in the daring task of trying to capture this securely fortified army garrison.

This was one of the several British Police fortresses in Palestine which was handed over to the Arab armies as a gift from the departing British army. This one was known as 'The Monster on the Hill' which later had its name changed to Metzudat Yoav after the war.

After seven unsuccessful attempts of continual fighting, we had incurred heavy losses of Israeli and volunteer soldiers. It was now imperative to capture and take control of this fortress, as it controlled all communications to the south. The main aim was to stop the daily barrage against Kibbutz Negaba, which had inflicted major damage due to the opposing Arab held fortress. The Kibbutz' water tower was also badly damaged, limiting the only available and lifesaving water supply.

Colonel Yitzchak Sadeh, the founder of the Palmach realised the importance of this battle, with his inspirational words when addressing us, "There was to be no failure this time" and no room for error. The difficulty of the attack was with approaching the fortress, as enemy machine guns poured down defensive fire, and soldiers on the roof dropped hand grenades. Sadeh realised a new and surprising strategy was needed - a jeep loaded with explosives. With the steering wheel tied down, and a brick placed on the accelerator, it was directed into the wall of the fortress. However, this attempt was futile, as the jeep was hit by Egyptian anti-tank fire before it reached the fortress.

Massive firepower was now needed. The 88<sup>th</sup> Battalion which I was in, manned the 75mm and 77 pounder guns, light and heavy mortars and medium machine guns. Our battalion with other units surrounded the fortress on all sides, then fired point blank at the fortress relentlessly for 2 hours, from 2pm, ending fire at 4pm when a large hole was blown into the wall.

The 89<sup>th</sup> Commandos of South African Machalnicks were the first to enter the fortress. Some of the remaining Egyptians whom surrendered were captured and taken prisoners of war, including two German officers.

After this tumultuous success, the adrenalin was at an all-time high. None of us could sleep as we laughed, cried and sang all night long. The capture of Iraq-el-Suweidan took place on the 9<sup>th</sup> November 1948. This successful operation took place under the brilliant command of Colonel Yitzchak Sadeh, Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

The pressure of the siege on Kibbutz Negba had now eased tremendously. More of our platoon arrived as we were sent to help the kibbutzim reorganise and repair all the damage to their water tower, as well as repairing all other major damage including the external connecting roads.



Wearing a Kafia in the Negev



Camp on the way to Iraq-El-Suweidan



Iraq-El-Suweidan police station and fortress 1948  
Photo taken immediately after the fortress had been captured



The fortress today as a museum



Damaged water tower in Kibbutz Negba



Left - Dennis visited the site in 2012, holding his original photo  
Right - Colonel Yitzhak Sadeh, Commander of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade



## Four Days Leave

At the end of the battle, our platoon were given four days leave to go to Tel-Aviv. Our Israeli Sergeant Yakov was on his way to visit his family and offered three of us a lift as he had space in his jeep. Immediately after dropping the three of us off, Sergeant Yakov, who was instrumental in the capture of both Beersheva and Iraq-El-Suweidan, and who went through twelve months of dangerous fighting in the war, all without a scratch, was tragically killed when his jeep overturned. His loss was deeply mourned by the entire battalion of the 8<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

However, at the beginning of my four-day leave, I was wearing the new British uniform and was constantly followed around by two Israeli military police. Eventually they detained me, and I was taken to military headquarters, where I was interrogated for several hours. The police assumed I was a British spy left behind when the British forces pulled out of Palestine.



Being a blonde, fair skinned soldier in a British uniform, it was plausible to make this mistake. It took many hours pleading with the military police to contact the South African Zionist Federation based in Tel-Aviv, to confirm my story that I was sent by the SAZF as a Machalnik to fight for the establishment of the Jewish State. After numerous calls back and forth, the military were finally convinced I was not a spy. They apologised for detaining me and spoiling part of my four day leave. We all left on good terms and I continued to enjoy the remaining days left of my leave.

During our leave and all throughout our time in Israel, we received a monthly salary and mail through the SAZF, based in Tel-Aviv. I also carried with me a brownie camera so that I could not only document my experiences and remember the places I had travelled, but to also send photos home to my family in Johannesburg, with reassuring messages.



Dennis while on holiday at the beach in Tel Aviv. The Altalena can be seen in the background

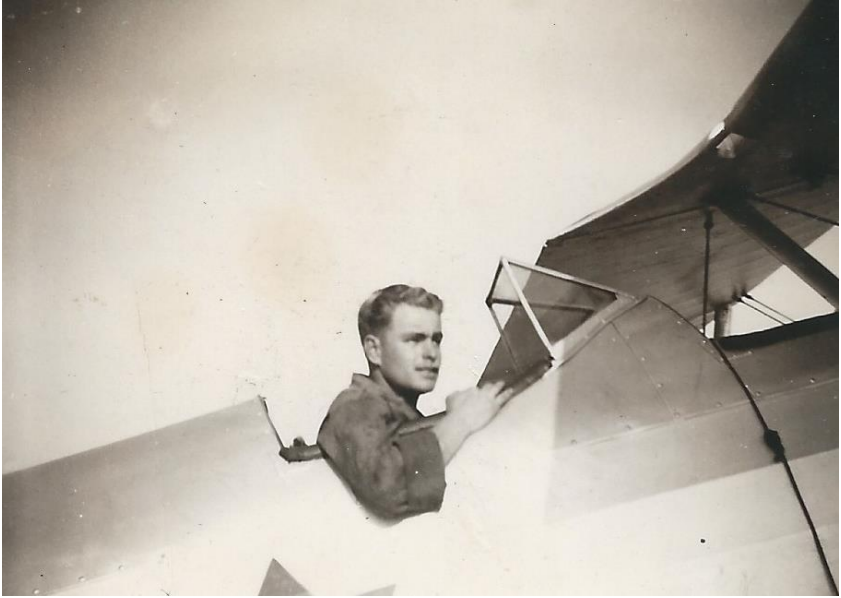


The Brownie camera that Dennis used to capture his time while in Israel

## K'far Sirkin

Because of my mechanical knowledge as a fitter and turner, I was next assigned to the K'far Sirkin airfield, otherwise known as the Hatzor Air Force Base, as it was located near Kibbutz Hatzor in central Israel. The airbase was opened in 1942 by the British Royal Air Force, however was taken over in 1948 by Haganah forces once the RAF withdrew due to the end of the British mandate in Palestine.

I continued to be stationed at the airfield for some time servicing Harvard trainer planes, when once again I was fortunate to be chosen from hundreds of applicants to go to Cal Aero Technical Institute, California to participate in an aeronautical training course, with practical experience working on an outstanding project: extending the existing fleet of the national Israeli airline EL AL.



Dennis sitting in one of the planes at K'far Sirkin Airfield during his time as an aircraft mechanic

## The War - an Afterword

You can see from these stories that the war was won by sheer guts, determination and creative tactics. So much so, that despite Israel having no new arms, and having to beg, borrow and steal what they could to survive, by November 1948, the Egyptians saw it in their favour for a truce to be declared between Israel and Egypt.

But there was another element at play, at least in my personal case. Throughout all the skirmishes and campaigns which I was personally involved in, I never went without my Tallis and Tefillin. I honestly believe that it is thanks to these two very religious items that I am here today to relate my historical experiences in the 1948 War of Independence.



A pair of Tefillin (above) and a Tallis, two religious items that Dennis always kept by his side

## **EL AL**

### **June 1950 - July 1951**

A group of influential Jewish-American philanthropists had donated a generous sum of money for the purchase of three second-hand Constellation planes, in order to upgrade them from military to commercial use. This would add to the fleet of the national Israeli passenger airline EL AL. The American donors requested the Israeli government to select and send forty of its top flight aircraft mechanics and technicians to undertake a twelve-month intensive aeronautical training course at Cal-Aero Technical Institute, Glendale, Burbank, in the State of California.

Roughly 600 applications were submitted to the Israeli Air Force for the forty positions which would become available to the successful group to go to America. All applicants had to undergo a series of rigorous aptitude tests, both in engineering and English literacy skills.



I kept praying all along that I would be chosen as one of the lucky applicants. During this time I was on tenterhooks waiting for the results to be announced - exactly the same feeling I had when finishing my Matric/H.S.C. I cannot express my emotions and excitement upon being informed that I was one of the forty successful and privileged technicians to be chosen to go to America to take part this amazing aircraft course.

The group of forty consisted of one British Machal volunteer, thirty-eight Israelis and myself. We left for America from Israel on a Douglas DC 4 plane. Unlike today's air travel, our trip to America took five days with seven stop-overs, and seven breakfasts in a row! We stopped over in Italy, Holland, Reykjavik, New York, Cleveland, Chicago, then onto our final destination California. Memorably, as the plane landed in Reykjavik, Iceland, two huge electric blankets were thrown over the engines, in order to stop the engine oil freezing. This was the normal procedure for all aeroplanes landing in Reykjavik from around the world.

Finally landing in California after a long, exhausting journey from Israel, we were met and welcomed by the Dean and lecturers of the College, who showed us our dormitories to freshen up and unpack our luggage. We were later taken on a tour, given all the text books which we would require for the entire course, then eventually retired to bed.

Several days after our arrival, a dinner was arranged for us to meet the sponsors of the project, and their families. Beforehand, we were very lucky as they bought each of us brand new suits and attire, not just for the dinner, but whatever we required. Despite this, I still worked weekends at a fruit and vegetable market, where I was lucky enough to meet Elizabeth Taylor, a famous movie star at the time.

We began lectures on the Constellation planes at the beginning of June 1950. The compulsory course for the conversion of the planes involved intensive study on aircraft engines and aircraft frames. Equal time was set aside for both theory and practice. When briefly working on the planes, we were supervised under highly qualified aeronautical safety supervisors from Lockheed.

Close to the college was the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation hangars, where the Constellation planes were housed. Lockheed was the manufacturer of the Constellations, commonly known as 'Connies'. These were forty-four seater Constellations used in the 1940's to 1950's. Compare that with today's modern passenger Boeing 777 which carries three hundred fifty-seven passengers non-stop across the Pacific Ocean.

We were now ready to begin our course in earnest. This was one of the most interesting and exciting projects to take place during my four years away from home. We observed the process of slicing and separating the planes into three sections for many, many months.

The time had now arrived for the actual task of modifying the first “Connie”. To begin, the plane was safely bolted down onto a train line. All the seating and electrical wiring in the cabin was removed and stripped bare. The four engines were also removed, ready to slice the first plane into the three sections. A huge band saw, four stories tall, operating on a second train line was positioned into place to then come down to cut the tail piece away from the fuselage. The band saw was moved towards the cockpit where the same procedure was repeated once again.

From the back of the hangar, an extension piece of fuselage was rolled in, so as to join the tail piece to the wings. This created a two metre extension to the tail piece. The same operation was then duplicated to enlarge the cockpit by yet another two metres. The total length of the improved extensions was lengthened by four metres. The planes were fitted with brand new Pratt and Whitney engines to safely cope with the extra length, more seating and extra passengers. It would also be able to carry more fuel, and travel further distances. All the planes were completely fitted throughout with a brand new interior.

Eventually, all of the planes were successfully converted and upgraded, and for the forty of us, under the very strict supervision from the Lockheed aeronautical engineers. The final step was to paint the Star of David onto the tails and wings with the EL AL blue and white signage. The forty of us were so very proud of what we had achieved during our twelve-month course in aircraft engineering and the assistance in the conversion of the Constellation planes.

At the Cal - Aero Technical Institute graduation ceremony, we were issued with diplomas. The English Machalnik graduated with 89%, I was 2nd in the class with 87%, and the Israeli achieved an 85% pass. The President of Cal Aero presented us, the three flight mechanics with a special letter of recommendation, so as to enable us to work for any airline around the world, since Cal Aero Tech. was known as the top aeronautical school in America. However, despite this, I was denied work back in South Africa, as they would not accept this training from overseas, asking that I redo my training locally for another two years.

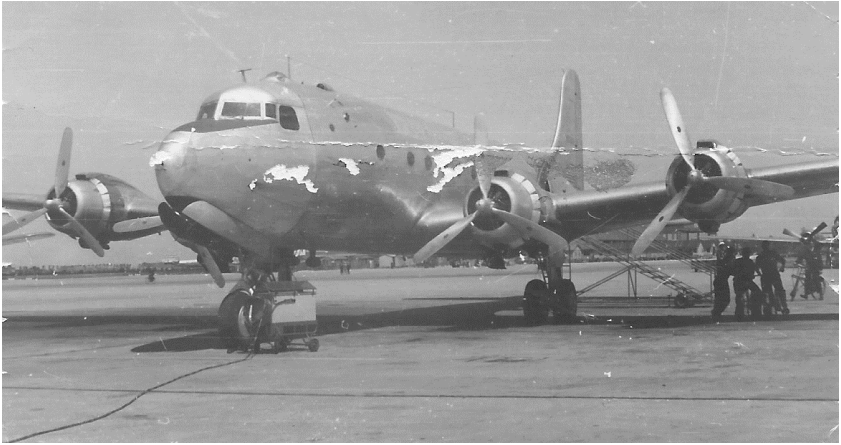
When the planes were finally completed and ready for delivery, the American donors invited Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion to accept the gift of the aeroplanes on behalf of the State of Israel. Together with General Chaim Hertzog they accepted the invitation during their three week visit to America, arriving in California on a Defence Force carrier plane.

The ceremony took place at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 1951, where the forty flight mechanics formed the Prime Minister's guard of honour as he walked up onto the stage to give his acceptance speech. Afterwards, Ben Gurion stopped to shake hands with each proud graduate. When he shook my hand and the two of us began to speak, Ben Gurion recognised my South African accent and asked me where I was born. Ben Gurion was told that I was a South African Machalnik.

As we continued talking, newspaper reporters gathered around the two of us, and began taking photos of the Prime Minister and I. This autographed photo is still proudly displayed in my home. At the conclusion of the ceremony, Prime Minister Ben Gurion and his entourage were whisked away to be shown the newly refurbished Constellations, leaving for Israel on the new planes by the 7<sup>th</sup> June. Awaiting was a tremendous crowd, where the Prime Minister announced this amazing continuation and growth of EL AL.

By the 29<sup>th</sup> June I had received all the certificates and accreditation required to complete the course for Cal-Aero Tech, and soon after left to return for Israel. We arrived at what was then known as Lydda Airport in 1951, later renamed to Ben Gurion Airport.

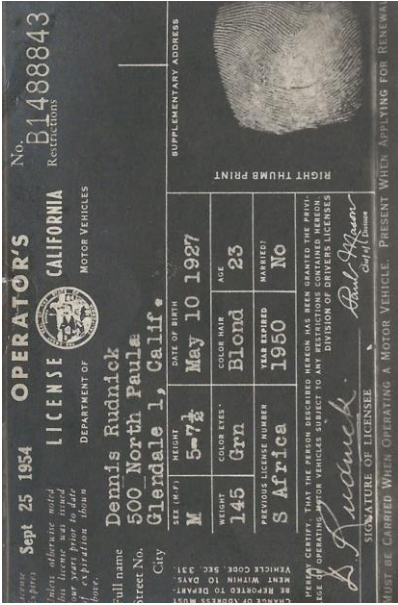
I stayed in Israel for a few months, and on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1951, I returned to my home in Johannesburg, South Africa. The reason being, my mother was extremely ill, and I was needed to be there for her and my two younger sisters. During this time I was in the process of organising my immigration to America, finally qualifying by September 1952. However my mother was still very ill, and by this stage I had already settled back with my family in Johannesburg for just over a year. Had I actually emigrated from South Africa, I would not have met my wonderful wife Edna, whom I married on 12<sup>th</sup> December 1954.



Douglas DC 4, 1950 plane that Dennis travelled on for five days,  
from Israel to California



View from inside the Douglas DC 4



Left: License for driving motor vehicles in America  
 Right: Flying Headquarters, taken on arrival in California



On leave in Nevada, California, 1950





Dennis with three other Mechanics at the sponsors dinner, in their new suits



Left: At the sponsors dinner, Dennis top right, with other mechanics  
Right: Dennis middle row, 2<sup>nd</sup> from left, with the sponsors and their families



Stripping parts from other smaller planes while in training.  
Dennis appears in the above left photo, 2<sup>nd</sup> from the right, and in the  
top right photo



Dennis in training at Lockheed in America. Below, he is with five others from the group of 40 that were chosen



Group of 40 Mechanics building the Constellations  
Dennis: middle row, 5<sup>th</sup> from left



At the Lockheed airfield in California  
Dennis: bottom, 3<sup>rd</sup> from right



In front of a finished constellation  
 Dennis is kneeling bottom, 5<sup>th</sup> from the right

NEWSBUREAU  
 LOCKHEED  
 BURBANK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

INSPECTING CONSTELLATION MANUFACTURE AT LOCKHEED are Israel air force enlistees studying aviation this year in the United States. Heading the student group of 43 is Capt. Yariv Haran of the Israel Air Force, (in front of propeller, center).

Others in the student group include: Asher Admon, Mordechai Alberton, Nordechay Alkalay, Samuel Apter, Gideon Badash, Isaac Bendet, Yoav Ben-Nun, Moshe Broshy, Jacob Goldstein, Yair Goldstein, Mordechai Gross, Paul Gruenberg, Moshe Gutkin, Amazia Hancock, Avner Harussi, Mordechai Kranz, David Litvak, Meir Mayer, Mordechai Mizrachi, Dennis Rudnik, Zalman Schochat, Chanoch Schwarzberg, Moshe Spigel, Jacob Wronsky, Yoav Barel, Levy Carasso, Ben-Ami Gudovitz, Nathan Haboba, Jacob Halabe, Samuel Hazan, Ben-Zion Hefter, Gershon Hicky, Josef Hochstein, Josef Huberman, Ami Katz, Isaac Koinger, Mordechai Savitsky, Elimelech Schanz, Alfred Schneider, Uri Seifer, Achiram Shirizly, Jacob Yaron.

5/51

A complete list of the 40 Mechanics chosen to work on the Super-Constellations in California for El Al



# CAL - AERO TECHNICAL INSTITUTE

GRAND CENTRAL AIR TERMINAL, GLENDALE, CALIF.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT DENNIS RUDNICK  
 COMPLETED THE MASTER AVIATION MECHANIC COURSE  
 OF 2000 HRS. ON JUNE 29, 1951

D. Rudnick SIGNATURE      Frank C. Argall DIRECTOR OF TRAINING

## School Graduation Certificate

This is to certify that DENNIS RUDNICK (Name)  
500 North Pauls, Glendale, California (Address) was graduated from the  
COMBINED AIRCRAFT AND AIRCRAFT ENGINE curriculum of the  
CAL-AERO TECHNICAL INSTITUTE (School)  
GLENDALE, CALIFORNIA (Address) Air Agency Certificate No. 70  
 on JUNE 29, 1951 (Date); that he has successfully completed the instruction required  
 by the Civil Air Regulations and is eligible to apply for a MECHANIC  
 Certificate and AIRCRAFT & ENGINE Rating as issued by the Administrator of Civil Aeronautics.

STUDENT NAME <b>CAL - AERO TECHNICAL INSTITUTE</b> GRAND CENTRAL AIR TERMINAL GLENDALE 1, CALIFORNIA MECHANICS DIVISION	AVER.	DATE FROM	DATE TO	HRS. POSSIBLE	HRS. ATTENDED	GROUP						
	86.6	11 3 MO. DAY	3 2 MO. DAY	680	657.2	3						
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GROUP 1.	GROUP 2.	GROUP 3.										
BASIC	ENGINE	AIRPLANE										

Various certificates of completion of the course at Cal Aero Tech to become an aviation mechanic

**CAL- AERO  
TECHNICAL INSTITUTE**

ESTABLISHED 1929

SPECIALIZING EXCLUSIVELY IN AERONAUTICAL TRAINING · LOCATED IN THE HEART OF THE AIRCRAFT

GRAND CENTRAL AIR TER  
GLENDALE 1, LOS ANGELES 4  
TELEPHONE... CHAPMA

June 29, 1951  
of our 22nd Year

Mr. Dennis Rudnick  
500 North Paula  
Glendale, California

Dear Mr. Rudnick:

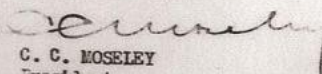
In addition to the issuance of your diploma in Master Aviation Mechanic, it is a real pleasure for me to be able to give you this special letter of recommendation.

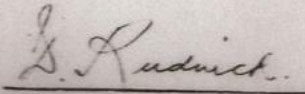
This letter is given only to exceptional students having a majority of Above Average grades in both theory and practice.

You have excelled in your training here and we feel certain that in your life work you will continue to be a credit to yourself, your school, and the aircraft industry. You are thoroughly qualified to carry out your assignments in Master Aviation Mechanics in any aircraft company you may join.

You are free to use this as a letter of introduction or recommendation.

Sincerely yours,

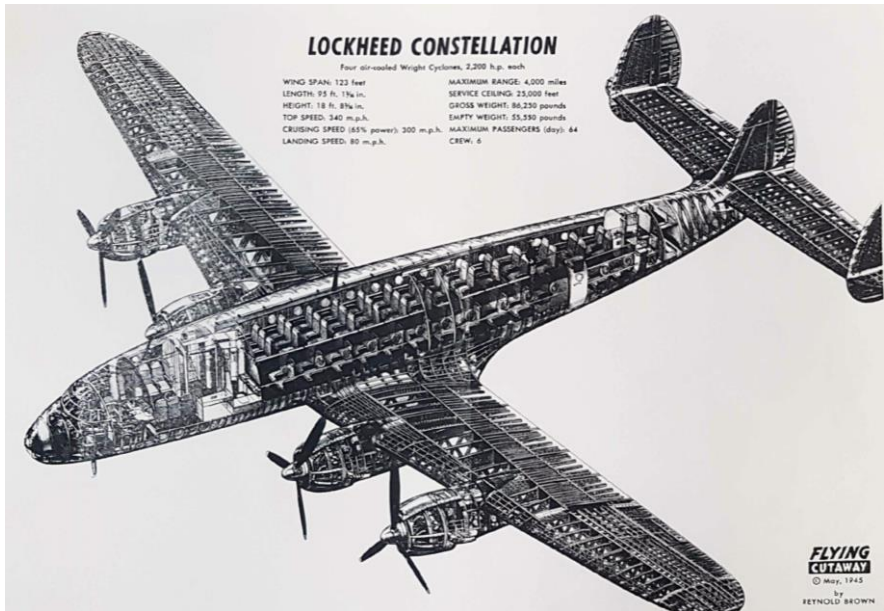
  
C. C. MOSELEY  
President  
Cal-Aero Technical Institute

  
Dennis Rudnick

Despite this special letter of recommendation due to the second highest rank in the course, Dennis' certifications were not accepted back in South Africa

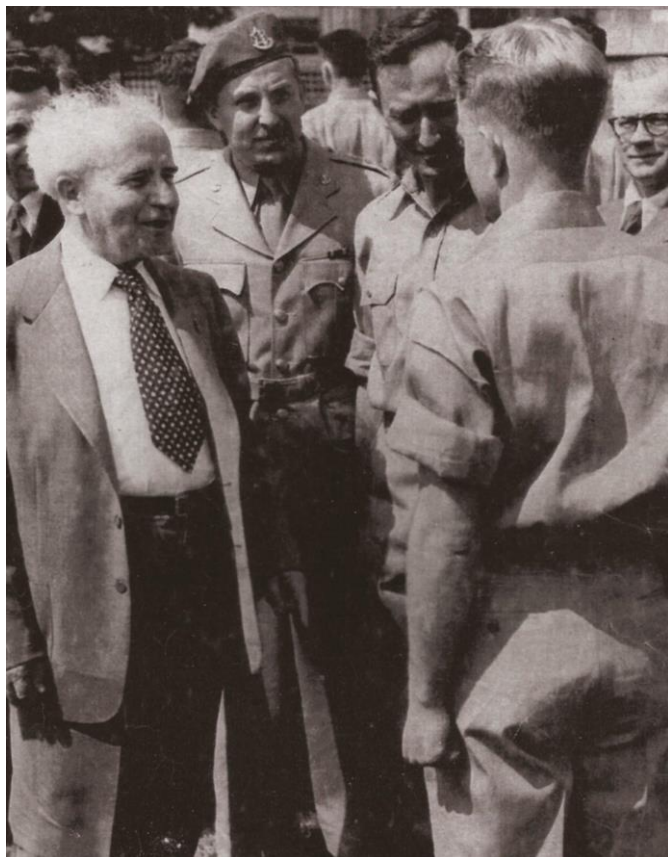


Postcard illustrating the final Constellation, 1950

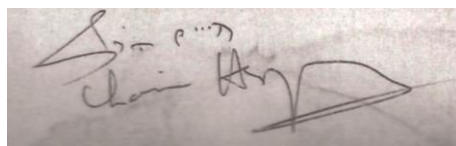


Illustrations of the internals of the Constellation, which was converted to a passenger aeroplane





Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, with Chiam Hertzog, inspecting a guard of honour at the Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1951, on the occasion of the acceptance of the Constellations



David Ben Gurion's autograph



The Hollywood Bowl, Los Angeles, California in 1951



Dennis standing in the Guard of Honour for David Ben Gurion,  
Guard of Honour Bottom Right, Dennis is back row, 5<sup>th</sup> from left

Source: USC Libraries

## Returning to Israel

*This chapter is a retrospective of Dennis' experiences in Israel in 2012, written by Jared Rudnick.*

In 2012, we were trying to organise one last trip back to Israel for Dennis, as an additional living historians project that I, his grandson, was undertaking, was sparking new interest. We were extremely fortunate that the JNF had arranged almost a week of personalised tours, visiting the same places that Dennis had fought at in 1948. Unfortunately at the time Edna was restricted from flying, so Dennis' two children, Aubrey and Charlene accompanied him on the trip.

The trip was much fun, seeing around a modern Israel, However there were a few standout moments from when Dennis was able to relive and honour his participation in the 1948 war of Independence.

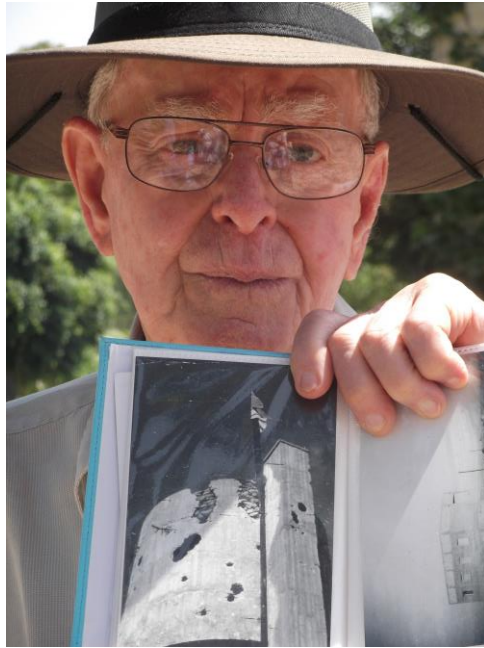
While visiting the Kotel, Dennis was taking shelter from the heat on a bench in the shade. One of the soldiers asked him if he was alright, and in typical Dennis fashion, he begun a conversation. This led to Dennis telling this soldier of his experiences in the war. The soldier called over some other soldiers, and soon enough there were about 50 soldiers all listening to his story. This was very emotional for Dennis, as he spoke with tears in his eyes. The Kotel was already such an incredible site making this such a surreal experience. Dennis was completely amazed and in awe that this opportunity with soldiers at the Kotel in modern day Israel was due partly to his, and many other Machalnicks efforts in the war, 64 years ago.

A similar experience occurred when visiting the Independence Hall, in Tel Aviv. A tour guide taking an American birth-right group started talking to Dennis, learning of this history. They organised for Dennis to stand at the podium, the same exact spot where Israel's Independence was declared, to relay his story to about 100 students. He explained that he was in Israel at the time when this amazing history was happening, and shared how the students should be extremely grateful for those who sacrificed their lives, for this cause. The students were so amazed, and were listening so intently that they were running late for their own tour bus, causing a traffic jam as it was forced to double park in the street!

Another special moment was when Dennis was able to visit the fortress at Iraq-El-Suweidan, and the water tower at Kibbutz Negba. Dennis pulled out his original photographs, depicting the hole blown into the wall of the fortress, and the damaged water tower. He was almost in shock, saying over and over “I cant believe it, I simply cant believe it”, as the tower and fortress shared the exact same bullet holes from when he was there in 1948. Again, everyone was extremely emotional, and in complete awe of the whole experience.

While these moments were extremely important and emotional for Dennis, he also was able to visit popular tourist sites and JNF infrastructure projects all around the country. Additionally, he visited the Headquarters of El Al at Ben Gurion Airport. After being treated to a lovely lunch in the pilots lounge, he was able to see behind the scenes at the command towers, and in the hangers. Dennis was amazed at the complex technology and computation used to organise and keep track of all the planes, as none of those systems existed when he was working as a mechanic.

Dennis was so thankful that he was able to go back to Israel again. He could not stop thinking about how Israel has developed over the years, from fledgling villages and towns into major cities, and a world leader in so many industries. We are all so grateful to the sponsors and the JNF for organising it, and giving Dennis the trip of a lifetime.



Dennis with his original photo of the water tower,  
at Kibbutz Negba



Standing at the hole in the wall of the fortress Iraq-El-Suweidan





Sitting with Israeli soldiers at the Kotel



Visiting the Israel Defence Forces History Museum, Tel Aviv  
L-R: Dennis, Aubrey and the JNF tour guide Brain Shapiro



Dennis visiting behind the scenes of El Al



## Dennis Today

Dennis continued living in South Africa, where he met Edna, whom he married in 1954, and had four children. By April 1996, he and Edna followed his four children, immigrating to Australia.

He has been fortunate enough to be involved in living historians projects almost ten times, sharing his story with many students from a variety of schools. Dennis has also been personally compiling this story for 10 years, from 2008, with amazing help from his wife Edna, and grandson's Justin and Jared.

Dennis passed away at the age of 90, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2017, Rosh Hashanah night. He was happily married to his wife Edna for 62 years. His honored legacy lives on with his four children, seven wonderful grandchildren and a great-grandson.



Dennis with his wife, Edna

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*I would like to thank my two grandsons, Justin Green and Jared Rudnick for their tremendous assistance in creating my story. I am forever grateful in their untiring efforts researching and editing, and I am very proud of what they have helped to accomplish.*

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1948 War of Independence  
**My Small Contribution**

By Dennis Rudnick



My Small Contribution is the story of Dennis Rudnick's experiences fighting in Israel in the 1948 War of Independence. We see all the successes and failures, emotional hardships and joys of celebration through a journey of warfare and amazing ingenuity. The story also continues with Dennis' experience as a mechanic, expanding El Al's fleet in America in the 1950's.