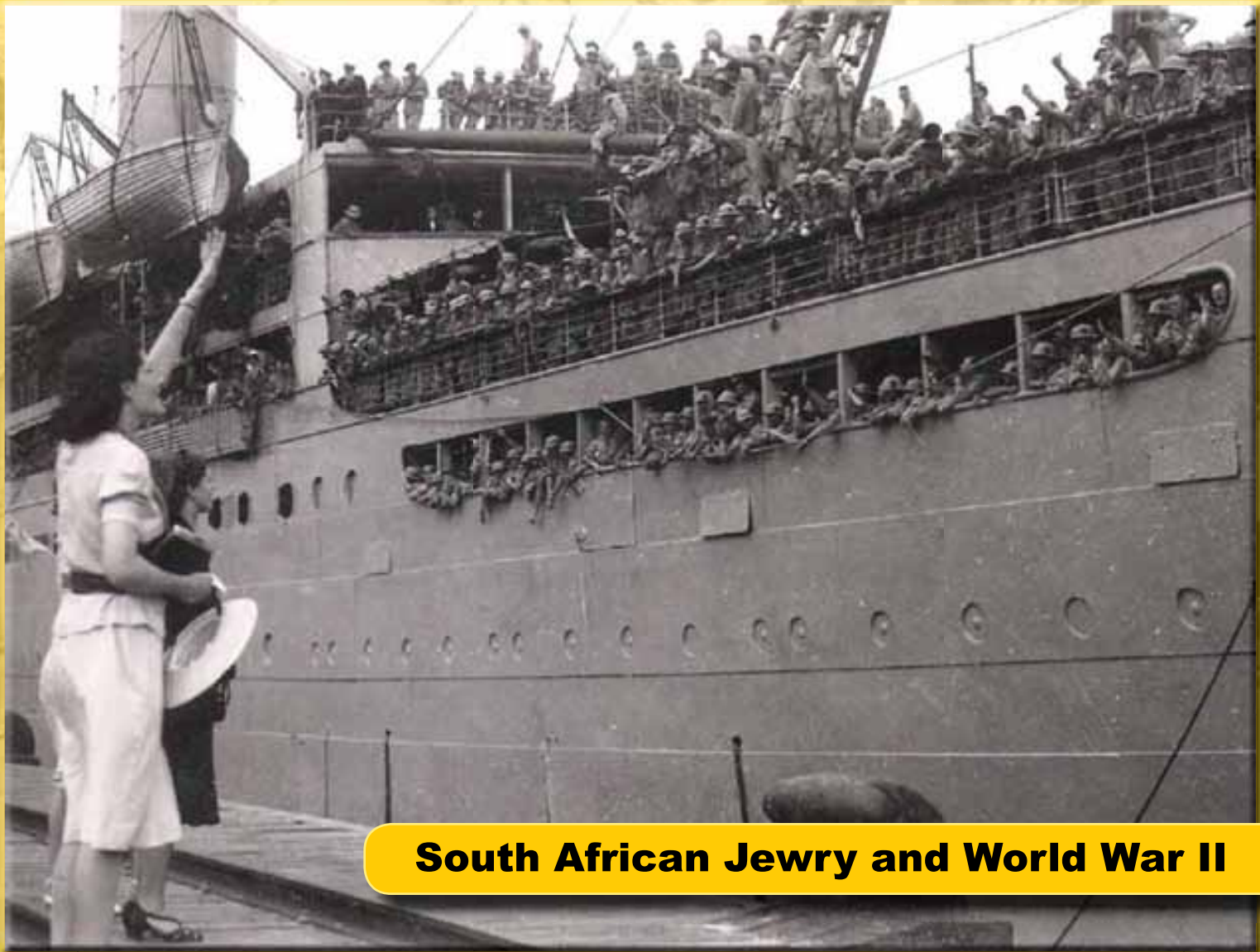


JEWISH AFFAIRS



South African Jewry and World War II

Rosh Hashanah 2015

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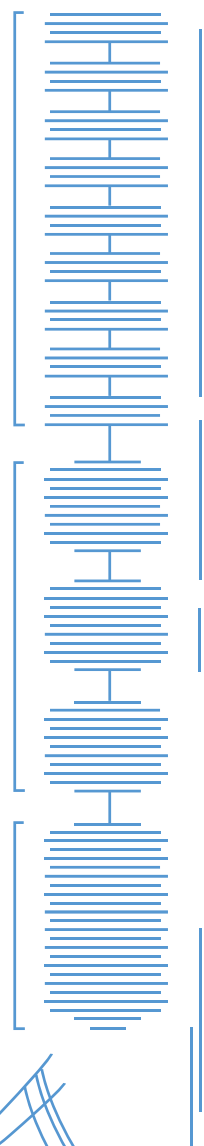
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JEWISH AFFAIRS

MISSION

In publishing JEWISH AFFAIRS, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies aims to produce a cultural forum which caters for a wide variety of interests in the community. The journal will be a vehicle for the publication of articles of significant thought and opinion on contemporary Jewish issues, and will aim to encourage constructive debate, in the form of reasoned and researched essays, on all matters of Jewish and general interest.

JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

JEWISH AFFAIRS will promote Jewish cultural and creative achievement in South Africa, and consider Jewish traditions and heritage within the modern context. It aims to provide future researchers with a window on the community's reaction to societal challenges. In this way the journal hopes critically to explore, and honestly to confront, problems facing the Jewish community both in South Africa and abroad, by examining national and international affairs and their impact on South Africa.

The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

The columns of JEWISH AFFAIRS will therefore be open to all shades of opinion. The views expressed by the contributors will be their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor, the Editorial Board or the Publishers.

However, in keeping with the provisions of the National Constitution, the freedom of speech exercised in this journal will exclude the dissemination of hate propaganda, personal attacks or invective, or any material which may be regarded as defamatory or malicious. In all such matters, the Editor's decision is final.

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South African troops departing for North Africa, 1941.

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Shana Tova and
well over the fast

JEWISH AFFAIRS

VOL. 70 ♦ NO. 2 ♦ ROSH HASHANAH 2015

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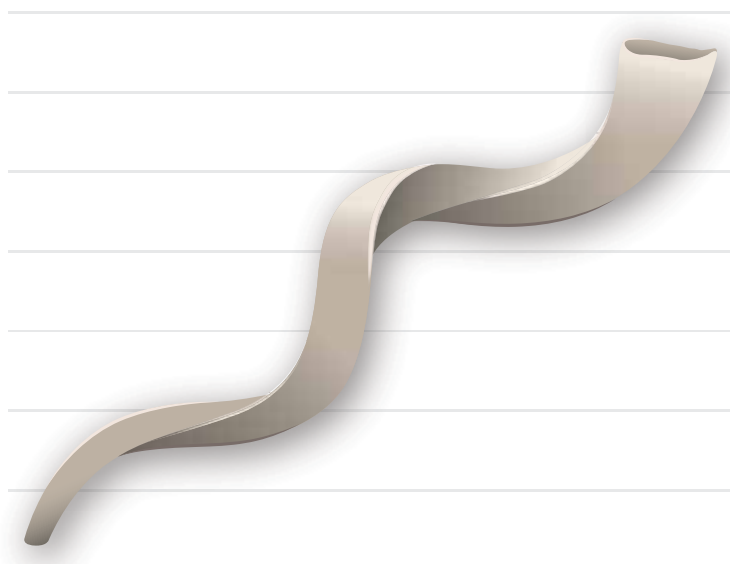
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Shanah Tovah

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Obituary



JOHN SIMON (1931-2015)

On 3 August, South African Jewry was deprived of a distinguished Jewish leader and one of its finest Judaic scholars with the passing in Cape Town of John Simon. By profession an attorney, Simon went on to pursue a parallel career, essentially in a lay capacity, in the field of academic Jewish studies. He obtained an M.A. in Jewish Civilization from the University of Cape Town, and went to speak and write extensively on various aspects of Cape Jewish history, with a particular interest in the early Cape rabbinate and Zionism. He was also a frequent contributor to law journals. In addition to lecturing at the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at UCT, he spoke on numerous Jewish communal platforms, particularly in his capacity as Chairman of Cape Town's Jacob Gitlin Library.

Simon was a stalwart supporter and over many years an active member of the *Jewish Affairs* editorial board. The many substantial articles published in the journal were noted for their erudition, intellectual rigour and sound judgment. Whether as a speaker or writer, he always had the ability to communicate the enthusiasm he felt for his subject to his audience.

In 1989, Simon assumed the chairmanship of the Jacob Gitlin Library, which under his guidance became renowned for its versatility and range of activities. To quote from his CV: "John Simon instituted the Annual Jacob Gitlin Memorial lectures, delivered by Rabbis, Academics and Scholars, which became the highlight of the annual Library functions. He also initiated the regular monthly or bi-monthly lectures and Discussion Forum, which drew a general, enlightened public. With these he stimulated debate about contemporary issues of Jewish interest. His erudite and humorous introductions as Chairman of these meetings, and his inimitable style and charisma have left an indelible and skilful guidance".

Among the communal leadership positions he held, Simon served as Chairman of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, Cape Council (1975–1977), as Chairman of the IUA Cape (1971–1975) and as National President of B'nai Brith (1971–1975).

Simon was married to Shirley Gillis, who predeceased him by two weeks. They are survived by their three sons, Mark, Jeremy and Trevor.

[The Editor]

.....

A NEW YEAR BRINGS NEW BEGINNINGS

.....



L'SHANAH TOVAH

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We wish you and your loved ones a blessed, contented and productive new year.

MESSAGE FROM THE SA JEWISH EX-SERVICE LEAGUE

*

William Bergman

I congratulate *Jewish Affairs* on this special issue, which is significant in the history of South African Jewry and particularly with respect to those Jewish members who served in World War II.

This year marks seventy years since WW2 ended, with Victory in Europe and the liberation of the infamous Nazi concentration camps. South African Jewry played a significant part in the war. The SA Defence Force relied upon volunteers, and the Jewish community came very much to the fore. Many do not know that 10% of the community volunteered for military service, as opposed to the South African national average of 7%.

During the war, many Jewish South African military personnel were decorated for bravery and outstanding military service. Many also paid the Supreme Sacrifice; their names are perpetuated on the South African Jewish Military War Memorial in Johannesburg's Westpark Jewish Cemetery.

The majority of the soldiers who died were young and in their prime. Some died so young that they did not have a chance to raise a family and experience the joy of having children. A number were the last male in their families, and hence their family name died with them. Many are buried in lands far from their homeland - so far away, that their relatives and friends cannot pay tribute to them at their graveside. A Memorial and Act of Homage service is held each year by the SA Jewish Ex-Service League to honour these brave soldiers, airmen and women, who gave their lives in the fight against Nazi tyranny.

However, let us also not forget and be thankful to Hashem for those who returned safely to their homeland, homes and families.

In keeping with the traditional patriotism found in all walks of life amongst fellow South Africans, the South African Jewish community has given unstintingly of its sons and daughters in the military service of their country. South African Jewry can be proud of its military record.

Lt Col William Bergman MMM (Rtd SA Army) is Branch Chairman of the Johannesburg and Reef Branch, SA Jewish Ex-Service League



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PHOTO GALLERY - SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY AT WAR



Jewish troops, with their chaplain, North Africa



Pte M. Goldstein, M.C.



*Capt. S. Rosenberg,
MBE, Mentioned in
Dispatches*



*Lt-Col D H Levinkind,
M.C. & M.B.E.*



*L/Cpl A Ruda, Military
Medal*



*Capt. A B Widman (left), in the field during the Italian campaign with
his Battalion Commander.*



Lt. J Karro, North Italy



Lt. Eric Manne, S.A.F.



Marriage of Sgt. Molly Koopowitz to Lt. Sonnenberg



One of 371 South African Jews who lost their lives whilst serving in the Union Defence Force, Warrant Officer Sylvia Jucum



The three sisters Koopowitz



Chanukah service in Cape Town's Great Synagogue, 24 December 1942

THE BROTHERS JONAS

Richard and Erwin Jonas, who arrived in South Africa as refugees from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, both served in North Africa, Richard as a staff sergeant in the Medical Corps and Erwin as a tank driver. After being captured at Tobruk, they were for a time united after meeting on the ship transferring them to Italy. Thereafter, Erwin was transferred to Germany, only being repatriated after the war. Richard remained in Italy, where he was liberated by Allied troops in 1944 and returned to South Africa.



*Staff-Sergeant Richard Jonas,
SA Medical Corps*



*Erwin Jonas as a POW in
Germany*



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MY BELIEVED BOYS! ON THE 12 OF THIS MONTH I RECEIVED THE FIRST LETTER FROM THE MY BELIEVED SAMUAD, ALDO-SIMON & SAUD. 8/11/12, 11/11/12, 11/11/12. THE REMAINING 2 LETTERS WERE THE SAME. I DON'T BELIEVE I SHOULD THAT IN THE PRESENTING THE RECEIVED MY CHARACTERFUL AND THE PARCEL WITH LETTERS WHICH I DID SEND YOU. NOW I HAVE GOT YOUR LETTERS AND THEY FEEL SO CLOSELY MYNARE. YOU THOUGHT OF MY MANY MANY LETTERS WHICH I HAVE IN THE PRINCE OF GALLES. I RECEIVED 4 LETTERS AND 4 PARCELS TO YOU. I AM SO HAPPY THAT YOU ARE ALL TOGETHER AND HEALTHY AND THAT YOU ARE BELIEVING IN GOD YOU WILL HAVE A LEAVE YOU. I AM U.S. AND ONLY WAITING FOR THE TIME WHEN WE THREE ARE EACH OTHER AGAIN AND REMAIN TOGETHER. THE LAST END OF OUR LIFE IF YOU TWO ONLY LISTEN FROM YOUR BROTHER. THEN SOMETHING IS WILL COME RIGHT. THERE IS NOTHING WILL BECOME SOMETHING GODS THE SAME AND WHY? I AM SATISFIED WITH MY JOB AND WILL STAY HERE THE YOU LONGER WORK, I WONDERLY NOT WHAT I DO. AS YOUR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS SEND THEIR LOVE, AND AND BROTHERS WOULD HAVE WRITTEN ALREADY BUT THEY ARE WORKING. THEY ARE ALL DEAD TIED IN THE EVENING. IT IS ALSO THAT THE SHIP WENTING ON OVER THERE HAVE BEEN NO MORE THAN MEN. IN A VESSEL I CAN LEAD ANOTHER PRINCE. IF ONLY WHILE REMEMBER THE NAME. MY BELIEVED HAVE GODS THEY FOR US BOTH YOU AND KEEP YOU HEALTHY AND ASK ME TO ME LOVE. MANY KISS AND LOVE WISHES TO YOUR BROTHER AND SISTER.



Durban Jewry made its premises, the Durban Jewish Club, available as a soldiers' canteen. Some two million Allied personnel ultimately made use of the premises



Union of Jewish Women packing Pesach items for soldiers



*Rest and Recreational centre, Johannesburg
Jewish Guild*



*Temple Israel Sisterhood preparing beds for soldiers,
JHB Jewish Guild*



*Clothing depot of the SA Jewish
Appeal, Johannesburg*

The Union of Jewish Women was very active during the war. In the coastal towns soldiers and sailors often came into the cities for short periods of time and UJW members would ensure that there was accommodation for the Jewish men in Jewish homes. In the minutes of meetings during the war years mention was made of dances that were held, shul services that included the soldiers and sailors, and how some men came to say Kaddish on yahrtzeits.

The same activities took place in Johannesburg. Jewish men and women were cared for and made to feel at home, dances were held and meals prepared at kosher venues. Women knitted and crocheted gloves, socks and scarves for the troops. They also collected money to buy what was needed at the front, and arranged for letters to be sent to the soldiers.



VETERANS VOICES

Editor's Note: This seventieth anniversary of the end of World War II is, in all likelihood, the last significant milestone in which those who took part in the war will still be with us to tell their stories. In the course of planning this special SA Jewry and World War II issue, therefore, it was decided to conduct interviews with some of the remaining Jewish participants. The editor thanks all those who assisted him in compiling this feature.

A forthcoming book on the eminent lawyer, Zionist leader and human rights activist Advocate **Jules Browde** will include a photograph of the 6th South African Armoured Division victory parade that took place in Monza, Italy, on 14 May 1945. Printed on the side of one of the leading tanks is the legend 'Flippie', which is how Browde is able to identify the tank's officer as himself. The name was placed there by Dudley 'Flippie' Fynn, Browde's predecessor as forward observation officer, who had been killed many months before.

Browde's participation in the parade was the culmination of five and a half years in the South African Artillery, during which he served in Abyssinia, North Africa and Italy. He was involved in some of the hardest fighting in the Italian theatre, from the battle of Monte Cassino through to the final surrender of the German forces in Italy at the end of April 1945.

At the time of the outbreak of the war, Browde was articled to his brother's Johannesburg law firm Mendelow and Browde. He enlisted at the end of May 1940, soon after the fall of France. Originally intending to join the Transvaal Scottish (his old school, King Edward VII, was affiliated to the regiment), he was persuaded by a friend, Philip Denton, to sign up with the Artillery instead. Denton, also Jewish, was later killed at Sidi Rezegh.

Browde's real war service began in East

Africa. His regiment was mainly Afrikaans-speaking, hence he learned to speak Afrikaans after hardly knowing a word of the language. He took part in the successful Abyssinian campaign against the Italians and was then sent for further training for a year to Egypt. During this time, he was one of four chosen to go on an officers' training course in Potchefstroom, which meant that he missed the battle of El Alamein. Now a lieutenant, Browde did not return to North Africa immediately, but spent some six months in Madagascar, where a possible attack by Japan was anticipated.

Up until now, Browde's wartime experiences had been relatively uneventful, but this changed abruptly following his arrival in Italy. As part of the 6th South African Armoured Division, he took part in the bloody battle of Monte Casino, and in all the subsequent hard-fought campaigning as the Allies fought their way up the boot of Italy. On the day of the D-Day Landings in France on 6 June 1944, he remembers being in his tank alongside the Tiber River in Rome. Around this time, he was appointed as forward observation officer, whose task it was to be on the frontline with the infantry to assess their situation and what their needs were. This job he held until almost the end of the war.

Browde's tank was one of the first to enter Florence. Here, he and his companion had a narrow escape when a German sniper opened fire just as they were about to enter an intersection and killed an elderly Italian man in a cart. He was involved in a subsequent 'clean-out' operation to rid the town of concealed German troops.

During the 1944-5 winter campaign, Browde was the officer chosen to occupy what was known as the Pink House on Hill 826 south of Bologna. It was, he recalls, "very close to the German lines and an uncomfortable place to be". Regular night patrols were conducted with the object of taking prisoners and obtaining information about enemy plans and positions. Browde accompanied the infantry on a number of these dangerous ventures.

With Germany's surrender the war, so far as South Africa's armed forces were concerned, was over, and for the troops it was now just a matter of waiting one's turn to be sent home.

However, for Jules Browde one more harrowing experience lay ahead before he finally arrived safely in South Africa. Early in the flight home, the Dakota he and a number of other South Africans was travelling on got into difficulties when first one, then a second engine cut out. In the end the pilot, managed to make a forced landing in Crete, thanks in



6th SA Armoured Division victory parade, 14 May 1945

no small part to an American businessman on the ground who, seeing the fired distress sign, managed to get in touch with the pilot and provide him with the necessary landing information. Because the runway was so short, the plane ended up going over the beach and into the sea, but no-one on board was hurt in the end. Browde was gratified to see the mainly Afrikaans passengers lining up afterwards to shake the pilot's hand, notwithstanding that he was an Indian.

Now aged 96, Browde still remembers his war service years with remarkable clarity yet – despite being well-known for his abilities as a raconteur – it is not something he has ever liked to talk about. He had himself lost quite a few friends, and had learned at first-hand what combat veterans throughout history have known – that little ultimately separates a living war hero from just another battlefield statistic. “If you’re lucky in war, you survive, if not, you don’t”, he says.

For many years, **Zelick Bedell** has been a familiar sight at the annual Yom Hashoah ceremony in Johannesburg as a representative of the South African Jewish Ex-Servicemen's League. Born in Dvinsk, Latvia, in 1920, he came to South Africa in 1937. On enlisting at the start of the war, he was assigned to the Engineering Corps, and duly became a ‘Sapper’. Fears of a Japanese attack on Simonstown in the wake of Pearl Harbour saw him dispatched to the naval base at Simonstown for anti-aircraft training. Thereafter, he was sent to join the 6th SA Armoured Division in Italy, arriving shortly before the prolonged and bloody Monte Casino campaign in the early months of 1944. Prior to the war, Bedell and his friend Mendel Flior – the two had met through their involvement in the left-wing Jewish Workers' Club – had come to an agreement that in the event of South Africa going to war with Germany, both would join up. He learned later that Flior had been killed in his very first engagement after arriving in Italy. Bedell himself served in the 6th SA Armoured Division until the end of the war, mainly working on the roads, along with members of the Polish and Jewish Brigade,



Zelick Bedell (holding flag) at the 2010 Yom Hashoah ceremony, held at West Park Cemetery, Johannesburg (Photo: Ilan Ossendryver).

and Indian and other Colonial troops.

Born and bred in Doornfontein, **Mike Feldman** went straight from school into the army, doing his basic training in Potchefstroom and going on to being trained as a Signaller at Roberts Heights (today Voortrekkerhoogte). In the middle of 1944, he arrived at the front just outside Florence, and served in the Signals Corps until the conclusion of the war just under a year later. As he acknowledges, this was the tail-end of the war, and his own involvement was essentially in a reserve and support capacity. With the coming of winter, not much happened in the Italian theatre until the final big push in April 1945, when the Allies continued their northward advance until reaching Milan and the remaining German forces in Italy surrendered.

Throughout his training and active service, Feldman was accompanied by his two close friends, Joe Slovo and Barney Feller. Prior to the war, he and Slovo had been instrumental in founding the Young Communist League, with Feldman being in charge of the Doornfontein branch. Feldman recalls with amusement a photograph taken of the three of them in Italy – much reproduced since then, in light of Slovo's subsequent career – showing “the three little Jew-boys with their berets and round glasses”.



Mike Feldman (left) with Joe Slovo and Barney Feller, Italy, 1944.

In his autobiography, Slovo devotes little more than a page or two to his wartime service, likewise observing that by the time he

arrived, the war was in its final stages: “Apart from spectacular artillery bombardments from our side and some stray bombing by German aircraft on road convoys, I neither experienced nor witnessed any major war action. I never saw a dead or wounded body, although I knew that we were suffering casualties from the messages I received and forwarded to the brigade signal communications centre.”¹

Unlike most servicemen, Feldman was able to return to South Africa fairly quickly, on “compassionate grounds” (his father was very ill at the time). He went on to qualify as an optometrist, in which capacity he worked for fifty years before his retirement soon after the turn of the century.

Wilfred ‘Wolfie’ Tobiansky (a nephew of Johannesburg pioneer and founder of Sophiatown Herman Tobiansky) served in the SA Air Force in the North African and Italian theatres. An aircraft mechanic, he was assigned his first plane to look after shortly after his arrival in Egypt, and is proud of the fact that in the ensuing two and a half years, he never lost a plane. Tobiansky served under various senior Jewish commanding officers, both in training and on active service. In Kimberley, he recalls, the training of pupil pilots was in the hands of a German-Jewish World War I veteran (“a legend and the most marvellous pilot”), who had been in the same Luftwaffe squad as Herman Goering. After being sent to the front, Tobiansky had the rare experience of being under two Jewish commanding officers in the course of his service, Lt-Colonels Cecil Margo and Oscar Galgut. Both became distinguished members of the South African Bench after the war, and Margo is additionally remembered as being one of the founders of the fledgling Israeli Air Force.

The North African campaign concluded with the surrender of the remaining Axis forces in Tunisia on 13 May 1943. Tobiansky recalls how shortly before this, a Pesach service for all Jewish personnel was cancelled shortly after it began when German planes flew over and dropped a number of what the men referred to as “daisy cutters” (cluster bombs). On arriving at the marquee where the abortive service was to have been held, he had nevertheless had the pleasure of meeting up with his cousin Basil Levitt, whom he had not seen since the start of the war.

From Tunisia, Tobiansky was sent on to Malta and from there took part – by this time, largely under the overall control of the Americans – in the capture of Sicily and the subsequent Allied push up the Italian peninsula. Finally, after serving in 24 Squadron for 33 months (“The normal tour was 18 months – I don’t know why they kept me so long”), he returned to South Africa. By this time a Corporal, he was put in charge of a team of

Italian POWs in Kimberley, whose task was to break up the hundreds of US-made Harvard planes (which, in terms of the Lend Lease agreement, could not be sold). The Italians were all skilled craftsmen, he remembers, and cooked the best food on the base.



Cpl Wolfie Tobiansky (left) with fellow 24 Squadron veteran Lt Dick Haig. Both are wearing their fathers’ World War I medals, in addition to their own.

Durbanite **Esmond Jacobson**’s real wartime ordeal started after he was captured at Tobruk on 21 June 1941. At the time, he was serving in the Signals Corps of the 2nd SA Police Battalion. The early months of captivity were ones of stark deprivation, but the situation improved once regular Red Cross parcels began arriving. In common with what seems to have been the general experience of South African Jewish POWs, the fact of his being Jewish did not affect his position at all during the time he spent in Italian camps. It very much became an issue, however, when the prisoners were evacuated to Germany ahead of the Allied advance. Jacobson was one of those who chose to identify themselves as Jewish when questioned about this by their captors. As a result, he was sent to Camp E593 in Shomberg, a camp for British Jews, the majority of whom were from the British Mandate territory of Palestine.

In his memoir of his time in captivity, published in the September 1946 issue of *Jewish Affairs*, Jacobson looks back on the fateful decision he made and its consequences:

We had to make up our minds quickly – and the gamble was between life and death. We gambled with death, and the decision opened many new doors to us. I take my mind back to that day, September, 1943, when 2000 South African prisoners of war reached Sagan in Upper Silesia, Germany, from Italy. Each Jew had to decide for himself: should he disclose his religion and race to the Nazis or should he conceal them? The majority of Jews decided

on diplomacy. Twenty-three of us, having faith that Germany would not violate the Geneva Convention, registered as Jews. The first door to richer experience opened to us.

As a result of their decision, the remaining twenty months of captivity for Jacobson and the other self-identifying Jews differed dramatically from those of other South African POWs. Until 19 January, when the prisoners were evacuated to the west ahead of the Russian advance, the experience was, as he remembers, “not unpleasant”. While they were made to work, in the coal mines of the Hohenzollerngrube and elsewhere, it was under reasonable conditions, and a strong spirit of camaraderie animated all the working parties. In camp, it was possible to hold regular Yom Tov services, as well as organise plays, concerts and sporting events. It even proved possible for Palestinians in the camp to organise a drive for Keren Kayemet. £600 was ultimately raised and paid into the fund by the Paymaster-General on receipt of the men’s stop-orders.



Some of the players in the play ‘David and Goliath’ produced by Shmuel Stern (arm on hip) in the all-Jewish Shomberg POW camp.

The final months of Jacobson’s captivity, by contrast, were harrowing ones. It was mid-winter, and the prisoners were made to march for 700 kilometres through Germany and Czechoslovakia:

During these first days, we passed countless Jews, Russians and other prisoners who, unable to continue marching, froze to death or were shot by the relentless SS. On those black days, many hundreds of Jews fell. We walked in the grey, snow-covered country – passed countless frozen bodies, blood-stained, horrible. Our newly found comrades [four Polish Jews who had joined them several days before] signified those of our race who no longer suffered – ‘Achad MiShelanu’ (One of Ours).

Eventually, the prisoners arrived at a detention camp in Brūx in the Western Sudetenland, where Jews from all over Europe were being held (“all unbelievably herded together”). The camp was liberated by the Russians on 7 May 1945, and Jacobson and two others were able to make their way, by bicycle, to the American lines at Karlsbad.

Esmond Jacobson still lives in Durban, where he has been a long-serving member of the Durban branch of the SA Jewish Ex-Service League. Just three of its members today are World War II veterans; the remainder served in the SADF during the Border War.

NOTES

- 1 Slovo, J M, *Slovo – The Unfinished Autobiography*, Ravan Press, 1995, p29

L’shanah Tovah

May this New Year be filled with health, happiness and exciting adventures for you and your family.



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UP NORTH

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W. Yesorsky

Editor's Note: The following is an edited version of an article by Rev W Yesorsky, originally entitled 'Leaves from a Padre's Diary', that appeared in the March 1947 of *The Judean*. Rev Yesorsky was at the time Honorary Chaplain of the Johannesburg Branch, SA Jewish Ex-Servicemen's League.

In a recent issue of *Readers Digest*, an interesting article appeared under the heading, 'Confessions of Clergyman', in which the writer endeavours to eradicate from the minds of laymen certain misconceptions about ministers of religion. Among these he mentions the assumption that padres live sheltered lives and are not brought face to face with the evils and the raw side of life. He writes in defence of his fellow 'skypilots' and says, "We do not wear halos - we do not dwell on the mountain tops and send down our wisdom to the people . . . The average clergyman sees more real life in a week than the average layman sees in a year."

As I read this article my mind travelled back a few years, and I thought of my own experiences as a padre in the Union Defence Forces, when so many of the 'boys' really got to know the 'skypilots' for the first time in their lives, and came to the conclusion that the padre was an ordinary human being just like themselves. He had the same fears and weaknesses, the same hopes and longings, and he could take it and rough it when the going was tough.

I shall always consider my years of service among the most interesting years of my ministry. For we were on active service in more senses than one. The padre was there not only to represent his denomination; he also served as friend, comforter and Good Samaritan wherever and whenever possible to all men, irrespective of creed or colour. He saw the humour and the pathos of each situation, helped to maintain a sense of balance and perspective among his boys, helped to build up morale – above all, he was prepared to live among the troops and take the risks and discomforts of army life with the rest of them.

When, in response to an urgent request from the Jewish soldiers of the 3rd Brigade, I was appointed padre to the troops stationed in the Eastern Transvaal, consternation reigned for some time in the Officers' Mess at Brigade HQ. A very senior officer expressed himself in plain army language and declared, "I'm not having any b**** Rabbis at my table!

Send him to the Imperial Light Horse!" (So high was the proportion of Jews in that the regiment that it was jocularly referred to as 'Israel's Last Hope'!) However, when I duly presented myself at Brigade HQ, this same Senior Officer was so surprised when he saw me, that he insisted I remain. It seemed, so I learnt later, that he had expected someone with a terribly broken accent and whose manners and behaviour would bring disrepute on his HQ mess – such was his picture of a Jewish padre.

February 4th, 1941 My first day in the Army I was introduced to my fellow officers "Padre Yeesorsky, Sir," said the Brigade Major to the O.C. "Yesorsky?" replied the O.C., "We can't have a name like this in our mess!" (Russian or Slavonic names were not popular in those far-off-days). I turned to the O.C. and asked him, "What do you suggest Sir?" With a broad grin the O.C. said, "I think we'll call you Yes-or-no-ski!" With a twinkle in my eye I said, "Sir, as a ware Afrikaner I suggest that we drop the 'ski' altogether, and that we change the remaining part of my emended name into Afrikaans!" And so it came about that from that day onwards I became known throughout the Brigade, and indeed the whole 2nd Division, as Padre Jannie!

From February–June, 1941, I was stationed at Zonderwater and soon knew every inch of the ground. I learnt to 'love' the place so much that I could understand why the boys were simply itching to leave it and be on their way "Up North". How often during those months, as I went on my rounds from company to company, from tent to tent, did I hear the same complaint from so many fellows – "We didn't join the Army to win the Battles of Zonderwater and Kaffirskraal."

June 9th, 1941: The great day arrived – all was set for our trek to meet the enemy in North Africa. I remember as our ship was about to leave Durban looking down at the crowd in the harbour and wondering what heartache and sorrow was to be the fate of some of those saying goodbye to their loved ones. Glorious

carefree days at sea. One padre, a little too zealous for the Church, annoyed many of the men aboard. He preached against smoking and against drinking and started a regular crusade against almost everything. Needless to say, he wasn't very popular later in the sandy wastes of the Western Desert.

June 23rd, 1941: Our first camp was at a place called Marcopolis, about twenty miles from Alexandria. Most of the fellows were unable to understand for what earthly reason they had been dumped there, for it was a veritable dustbowl. From morning till evening the sand and dust whirled all around and it was a real endurance test to go on one's rounds. I think the powers-that-be decided that if we could survive the "Battle of the Marcopolis", we could survive anything up North.

August, 1941: I returned one afternoon from a visit to the hospitals in the Delta region, to be told that we were on the move. We were on our way to a little known place on the banks of the Mediterranean – a place destined to become famous as the scene of one of the most decisive battles in all military history, and the scene of the great turning point of the Second World War – El-Alamein. But in 1939, none of us had ever heard of the place, and the average Egyptian hadn't set eyes on it either. Not that there was anything worth seeing at El-Alamein – just mile after mile of sand and rubble. We were stationed there for over four months, during which time the Division was mainly responsible for building the defences that were to prove so vital to our campaign in the following year. Yet at that time, practically every fellow I met laughed and ridiculed the whole idea of digging at El-Alamein as a sheer waste of time! Little did they realise then how they were literally "digging for victory"!

What characters I learnt to know during those days! One name appears quite often in my diary – Dominie Malherbe. For a few months, the Dominie and I shared a tent, and regular bets were taken in the mess as to who would convert whom first. My fellow officers could never quite get over the fact that a Rabbi and a Dominie could live together without getting into heated arguments over their respective faiths. The Dominie was a good and faithful padre, always kind and cheerful – a good Christian and a fine friend. We visited hospitals together, and the Dominie would make his rounds of the wards carrying a case with him wherever he went. As soon as he'd seen all the fellows in any ward – out would come his case. It was a music case, and he'd play a number of cheery tunes on his fiddle just to brighten the chaps up. Good luck to you, Dominie Malherbe, wherever you are.

Rosh Hashona . . . Yom Kippur . . . Succos, 1941: With great difficulty, I was able

to arrange for men to have leave from their vital work of building defences – hundreds of parcels fortunately arrived from the Board of Deputies, just in time to cheer the boys with the thought that the people on the home front hadn't forgotten them.

November, 1941: We were on the move again . . . this time the campaign was on in earnest. The Division was split up all over the Western Desert and my work was becoming increasingly difficult because the men were so scattered. My biggest headache at that time was the transport problem. The padre had to be mobile if he was to be of much use to his men, and unfortunately a number of padres, including myself, had no trucks or cars at their disposal. In the eyes of the higher ups, the padres were still "necessary evils", and had to be satisfied with scrounging lifts whenever they conducted services or wanted to visit their respective units. For the Jewish padre, with his men spread over a whole division, it became absolutely impossible to carry out his duties unless he had transport at his disposal all the time. A number of us held a very secret meeting and we enlisted the support of the Gestapo – the Military Police – and we decided to organise a raiding party on V.R.P.'s (Vehicle Reception Parks) to 'acquire' the necessary transport. And so it happened – we made a recce and eventually all of us came back in possession of transport. The full story, of course, can't be told – but all my boys remember how I clung on to my mobile Synagogue right through all the arduous and trying months that followed.

During the early critical days of the campaign a routine order was published, and both Father Simpson, the R.C. padre, and myself found to our utter amazement that we had been declared L.O.B. (Left out of Battle). We had to decide whether we would accept army discipline and stay behind or defy authority and move forward with our boys. Thanks to our own way of *solving* our transport problem, we decided on the latter course. I shall never forget the look on the face of the O.C. when two dishevelled and defiant padres appeared one morning at the front line and duly presented him with a letter signed by ourselves in which we pointed out to him quite respectfully but nevertheless very firmly that no padre could be *left out of battle*, and that the place of the padre was with his men in the front.

January, 1942: Battles of Bardia and Sollum brought busy days and nights for padres . . . fairly hungry days for Jewish padres. Down the line it had nearly always been possible to obtain tinned food and vegetables, but in the front line not too much of this kind of food was available. Sometime previously, the O.C. had asked me how I was going to manage for food in the front line. "How many

commandments have you got, Sir?” I asked him. “Ten, Padre”, he replied. “Well, Sir,” I declared, “I’ve got eleven! Right at the top of my commandments I’ve written a new one – Thou shalt not starve!”

Pesach . . . Shovuos . . . Rosh Hashona, 1942: During those months, our fortunes in the Middle East changed completely . . . Most of our Divisions captured at Tobruk . . . the battle went on. I held countless services all over the Desert and tried to bring some comfort to the boys. Many of these services have left indelible impressions on the minds of many hard-bitten soldiers. Two services are the most vivid in my own memory: one on 20 June 1942, and the other on Rosh Hashona of the same year. On the morning of June 20th, I was on my way to hold a service at a place just within the Libyan border when a dispatch rider passed me and shouted three words: “Tobruk has fallen!!” Can I ever forget the look of anxiety on the faces of my boys gathered round my Mobile Synagogue, all of whom had come to service despite the terrible news they had just heard. Never had the need for courage been greater, yet everyone was on edge, waiting for orders. My text on that occasion was brief and to the point: “If thou faintest in the day of trouble, thy strength is indeed small” [*Mishlei/Proverbs*, 24:10]. That text was meant not only to cheer the men up, but to cheer the padre as well!

June-July, 1942: The epic defence of El-Alamein is now world-famous, and how proud I was during those awe-inspiring days of the boys – their undaunted spirits and their determined will to hold out at all costs, come what may.

Rosh Hashona: The military situation during the weeks preceding Rosh Hashona made it extremely doubtful whether we would be able to celebrate the Holydays at all, for we were expecting an attack by ‘Jerry’. How totally different had been our position the previous year. Then, all was quiet on the Western Front. Now we could do nothing until Jerry made his move, and we hoped that it would come before Rosh Hashona. It did come before Rosh Hashona – and it failed miserably. With the comparative lull that ensued, I made arrangements to hold services and do whatever was possible to enable the men to celebrate the Sacred Festivals. Right in the heart of the forward area, in an old disused *bir* [pit?] which ages ago had probably been used for storage purposes, we established our Shul, our desert House of God, and prepared to usher in the New Year. What a Shul! A huge hole in the earth sufficient to hold hundreds of men. Most of the congregation brought their own seating accommodation – petrol tins – with them. At the top of the *bir* stood our improvised *Aron Kodesh*, covered with

mosquito netting which, being white, gave it the traditional *Yomim Noraim* setting. Our beautiful little *Sefer Torah* was taken out of the *Aron Kodesh* and placed on the *Almemar*, which was covered by a fine plush *parochet*. Thanks to the Board of Deputies, wine was at hand for Kiddush and every soldier had a copy of the Special Siddur for Servicemen – our Shul was complete.

Many a soldier back home in South Africa must cast his mind back, especially on festive occasions, to services such as these – our desert Synagogues might have been drab and bare, but they were filled with such warmth and feeling – sometimes absent from our more pretentious houses of worship.

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PRISONERS OF THE NAZIS

*

I S Marks, L Sandground

Editors' note: Shortly after the war, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies approached various Jewish former POWs, requesting them to provide a written account of their time in captivity. These testimonies are now housed in the SAJBD's SA Rochlin Archives, with the following two accounts having been selected, in edited form, for this special 70th anniversary issue.

Statement by No. 31449, Private L Sandground, Ex-Imperial Light Horse

I was taken prisoner at Tobruk. From there, I was taken to Benghazi, and then to Italy. I remained there until Italy's collapse, when, together with five or six thousand other South African prisoners, I was sent to Mühlburg in Germany. From there I was posted to Brück, where we worked in the coal mines.

Before we were sent to Brück, we were interrogated, and cards taking information about our nationality, religion, etc. were completed. When I said my religion was Jewish, the British sergeant who was filling in the card advised me to conceal this fact, since, in his words, "they would take it out on me." However, I refused to hide my religion.

One day the order came through to the camp commandant at Brück that all Jews were to be sent to Teschen. Seven of us were told to prepare for the move. On arrival at Teschen, we learned that the work we would have to do was loading coal. One of the Jews with us was a corporal and he protested that by virtue of his rank, he was protected from being ordered to work. He was taken away and I never saw him again. I cannot say whether he was returned to Brück. The Imperial POWs in Teschen had been informed that they were there because they had continued to fight in Crete after the general order of capitulation had been given by the British. The rations at Teschen were bad, and the work was very hard. We were expected to load 120 tons of coal per shift.

When I first arrived, the second-in-command entered our billets and attempted to persuade the non-Jews to ostracise us 'Israelites'. They took no notice, however, and relations between us were always of the very best. The camp Commandant called us into his office and explained that we had been sent to his camp because we were Jews, but that provided we complied with the regulations and made no trouble, we would be treated exactly the same as other British prisoners.

In December 1944, the order came through from higher authority that all Jews were to be separated from non-Jewish prisoners, and the camp Commandant informed us that we were being sent to Teklowicz. The non-Jews

were very distressed when they heard this, and showed their sympathy in many ways.

At Teklowicz, we found only Jews. There were 28 of us, including Palestinian, Moroccan, Czech and American Jews. We were put to work in a quarry. The stone was a kind of ironstone and we had to break it into small pieces with sledge hammers. It was then crushed by a steam-driven crusher, and sent off by rail. Our rations consisted of a few potatoes, a small piece of bread, some margarine and a teaspoon of jam per day. While we were there, a high official came to visit our camp and addressed us, saying that we had been sent to the 'Straflager' because we were Jews and it was the Jews who had plunged Europe into war.

The guards were elderly men and although pro-German, were definitely anti-Nazi, nor did they conceal their views. On the whole, they were quite decent to us, and for a few cigarettes we could obtain many favours from them. They were, however, definitely anti-Jewish.

When the coal supply ran out, the crusher stopped and since we could no longer work, our rations were cut still further. The guards, however, took us out into the fields and allowed us to collect thistles and nettles, with which to make soup.

We remained in Teklowicz until 8 May 1945, when the news of the German capitulation came through. The camp Commandant told us that POWs were to make for Leitmeritz, the nearest assembly point. Our guards simply disappeared and we walked out of the camp and made our way to Leitmeritz as best we could. At Leitmeritz was the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and when we arrived, we were told by the Germans that the inmates had broken loose, seized arms and were looting, raping and generally running amok. We discovered that this was quite correct and that such of the inmates as were able to, had seized arms and broken into the town. When we went to the camp itself, however, we found that most of the inmates were far too weak to do anything. They looked 'too, too pitiful for words'.

When the Russians entered Leitmeritz, we managed to get a lift on a military lorry as far as a nearby station, where we caught a train to Prague. From there, we were taken to Pilsen, and from there to England.

Some general observations:

- The great rank and file of the German people, so far as I could see, believed that the Jews were something inferior and diabolical, and had started the war. I recall meeting only one German who expressed disbelief regarding Nazi stories about the Jews.
- The non-Jewish prisoners were not at all responsive to Nazi propaganda and relations between them and the Jews were excellent.
- As late as the first months of 1945, many Germans still believed that Britain and America would cease their onslaught against the Reich and link up with the Germans against the Russians.
- The Germans were absolutely terrified of the Russians and I can recall that the day before the Russians entered Leitmaritz, I found two German women crying in fear. They believed all the atrocity stories they had heard about the Russians.

• One final observation: When I arrived in Britain, I travelled from Brighton to London and scrawled across the compartment I saw the words, "This is the Jews' war. Why fight it?"

Statement by No. 87708 Warrant Officer I S Marks, 1st SA Irish

I was captured at Sidi Rezegh and removed to a POW camp in Italy, where I remained until Italy's collapse. Then we were moved to Spittal in Austria en route to Germany. There were 29 South Africans. Col. Page placed me in charge. When I was taken prisoner I was a private but was promoted to sergeant by Col. Page. In September 1943, we left for Germany. I was in charge of about 1600 men at our new camp, about 20% of them South Africans.

We found our new camp in a terrible condition. It had been evacuated the previous day by 2000 Russian prisoners and had not been cleaned. I got in touch with the German Company Captain and then with the Stalag Captain. They were regular army officers, and with their assistance we had the place cleaned up and beds installed. They did not know they were dealing with a Jew but took me to be an Irishman. I have always taken a keen interest in sport and I obtained many recreational facilities for the men in the camp. We had football, hiking, swimming and boxing concerts over week-ends and two or three times a week we were allowed to attend cinema performances in the village cinema.

After I had the camp rebuilt and in ship-shape order, I resigned as camp leader and invited the men to elect a successor. As only about 20% of the men in the camp were South Africans - the rest were Imperials - I felt that the Imperials might want to elect their own camp

leader. However, I was unanimously re-elected.

I thought it in the best interests of all concerned to conceal my Jewishness. In Italy it was different. There, I actually ran services. For this purpose, I was allowed to use the Catholic chapel.

I estimate that there were more than 100 Jews in my camp. There was no antisemitism at all and relations between Jew and Gentile were excellent. The German authorities often approached me for names of Jewish personnel, but I insisted that there were no Jews in the camp. They brought with them lists of personnel who bore typically Jewish names but I stuck to my story. On one occasion, I had to sign an affidavit that there were no Jews in the camp. I was often handed anti-Jewish propaganda for distribution but invariably I burned it all. About 40 to 200 copies of 'Camp' were sent to me, and these I also burned.

The Germans never interfered with the internal administration of the camp. I used to play off one authority against another. I did all the staff work myself. If any of the guards gave trouble, I entered his name in a little book which I kept for that purpose and more often than not was able to have him removed. I even had *unter officers* moved for abusing or ill-treating prisoners. I used to visit all the working parties and satisfy myself that the men were in good health and receiving their due treatment.

There were two captains in the camp, but they asked me to carry on. One of them was a member of the Australian Medical Corp, Captain Mayerhofer, and when hostilities were over he promoted me to Warrant Officer 1 for my services in the camp. When I arrived in England, I was sent to Buckingham Palace and introduced there as the South African soldier who was promoted WO 1 by the Australian Army for his services to POWs.

The camp Commandant was not a Nazi. He had had 24 years service in the regular army and was very good to the prisoners. He never punished anyone while he was with us, that is, for a period of twelve months. He was replaced by a Nazi who was very strict but very just. This Commandant was with us until peace, when he made off for his life.

While in camp, I used to listen to the BBC news. A Czech operator at the cinema had a wireless set and on this we listened to London. I was then able to tell the men the latest news.

Through the operator, I met a woman who was then passing as a non-Aryan [sic] although she was actually a Jewess. The authorities wanted to send her to the Eastern front to work on fortifications, but the [first] camp Commandant helped me to evade the order. I contrived to protect her until peace came and finally I married her and brought her with me to South Africa.

ESCAPE TO SWITZERLAND

*

Hyman Jocum

Herbert German was born in Cape Town on 3 October 1918. In 1937, he was employed by S. Jocum & Co., an old established wholesale hardware firm. He enlisted in the Union Defence Force in June 1940, and served in the Abyssinian and later in the North African campaigns.

When German Field-Marshal Erwin Rommel captured the Libyan port of Tobruk on 21 June 1942, he took 32000 Allied troops "into the bag". This included 11000 South Africans. Herbert German was amongst the captured Springboks. He spent about three months in a makeshift Italian prison camp on the Tobruk water side. During this period, not only food but water was tightly rationed, for both POWs and their Italian captors. Three months after Tobruk's fall, Private German was in a group transported to the Italian port of Naples. The group was later transported to a camp about forty kilometres north of Rome. Fortunately, their captors kept them reasonably well-fed, with a breakfast of coffee and a luncheon and dinner of spaghetti and macaroni.

German spent about twelve months in this prison camp until, on 3 September 1943, their Italian warders informed them that Italy had surrendered to the Allies and advised them to make a break for it while there were no guards to detain them. Most of the POWs elected to wait until the advancing British and American armies eventually liberated them. Little did they know that they would soon be transported by rail to Germany, where they would wait at least another eighteen months for their liberation.

A group of about twenty prisoners decided to rather make a break for it, with the aim of walking several hundred miles to the Swiss border. As Italian troops in south-eastern France, which Mussolini had seized in June 1940, had been hastily replaced by German troops, some of the escapees expecting an avalanche of Germans to advance down the Ligurian coast of Italy. Hence, they made for the Apennine mountains, keeping close to the range's western slopes. There, they sought shelter in scattered farm houses and gratefully accepted the fruit or vegetables that peasant

farmers provided for them.

It was fortunate that Private German chose to make his escape along the western slopes of Apennines in his bid to reach the Swiss border, since the warm winds from the Adriatic Sea keep the Alps in the Italian lake district relatively snow-free in autumn than is the case regarding the rest of Switzerland. As a healthy 25 year-old, he was able to scale the Alps, which in the late autumn of 1943 were not as heavily snow covered. Once he had reached the Swiss side, he was apprehended by Swiss mountain police and whisked away to a hill-top sanatorium at Degersheim in the canton of St. Gallen. The town borders the shores of Lake Constance, which shares a border with Germany. Early in the 20th Century, consumptives were treated at hilltop hospitals, often located above cloud level, where they were assured of the maximum hours of sunshine. The later discovery of antibiotics had made most of these hospitals redundant, but a number of them continued to exist with the minimum of patients and a skeleton staff. As the number of escapees from the POW camps in Italy was never very large, the Swiss had little difficulty in accommodating them in the empty wards of sanatoria which were still reasonably well-staffed.

In preparing this article, I have consulted a batch of letters written by Pte German to his sister, Mrs Mary Abramson of Cape Town, from a camp in d'Evade's, Degersheim. His last letter is dated 20 December 1944, and had taken quite a while to reach its destination. Over four years have passed since Herbert left his job to join the army. He writes, "Although these last two years have been by far the worst in my army career, I don't for one moment regret having volunteered for what I've gone through. Many a time, I felt down in the dumps and have had my blue, solitary moments, but that is all part of the soldier's lot, which is rough and smooth." Herbert describes the Christmas festivities: "In this country, it is a very religious celebration. Everything is at a standstill from 8 p.m., Friday, and all day Saturday. We are having a special Christmas breakfast, followed by a presentation of a Red Cross parcel to each of us. If they are the same as what we received elsewhere last year, they're well worth looking forward to." There was also to be a party and concert given by the villagers, a special dinner and sufficient

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snow allowing, tobogganing and skiing races.

In an earlier letter, Pte German tells of his first experience of seeing "genuine, lilywhite fluffy snow floating down to earth from high above." The pictures he had seen of snow-capped mountains and houses, he comments, were nothing like the real thing: "As I write, the flakes are sailing downward steadily, enwrapping the trees and house-tops and laying a spotlessly white, smooth carpet over the streets and countryside. . . . I actually got a kick out of making my first snowball! It was really sensational scooping up a handful of feather-weight moist flakes, crushing them between your hands until you have got a solid ball of ivory ice, which appears to have doubled its weight in spite of its decreasing in size . . . I was enthralled with this unbelievably spectacular master-piece of Mother Nature."

German worked first in a chocolate factory and was now doing agricultural work. He writes, "Negotiations are going on with the trade board here to permit my friends and myself to return and carry on working in the chocolate factory. Naturally, you can understand why I'm so keen to get that position back. Apart from having a fill of chocolates, it was a very much lighter and cleaner job, indoors almost all the time, the best I've had up to

date in this country."

In the latter part of 1944, to the delight of most of the Swiss, the British and American armies liberated southern France along the western Swiss border. As the Allied armies marched across Germany and Austria, few of the residents of the home could foresee that it would take another four and a half months before Germany was finally defeated. Former POWs, though no longer prisoners, had to remain on Swiss soil until the war's end.

From Switzerland, German travelled by rail to England in mid-May 1945 and from there returned to South Africa. In 1947 he married Rose Politsky at the Woodstock Shul and opened a general dealer's store in Somerset West, Western Cape.

Herbert German's younger brothers, Joseph and Jack, also served in the Union Defence Force during the war. Joseph served in the Western Desert in 1941-1942. He was badly injured in the neck and invalided back home to Cape Town, where he passed away fifty years later.

Jack, Herbert's youngest brother, served from 1940 until 1945 and was awarded the African Service Medal.

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A JEWISH CHAPLAIN IN POST-LIBERATION BELSEN

*

Isaac Richards

With the entry of the Allied forces into Germany, the work of the Jewish Chaplain took on quite a different character. No longer was he merely a spiritual guide and adviser. His primary task was no longer the arranging of services and facilities for the observance of the Festivals. He was suddenly called upon to be the spokesman of the Jews liberated from the death camps; he was called upon to become a welfare worker for tens of thousands of people stricken in body and in mind. With inadequate facilities and practically no staff, he endeavoured to be a clearing house for information and was called upon to compile lists of the survivors.

It must be remembered that it was many months before any Jewish relief workers were able to enter Germany, and that the British and American Jewish chaplains were the only official Jews in the whole of the country.

I was closely associated with the Belsen Camp and its later offshoots. In his pamphlet 'Nowhere to lay their heads', Victor Gollancz mentions the Stateless Camp which the British authorities endeavoured to set up at Lingen near the German-Dutch border. I was very closely associated with this experiment, the history of which shows clearly the lack of foresight in planning to face the problems of the pitiful remnants of European Jewry who might have been expected to survive Hitler's death camps.

I arrived at Belsen very shortly after its liberation; the only chaplain there was a friend and fellow student of mine, Chaplain Leslie Hardman. The only other [Jewish] chaplain in Germany at that time was senior Chaplain Harry Levy, whom many South Africans will remember from North African days. Both had sacrificed themselves unstintingly and thrown aside all military duties to devote themselves exclusively to bringing help and succour to the stricken survivors.

Three weeks later, when I left Belsen, we were still burying two hundred daily. It

wounded me deeply later on to be asked by fellow officer non-Jews, "Were the Belsen atrocity stories really true?" We who were there can never shut out the picture of horror which met our eyes when we entered Belsen, and the knowledge of what inhuman cruelty had been inflicted on innocent people.



Dr Fritz Klein, camp doctor at Belsen, being interviewed by his captors alongside a mass grave. Klein was executed for his part in the mass murders in the camp and elsewhere on 13 December 1945.

The liberation of Belsen, while it meant the cessation of the survivors' physical torture, did not mean the end of their mental torture, nor the end of the period of hardships and deprivation which still goes on. The first step taken by the military authorities was to transfer the survivors from Belsen to the nearby Panzer barracks at Bergen. This transfer was carried out smoothly, the very sick being transferred to hastily improvised hospitals. There was, unfortunately, no room in the hospital for those not severely ill.

The efforts made by the Red Cross, Quakers and other voluntary organisations are beyond praise, but unfortunately, there was a shortage of personnel and equipment. It is also a sad reflection on the preparations made by voluntary Jewish organisations that there was only one Jewish relief team in Europe at the time. They were working in Rotterdam and it was some months before they were able to obtain permission to move up into Germany.

Rev. Isaac Richards of the United Jewish Reform Congregation of Johannesburg served as a Chaplain in the Union Defence Force and after the war spent three weeks assisting survivors in the newly liberated Belsen death camp. The following account of his work on behalf of survivors first appeared in the September 1947 issue of The Judean, organ of the SA Jewish Ex-Service League.

No sooner had the Belsen horror camp been liquidated and burnt to the ground than the ancient Jewish question rears its head: 'Wohih' – what was to happen to the Jewish survivors? Bergen-Belsen contained a most cosmopolitan population. There were people of every European race, and even a few Asiatics.

Repatriation for the people of Western Europe began almost immediately. The great problem was the Eastern Europeans. It was planned to set up transit camps for the various nationalities, where they would stay pending their repatriation. It was at this stage that the Jewish problem really came to the forefront. The Jewish survivors, the great majority of whom were from Poland, were determined on two things: They would never return to Poland, nor would they go to a Polish transit camp where they would fall under the jurisdiction of the Polish authorities. They demanded a Jewish camp, which would be but a stage further on their journey to freedom in our ancient Homeland.

The military authorities set their face resolutely against the idea of a Jewish camp. The British authorities have all along opposed the idea of such a camp, and Bergen-Belsen only became a Jewish camp some five or six months ago, when many of the Poles were repatriated and the remainder transferred to other camps. In those early days an impasse was reached. The authorities claimed that the Jews were Polish nationals and that no distinction could be made on grounds of religion. The Jews remained adamant. They wished to be treated as an independent group, as Jews, and refused to have their fate decided by the Polish authorities, who had played no small part in the terrible sufferings they had undergone during the war years.

An ultimatum was presented to us. Either the Jews go with the Poles or they be declared 'Stateless'. In the event of their choosing the latter, they would be transferred to the Stateless Camp at Lingen. As there were very few people classified as Stateless, it was felt by the Jewish Committee that the result of this transfer would be that at Lingen, we would have a camp almost 100% Jewish. This would have many advantages - political, spiritual and moral.

The matter was put before the people, and hastily called mass meetings were held in various parts of the camp. The unanimous decision was that the risk of being declared Stateless was preferable to the prospect of being put under Polish domination and perhaps forced to return to Poland, the graveyard of so many of their nearest and dearest. As one of the people put it, "Poland is a country where every stone cries out with the blood of the martyred Jew". It was the unenviable task of Chaplain Hardman and myself to

communicate the feelings of the people to the military government. The news we imparted was received with considerable annoyance and we personally were accused of inciting and encouraging the Jewish people in their attitude. There was no delay, no opportunity for us to investigate conditions at Lingen. That same evening it was announced that some 1500 people would be transferred next morning. As the first contingent, certain barrack blocks were chosen to be the first to go. The following morning the convoy arrived and people were packed into army trucks – 25 per truck – in addition to which they had to squeeze in their pitiful bundles of personal belongings. Those of us who have travelled long distances in the back of army trucks know how uncomfortable and nerve-racking such a journey can be. Added to this was the fact that the roads were full of bomb craters. Detours had to be made where bridges had been blown, and the road often was nothing but a field path. These people were all physically sick and this journey, which lasted for some ten hours, was a tremendous strain on their already exhausted physiques.

The severest blow, however, came when we arrived at Lingen to find not an empty camp, prepared for our arrival, but an already overcrowded camp containing thousands of Russians and Poles. Allotted to the new arrivals was a group of wooden barracks in dilapidated condition with gaps in the walls and ceilings, no beds, blankets, or lights. It was by now quite dark and UNNRA endeavoured to share out food, which merely added to the pandemonium and confusion of darkness. The first night at Lingen was a form of Tisha b'Av; the people sat on their bundles all night in the darkness and wept.

Senior Chaplain Levy had asked me – quite unofficially – to accompany the convoy, and with me went a Polish Jewish chaplain who had been a POW and young Jewish woman who was a member of a Quaker relief team. We were shocked at the condition at Lingen and an immediate protest was sent to HQ. No further transports were sent from Belsen, nor could they possibly have been accommodated. The whole plan seemed to be a reprisal for the recalcitrant attitude of the Jews in claiming their right to be treated as a separate national group. We lost no time in obtaining beds, blankets, adequate food arrangements and medical and sanitary services. Repeated protests to HQ about the conditions in the camp resulted, after a five week stay, in another exodus. This time we were transferred to a slightly better camp, at Diepholz.

The people were, however, gravely concerned at the fact that they had been cut off from the main group at Belsen, who they had been told would be joining them. As there was now no prospect of such a reunion,

representations were made and after a five or six weeks stay at Diepholz, they were transferred back to Bergen-Belsen. The majority of these unfortunate people, together with the thousands of Jewish displaced persons, are to this day living in displaced persons camps, awaiting the realisation of their hopes to be able to go freely to Eretz Israel.

With the arrival of the first Jewish relief team at Bergen-Belsen, I was ordered back to military duties. There were, however, numerous occasions when my interventions with the military authorities were able to obtain some alleviation of the hardships which both German Jews and Jewish displaced persons were undergoing.

I left Germany in November last. It is not difficult to understand the feelings of disillusion and even desperation in the hearts of our brothers and sisters still living in camps. Our hopes were so high; we were so confident that Britain and the world would keep their promises and open wide the gates of Palestine. Two years later, the majority of those people whom I found in Belsen are still there. Throughout all their trials and tribulations they have not lost hope. Their spirit burns brightly. Such a spirit, such a resolution cannot be doomed to failure. When I took my farewell of them, their last words were *'L'hitraot B'eretz Yisrael'*.



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THE SAJBD AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH WAR EFFORT

*

David Saks

When the South African Jewish Board of Deputies took a decision in the middle of 1941 to launch a monthly bulletin – to be called *Jewish Affairs* – the two issues of dominant concern to local Jewry were the continued high levels of virulent antisemitism in South Africa and the country's involvement in World War II. Given the profoundly unsettled nature of the times, it was felt that annual conferences and occasional report-back meetings were no longer sufficient to keep the Jewish community abreast of what was happening and that a more regular channel of communication needed to be established.



The early issues of *Jewish Affairs* were dominated by war news of Jewish concern, including on local recruiting campaigns, fundraising efforts, casualty lists, military awards and, more broadly, the impact of the war on world Jewry, including ever worsening reports on what had befallen Jews in areas

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under Nazi occupation.

On 6 September 1939, following the narrow defeat in Parliament of the pro-neutrality faction headed by Prime Minister J B M Hertzog, South Africa declared war on Germany. The next day, SAJBD Chairman Cecil Lyons wrote to the newly appointed Prime Minister, General the Rt. Hon. J.C. Smuts, pledging the full support of the Jewish community:

Dear General Smuts,

On the occasion of your acceptance of the heavy responsibility of the Government in this hour of crisis, we desire respectfully to reaffirm the loyalty of the Jewish citizens of the Union for their country and their readiness to serve it with faithfulness and devotion.

We desire, too, to convey to you personally the prayer which we know is in the hearts of all the Jewish citizens of this country, that your work on behalf of the South African people in these days of difficulty and trial will be blessed by the Almighty.

This letter went beyond standard polite assurances of Jewish loyalty from the community's representative spokesperson. Even more than for those of British origin, this was a conflict whose waging and outcome concerned Jews in the most painful and immediate way. At the commencement of the war, few if any can have anticipated how total would be the catastrophe that would befall European Jewry. That being said, there were already sufficient indications that the outcome of the struggle would be of crucial importance to the Jewish world, and that consequently, there was an especially pressing need for Jews to actively support the Allied cause. In the wartime debates at SAJBD conferences, speaker after speaker stressed that the community had to go beyond merely "doing its bit", but must rather exceed what other groups were contributing. This was not in order to counter perennial antisemitic slurs that Jews were 'shirking' (which had been a major motivating factor for Jewish participation during the previous World War), but rather because this was a conflict that directly involved Jews over and above the rest of South Africa. It should always be

borne in mind that the great majority of South African Jews were first or second-generation East European immigrants or recently arrived refugees from Germany, and hence in most cases had relatives or friends still trapped in Nazi-occupied Europe. A second powerful motivating factor was the threat posed by local antisemitic movements, who quite openly identified with the aims and ideologies of Nazism.

Notwithstanding the view that Jews should support the war effort because of the intrinsic nature of the conflict rather than to appease those who accused them of not pulling their weight, the Board nevertheless took a decision to publish a booklet, entitled *They Answered the Call*, to publicise how the Jewish community was contributing.¹ Two editions were eventually brought out and widely distributed around the country. The Board continued to compile statistics and other war service-related information regarding Jewish participants. At its 1945 national congress, it was reported that the number of South African Jewish men and women who had served in the SA and Allied forces as of 20 February 1945 was just under 10 000 (9 862), out of 210 000 white South Africans who served. This figure is proportionate (but, somewhat surprisingly, no more than that) to the Jewish percentage of the white population at the time (4.5%). Total casualties at that date were 1129, made up of 357 dead, 309 wounded, 28 'missing' and 609 Prisoners of War. The number of decorations and awards was 170, the great majority of them being for bravery.



At the Board's 1940 congress, resolutions dealing with the war and its problems were adopted. Among them the following stood first:

At this critical hour when Nazism is destroying the liberties of nations and individuals, and challenging the fundamental ideals of civilisation, this Congress of South African Jewry solemnly affirms the obligation of every citizen resident in the Union to rally to the defence of the country, and further pledges that the Jewish community will do all in its power to assist the Union and its allies in their fight for victory.

The SAJBD's own wartime activities took many forms. Domestically, it included proactively encouraging and facilitating Jewish recruitment into the Union Defence Force, providing for the needs – spiritual, material and cultural – of Jewish members of the Forces and fundraising for war-related causes. To implement these goals, three special War Committees were established, namely the War Service Council, the War Emergency Council and the Soldiers Assistance Committee. The first was "charged with....invigorating the community's direct contribution to national service", the second had the task of "assisting the Jewish chaplains in their ministrations" and the last was "to attend to the needs of serving and discharged soldiers" whose cases were not sufficiently dealt with within the ambit of the Governor General's National War Fund and other national organisations.²

Immediately after its 1940 national congress, the War Service Council embarked on an intensive campaign to stimulate the war effort. Numerous community meetings were held where addresses were delivered by speakers on behalf of the Board in support of the Prime Minister's recruiting appeal. For that year's High Holidays, Jewish ministers were asked to deliver sermons on the subject of national service, and this request was thereafter issued each year thereafter for the principal Jewish holidays. Through the Special Committee of Jewish Recruiting, twenty prominent Jewish community members were co-opted to canvas Jewish employers with a view to their signing on to an undertaking, on the lines of that drafted by the Johannesburg Chamber of Commerce, pledging to give allowances to employees (whether Jewish or not) who volunteered to serve. It was accepted as a major obligation of the SA Jewish War Appeal to assist soldiers and their dependants in cases of hardship arising from war service. Monies set aside for this purpose were administered by the Board's Soldiers Assistance Committee, which worked in close collaboration with the Governor General's National War Fund and the Demobilisation Committee. Cecil Lyons

represented the Board on the National Council of the Governor-General's National War Fund, and was in due course appointed a member of the National Executive of the Fund and Chairman of its Fund Raising Committee.

Following the implementation in mid-1944 of a new recruiting drive for reinforcement for the 6th SA Armoured serving in Italy, the War Service Council launched an intensive campaign within the Jewish community. Jewish officers addressed numerous meetings of Jewish organisations, with particular attention paid to university students, a general letter of appeal was sent to all Jewish householders and the Jewish press were supplied with publicity material. In March 1942 Captain H. Serebro, a former Mayor of Volksrust who had returned from service in North Africa, was appointed itinerant recruiting officer for work in the Jewish community. He was formally commended for the "energy and tact" with which he had carried out his duties, in collaboration with the War Service Council. Opportunities were also created for encouraging the enlistment of Jewish women in the Women's Services, and meeting to this end were held with representatives of Jewish women's organisations. For those debarred by physical disability or other causes from joining the full-time forces, steps were taken to bring the claims of the National Volunteer Brigade (Civic Guards, the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance Brigade) to their notice.

The Board's War Emergency Committee's role was to deal with such questions as the welfare of Jewish members of the forces and the appointment of Chaplains. By the end of 1944, there were six full-time Jewish chaplains to the forces "up north" and in the Union there were five full-time and thirteen part-time chaplains. When the 6th SA Armoured Division went to Italy, the Board provided a mobile synagogue for the use of its Chaplains. At the instance of the Board, the Union of Jewish Women defrayed the cost of the religious appurtenances and the furnishings for the new synagogue at Voortrekkerhoogte. The Board itself was instrumental in securing furnishings for the non-denominational Chapel

of Zonderwater and further defrayed the cost of furnishing the Jewish Chaplains' quarters at Voortrekkerhoogte. Through the Jewish chaplains in Egypt, the Board facilitated visits by Jewish and non-Jewish members of the forces to Palestine, and donations were made to the Jewish Soldiers Welfare Committees there. From time to time, at the request of its counterparts in the UK, the Board assisted Jewish members of the Imperial forces stationed in East and West Africa.

In addition to its work of seconding the efforts of Jewish Chaplains, the War Emergency Council provided in various ways for the welfare of the Jewish soldiers, both locally and in the operational areas. Especially welcome, no doubt, was the provision of reading matter. Large quantities of books and periodicals (including *Jewish Affairs*) and pamphlets dealing with Jewish subjects were purchased and regularly despatched. In all, exclusive of pamphlets and journals, well over 18000 books of Jewish interest were sent to Jewish members of the forces. Gifts were distributed for the major festivals and other suitable occasions, including to patients of the military hospitals and convalescent houses. The War Emergency Council further involved itself in the Prisoners of War Relatives Association, making annual donations towards the expense of its monthly magazine.

In its reports to congress, the Board singled out for commendation the Soldiers' Canteen conducted by the Jewish Ex-Service League at the Jewish Guild, Johannesburg, the billeting service of the Sisterhood of the Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation, the Durban Jewish Club's Soldiers' Canteen and the Services Club of the East London Jewish community. In Cape Town, the Board's Cape Committee funded the canteen for visiting troops conducted by the Union of Jewish Women at the Zionist Hall.

The Board further felt it necessary "to give a lead to the Jewish Community with a view to the avoidance of 'ostentatious festivities' and the practice of austerity in wartime". To this end, conferences were held with representatives of various congregations, and leaflets on the subject were issued. A conference convened in March 1942 unanimously adopted a resolution directed at "eschewing the usual festivities on the occasion of wedding and barmitzvahs". Among minor war problems, the Board was called upon to assist when the community was found unprepared for the shortage of matzoth over the Pesach of 1944.

Further afield, the focus was on helping to relieve the plight of Jewish victims of the war. Anticipating that Jewish sufferings in Europe was likely to be on an "unprecedented scale", the Board took a decision early on to organise a War Victims' Fund similar to that established during the previous global conflict.



A sum sent by the Board became the nucleus of a fund of £30 000, to which other Jewish bodies abroad also contributed, and which made possible a relief programme for Polish refugees in the Vilna area to be carried out by the US Joint Distribution Committee.

Of particular note is the assistance provided by the Board to the more than 1500 Jewish detainees on Mauritius, all refugees from Nazism who had been interned on the island after being denied permission by the British authorities to settle in Palestine. This included providing *siddurim*, reading material, essential medicines and other provisions. After the war, the Board's connection with Mauritius continued through ensuring the upkeep of the St Martin's Jewish Cemetery, which was extensively restored at its behest in the 1990s. Since then, this work has been taken over by the African Jewish Congress, whose head offices are located within the administrative structure of the SAJBD. Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft combines his work of Spiritual Leader to the South African Country Communities within the SAJBD's structures with that of CEO of the AJC. In 2014, a memorial centre and exhibition recording the story of the detainees was opened.



St Martin's Jewish Cemetery, Mauritius

The SA Jewish War Appeal's general policy was to act autonomously, but wherever collaboration with other world relief bodies was felt to be in the best interests of the war victims, it co-operated with such international Jewish relief bodies as the Joint Distribution Committee, the Jewish Agency and the World Jewish Congress. A monthly remittance was sent to Switzerland exclusively for the benefit of Jewish refugee children, and through the SAJWA, arrangements were made for blocked account facilities that enabled people in South Africa to make small personal remittances to their dependants in that country. Further substantial sums were collected for Ort-Oze in Switzerland, a body "dedicated to promote retraining and health of central and eastern Europe's Jews". As soon as the advance of the Allied forces made North Africa accessible, funds were sent to Algeria, Tripoli, Benghazi

and Casablanca. Monthly remittances were sent to Spain and Portugal to assist the Joint Distribution Committee in its relief activities, and a substantial sum was sent to Stockholm to assist the World Jewish Congress in sending small food parcels to prisoners in Bergen-Belsen, Birkenau and other concentration camps. Further funds were sent to assist in the transportation and maintenance of refugees, chiefly children, in Teheran, for refugees from Hungary, Bulgaria and Rumania and for the relief of Jews in Greece. As soon as contact with Poland became possible, the SAJWA purchased a large quantity of clothing and food from lend-lease supplies in the Middle East, and some 56 tons of goods were sent to Polish Jewry in the name of South African Jewry.



Clothing Depot SA Jewish Appeal, Johannesburg

As more was learnt about Nazi atrocities, the Executive Council appointed a Special Committee on the Tragedy of European Jewry (on which the SA Zionist Federation and the ecclesiastical authorities were represented), the main object of which was to bring home to the public the significance of the news in order to arouse "strong public indignation in the hope of exercising a restraining influence on the Nazi leaders".³ Reliable information regarding "the diabolical policy of mass extermination



Day of Mourning, Cape Town City Hall, 29 December 1942.

Rabbi Israel Abrahams reads the opening prayer.

of the Jews in Europe” began reaching South Africa in the latter part of 1942. A Day of Mourning, the first of several, was held on 29 December that year, for which Jewish business premises closed for part of the day, and mass meetings were addressed by Jewish and Christian leaders throughout the country.



Day of Mourning, Johannesburg City Hall, 29 December 1942.

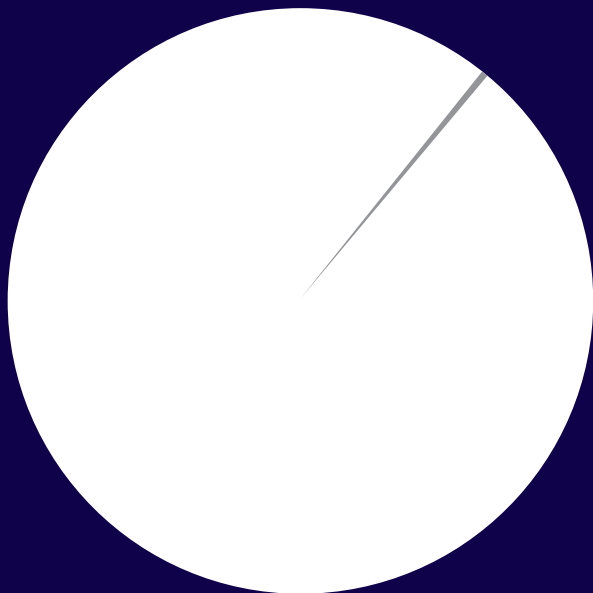
Among other steps taken in attracting the attention of the public was the wide distribution amongst Members of Parliament, clergymen and others of an issue of *Jewish Affairs* containing material relating to the tragedy of European Jewry. In February and again in September 1943, joint deputations of the Board and the SA Zionist Federation met with Prime Minister

Smuts, urging him to take “every possible measure which could offer rescue, relief and asylum to the victims of the Nazis”. Smuts was reportedly, “sympathetic but could not offer much hope of a successful action”.

Ultimately, despite the endeavours of the Jewish communities and the Allied nations, the Board’s report to congress in 1945 conceded sombrely that it had “not been found possible to take any practical steps to save more than a mere handful of the victims of the Nazis, who as they saw their doom approach, intensified their bloody work”.⁴ For the time being, the immediate glow of victory helped to lessen the full impact of what had happened within the community. Only in succeeding years, as the enormity of the catastrophe sunk in, would it come to dominate how South African Jews looked back on the war, to the point when the victory over the Nazis regime and the part they had played in it would hardly be remembered at all.

NOTES

- 1 A 180-page book, entitled *South African Jews in World War Two*, was brought out by the Board in 1950.
- 2 SAJBD Reports to Congress, 1942, S A Rochlin Archives.
- 3 SAJBD Reports to Congress, 1945, S A Rochlin Archives.
- 4 Ibid.



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TWO GREAT JEWISH WAR WORKERS: CECIL LYONS AND JACK A. COHEN

*

Naomi Musiker

On 4 September 1939, after a historic and heated debate, the South African parliament agreed, by a slim majority, to enter World War II on the side of Britain and her allies. This was despite the objections of the National Party, which favored a policy of neutrality. It is clear that events of the late 1930s were already building up towards war. The period was one of great anxiety for the Jewish community due to the spread of rampant antisemitism, the activities of pro-Nazi sympathizers in the form of the various 'Shirt' movements and anti-Jewish sentiments expressed by the National Party, particularly certain statements made by its leader, Dr D F Malan. In October 1937, the first edition of the Nationalist daily newspaper *Die Transvaler* appeared under the editorship of Dr H F Verwoerd, a strong proponent of the limitation of Jewish immigration and economic discrimination against Jews. In addition, the passing of the Immigration Amendment Act in 1936 and the Aliens Act in February 1937 effectively limited the immigration of Jews into South Africa, particularly those wishing to escape Nazi persecution in Germany and Eastern Europe.

It was fortunate that already in the period 1935-1937, the SA Jewish Board of Deputies had recognized the approaching danger and taken steps to strengthen its position. In the Report to the Executive Council, submitted to the 12th Congress at Bloemfontein, May 1937, many of these reforms are outlined. The Publicity Department (later the Public Relations Committee) was created under Dr H. Sonnabend to advance a policy of 'public enlightenment' through the issuing of various pamphlets on Jewish issues, both to the press and private individuals and foster the formation of a Society of Jews and Christians. The 'Press Digest' was created, consisting of weekly summaries

of events of Jewish significance, particularly those relating to antisemitism.

The Board also underwent administrative changes through the recruitment of new personnel, including the appointment of Gus Saron as General Secretary and Jack Rich as Secretary. The latter was personally recruited by Cecil Lyons during a London visit. Saron also served as Honorary Secretary of the Publicity Department. Other Committees created were the Finance, Law and General Purposes committee. The Executive Council was enlarged to include more individuals of public standing. A most important development was the increase in funding through the drawing up of a budget, to which each provincial committee was required to contribute. This resulted in the more effective functioning of the Board.

All these reforms were created under the chairmanship of Cecil Lyons, who thus placed the Board in a favorable position to meet the demands of the war situation which arose at the end of the decade.



Cecil Lyons, 1897-1945

Naomi Musiker, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and long-serving member of its Editorial Board, has contributed numerous biographical articles for the Dictionary of SA Biography and the Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa and, as an indexer, has worked for some of South Africa's leading publishers and indexed many important reference works. She has held the position of archivist at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies since 1992.

Cecil Lyons, born in Johannesburg in 1897, was a highly respected Jewish communal leader. From an early age, he made his mark in communal life, first in Durban, where he lived from 1919 to 1934, and thereafter in Johannesburg, where he attained the position of Managing Director of Lever Brothers (SA) Limited. In Durban, he helped found the Durban Jewish Club, of which he was successively Chairman and President. He also took the lead in founding the Council of Natal Jewry, of which he became President. Other positions he held included the chairmanships of the Transvaal Chamber of Industries, the SA Soap and Candle Manufacturers' Association and the SA Oil Expressers' Association.

When he came to Johannesburg in 1934, Lyons was elected to the Executive Council of the SAJBD. From 1936 to 1940, he served as Chairman of the Board and as President from 1942 to 1943. He was also on the National Executive of the SA Jewish War Appeal, established in 1942, and was associated with the work of the SA Zionist Federation.

Lyons was called upon by the South African government to serve on various advisory committees concerned with adapting the country's industry to war-time conditions during the 1939-1945 period. He remained a member of the Executive Council and participated in the Finance and Public Relations Committees, but his public duties led to frequent absences from meetings. He was unable to continue holding chief office, but actively assisted with the work of the Board and his counsel was always available.

In 1939, a public body for fund-raising purposes known as the South African Mayors' National Fund was created. This later became the Governor-General's National War Fund (hereafter NWF), consisting of 34 members under the control of the Governor-General, Sir Patrick Duncan. It was established to transmit funds to Britain for agricultural purposes and for the purchase of war supplies. It also supported South African soldiers serving in the war and their dependents who might suffer as a result. The National Committee of the Fund included the mayors of various cities, civic dignitaries of Johannesburg and one representative each of the Jewish Board of Deputies and the National Council of Women. The Johannesburg branch was established at London House, Loveday Street, and was under the chairmanship of the Mayor, with the Deputy Mayor as one of the Vice Chairmen.

The second vice chairman of the Johannesburg branch of the Fund was Jack Andrew Cohen, a prominent member of the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Cohen was born in 1877 in Newcastle-on-Tyne and educated in England. He arrived in South Africa in 1899 and from 1902 was in charge of the firm

of Freeman Cohen. He was connected with various mining companies and was also at one time chairman and joint managing director of the *Rand Daily Mail*, Ltd. He was known for his philanthropy and communal service, which included the chairmanship of a branch of the Johannesburg Jewish Working Men's Club and support for the Johannesburg Jewish Congregation. Throughout his tenure as vice chairman of the NWF, Cohen was chairman of various fund raising efforts and was particularly prominent in upholding the welfare of soldiers through the Gifts and Comforts Fund. He assisted in organizing several race meetings on behalf of war funds, chaired the Victory Fair held at the Zoo Lake in 1944 and also the National Birthday Gift to General Smuts, raised on behalf of the NWF. In the course of the war, he gave several thousand pounds from his private purse to war appeals.

In July 1940, SAJBD President Maurice Franks suggested that Cecil Lyons substitute for him as member of the National Committee of the NWF. Lyons became chairman of the fund-raising section of that body. In June 1941, he wrote to the chairman of the Executive Council of the Board, Gerald Lazarus, requesting the right to discuss at an Executive Meeting a special drive to raise £150 000 in stop orders from the Jewish community in aid of the NWF. An angry response was received from Bernard Alexander, a member of the Executive Council. He stated that he fully supported the aims of the NWF but argued that Jews should not be called upon to have an obligation different from and more imperative than that which rested upon every other citizen. 'The conclusion will be drawn that the Jew finds it necessary to parade his collective goodwill to stave off charges of the inadequate participation of Jews in the collective effort; whilst the man in the street...will not only be unimpressed by £100 000 or even £200 000 raised by the Jewish community of South Africa as a collective whole, but will take it to be the measure of what the 100 000 Jews have done for the Fund, and will regard it as miserably inadequate'.

Alexander was probably incensed by the persistent antisemitic rumors and insinuations which persisted during the war years regarding Jewish participation. An example of this was a rumor circulating among the troops stationed at Howick that the Governor General's fund was controlled by Jews and that Fund workers received considerable remuneration. This rumor was denounced as a downright lie when brought to Lyons' attention by the Secretary of the Natal Council. Lyons commented further that he had quite recently delivered an address to the Rotary Club in Pietermaritzburg, which had been favorably received and would counteract any rumors in that area.

No exact figures of Jewish contributions

to the Fund exist except for the year 1940, when lists of contributors and amounts of their donations were published regularly in the *Rand Daily Mail*. From these lists it is apparent that many prominent individuals, firms, institutions and organisations gave generously. A Memorandum regarding the Mayor's Fund was prepared on 30 May 1940. This concluded from extracted figures that Jews contributed approximately 25% of gross contributions in Johannesburg.

Cecil Lyons was determined to reach the Ten Million Target and it was largely due to his energy and resource that the Fund was in

sight of it just before his death at the early age of 48 on 14 April 1945. The National Executive Committee of the NWF paid tribute to him, and also to Jack Andrew Cohen, who died in August 1944, in its Fifth Annual Report (1944-45).

Lyons' funeral at Johannesburg's West Park Cemetery was one of the largest Jewish funerals ever up, until then, and was attended by representatives of all sections, Jewish and non-Jewish. In 1948, the SAJBD established the Cecil Lyons Memorial Fund in commemoration of his outstanding services, both to South African Jewry and to the general society.

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WWII AND SA JEWRY AS REFLECTED BY ARTEFACTS IN THE SAJBD CAPE COUNCIL COLLECTION

*

Gwynne Schrire

The SAJBD Cape Council is the proud possessor of an interesting collection of religious and historic artefacts, acquired as trustees of the former Jewish Museum and now on display at its offices. Among them are objects that have been donated by ex-servicemen and their families. This article looks at Jewish participation in World War II as seen through these artefacts.

It was touch and go whether South Africa would enter the war on the side of the Allies or remain neutral. General Smuts was in a fusion government with JBM Hertzog, many of whose supporters had strong pro-German and anti-British feelings. Smuts approached Woolfie Harris, Chairman of the Cape Board (1937 -1942), to ask for the Board's help in swaying certain border-line Members of Parliament. Harris invoked the assistance of his nephew by marriage, Dr Louis Mirvish, the first gastro-enterologist in the country (and one of the founders of the Jewish Museum) to assist him in visiting MPs, some of whom had been Dr Mirvish's patients. It was by a majority of 13 votes that South Africa entered the war.¹

The SAJBD "pledged that the Jewish Community would do all in its power to assist the Union and its Allies in their fight for victory".² The Cape Council held recruiting drives, including in the City Hall, and met with the Cape Town War Emergency Committee to take steps to integrate the community's effort with the recruiting drive.³ To prevent allegations that Jews were not 'doing their bit', the Board began to collect statistics and information. In December 1942, it published *The Jewish Contribution: Facts and Figures about the War Effort of the Jewish People* showing that Jewish enlistment constituted 9% of the total Jewish population of South Africa, well above the average. After the war, in 1950, the Board published *South African Jews in World War II*, which contains details of the nearly ten thousand South African Jews

who enlisted in the Union Defence Force.⁴

At Pinelands No. 2 Cemetery there is a war memorial, where each year after the Yom Hashoah ceremony members of the armed forces lay wreaths to honour the Cape Town Jews who laid down their lives. Oranjia, the Cape Jewish Orphanage, has an illuminated Roll of Honour listing forty of their "boys and girls who had) honoured their Home and themselves in responding to their Country's call." Six of them were killed, including two who had arrived among those rescued from the Ukraine by Isaac Ochberg.⁵

The Cape Committee co-ordinated a Soldiers' Assistance Committee which saw to the cultural and religious needs of the Jewish soldiers and provided gift parcels to them for Passover and the High Holy Days. Examples of religious books provided to the troops are among the artefacts on display. Among the Cape's collection is an olive-wood covered prayer book presented in 1943 by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies to the Jewish servicemen in the Middle East as Christmas gifts (!) and containing *Readings from the Holy Scripture* by Chief Rabbi Hertz for the Jewish Members of His Majesty's Forces. There is also a *Haggadah of Passover for Members of the Armed Forces* presented by the Jewish Welfare Board, New York (1943).

SA Gifts and Comforts, headed by General Jan Smuts' wife, Issie, provided gifts to soldiers. Some of the funds raised by the Union of Jewish Women for war-related causes went to SA Gifts and Comforts.⁶ Among the artefacts given to the Cape Council is a cigarette tin distributed to soldiers by the SA Gifts and Comforts Fund by Ouma Smuts with the inscription *Welcome New Year with peace 1945*. It was donated by this writer, in memory of her father, Dr Louis Schrire, then a captain in the UDF.

Also on display is a *Prayer Book for Jewish Members of H.M. Forces* 1940, presented by the Potchefstroom rabbi, Capt Rev A.M. Kaplan, the Jewish Chaplain at Potchefstroom Military Camp. It was reported in the *Potchefstroom Herald* that Chaplain Captain Kaplan directed his sermons to the soldiers, speaking of the peaceful nature of the Jewish nation and "how if mankind followed the teachings of the Scriptures, there could be no war."⁷

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Flashing forward to another war, there is a copy of *A Guide for Jewish Servicemen*, harking back to the days of apartheid when conscription was a reality and the enemies were not Nazis, but fellow citizens in the townships or resistance fighters in neighbouring countries. The booklet contains chapters on General Articles, What to Expect, What to take to Camp with you and Jews in the SADF – including sections on Shabbat, Kosher facilities, festivals and antisemitism (“The SADF has taken a clear official stand against Anti-semitism (sic)... Should you come across any Anti-semitism of any kind and on any level, inform your Chaplain or the Principal Jewish Chaplain immediately. Steps will be taken, proportionate to the nature of the incident”).

Recently donated by Sheila Beder are five South African ration books - one for each member of the Singer family. Her father, Barnet (Bertie) Singer, belonged to the Active Citizen Force - she remembered him patrolling the streets in Cape Town wearing a helmet. These ration books belong to a forgotten period of South African history, a period of queues and war-induced shortages. White bread was unobtainable, so women would sift coarse flour, behind drawn curtains, using illegal, home-made sifters to make white bread. Fuel, foodstuffs like sugar, butter and flour, wool, yarn and even toys were in short supply and could only be obtained with official ration coupons such as the rare ration books now in our collection.⁸

The local Jewish community gave generously to assist both those who were fighting and their fellow Jews caught up in the unimagined horrors that were happening in Europe. Evidence of this on display is a tin charity box, painted green. On the lid is written (in Yiddish), “A Gift from your brothers and sisters in South Africa”, on a map of Southern Africa with Rhodesia, Union of South Africa, Salisbury, Bulawayo, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, Durban, East London, Port Elizabeth and Cape Town identified.

Hereby hangs a tale. A picture of an identical box, but in orange, was sent to the Cape Town Holocaust Centre with a request for identification. The Centre sent the photo on to the Cape Board for an answer. The writer recognised the box because the Board had an identical one in its collection. She explained that the United South African Jewish War Appeal (SAJWA) had been established in Johannesburg in 1941 by the Board of Deputies and SA Zionist Federation. Money was sent via the Joint Distribution Committee to Jewish refugees in Switzerland, Greece and Spain, to Jewish communities in Algiers, Tunis and Casablanca, to the Association of Lithuanian Jews in Palestine who were sending parcels to Jews who had escaped into Russia and

for relief in Palestine itself. Money was also sent to the Teheran child refugees and, while allowed, to Stockholm, to provide food parcels to prisoners in Bergen-Belsen and Birkenau. After the war, the SAJWA sent money and parcels of food, clothing and medicine through the Joint to survivors and refugees living in DP camps.

When Sara Nuss-Galles was clearing out her late father's apartment, she came across this orange tin. She found no help from the Internet in identifying it and, as she and her husband, Prof Arie Alexander Galles, were planning to visit South Africa, she decided to seek an answer here.⁹ Sara's parents Hirschel Tzvi and Prywa Nuss, from Piaseczno near Warsaw, had fled East with their two sons. As they refused to accept Russian citizenship, they were sent on a six-week train journey to Siberia - 90% of the occupants perished on the way. There they survived two years in a work camp, chopping trees in the forests. When the Polish government in exile protested at the treatment of its citizens, the family was sent to the Dzalalabad area of Kyrgyzstan. There was just as little food – they picked grass for soup - but at least the weather was warmer. In 1946, when Sara was ten days old, they were repatriated to Poland. Her father returned to his grandparents' home in Gora-Kalwaria - but found no Jews, only hostile strangers living there, the home still furnished as it had been the day they had left. He stopped at a coffee shop and the owner, who recognised him, gave him food and warned him to leave the area immediately. The Holocaust was over, he said, but the Jewish remnant was not welcome and people were being thrown off trains. Thus, the family smuggled itself across the border to the Bergen Belsen DP camp, where they lived for five years before leaving, in 1951, for Chicago.

In Bergen Belsen, they were given the tin box. One would have to have been a starved refugee to understand how much this gift would have meant. It had travelled with them to Chicago and been treasured for the rest of Sara's parents' lives. The donor, Mrs G Leavis, c/o 67 Duncan Road, Bulawayo, had filled in her details in the section, “If you want to write to us, we will answer with pleasure”. Now Sara wanted to find Mrs Leavis to thank her.

The author sent a query to a Bulawayo internet site. Some weeks later, she was delighted to get a response from someone who used to play with Gladys Leavis's children and had found her great-granddaughter's contact details. Sara wrote and thanked the family for “reaching out in kindness to post-World War II refugees.” The grandson responded that his mother “was and is still very sensitive about being Jewish, perhaps because she was bullied at school. My brothers and I have a gap in

roots with our past because of this as it was not talked about when we were little". Sara arranged to contact them the next time she was in England.

Also in the Board's collection is the original drawing by the British Jewish artist JH Amschwitz for the poster advertising a "Citizens Mass Meeting to express sympathy with the millions of victims of Nazi brutality" to be held on "a Jewish Day of Mourning and Intercession" in the City Hall on 29 December 1942. This followed the release of information by the Jewish Agency in Palestine that Jews were being systematically exterminated in Europe "by the most satanic means the deranged minds of men can devise", a tragedy so great that "there were no tears to mourn this dire catastrophe, its magnitude is beyond all weeping."¹⁰ This was probably the last thing Amschwitz drew – he died in Muizenberg on 6 December. His son, Harry, was serving in the RAF as a fighter pilot at the time.¹¹

NOTES

- 1 Dr Mirvish told this to his son, Sidney, shortly before he died. Mirvish, Julian, and Gwynne Schrire, 'Dr Louis Mirvish: Doctor, Philanthropist, Art Lover', (*Jewish Affairs*, 2004, 59. 1)

- 2 No name, *South African Jews in World War II*, SA Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, 1950, 5
- 3 Leon Segal, Cape Board Chairman 1942 -1946 In Gwynne Robins, (ed) *South African Jewish Board of Deputies (Cape Council_ 1904 -2004 5664-5764 : A Century of Communal Challenges*, Kadimah, 2004, 50
- 4 *South African Jews in World War II*
- 5 Belling, Veronica, From Cape Jewish Orphanage to Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre: A Hundred years of caring for our children, Oranjia Jewish Child and Youth Centre, Cape Town, 2014, 49-50
- 6 The UJW also supported the Governor-General's War Fund, the Home Comforts, the Navy League, the Merchant Navy, Medical Aid for Russia, Bundles for Britain, Chinese War Relief and Holland Relief.
- 7 *Potchefstroom Herald* 6 Sep 1940.
- 8 SOUTH-AFRICA] Off Topic. Rationing - Archiver; archiver.rootsweb.ancestry.com > SOUTH-AFRICA > 2007-07 "A. Labuschagne" < snowgoose-al@shaw.ca, 07 Jul 2007 05:43:15 -0600 References: <003401c7c06a554104fd0\$cf09d0c4@franklynhyh8ts7> Frank Lyn" < franklyn@tiscali.co.za July 07, 2007
- 9 Prof Galles is, like her, a Polish Jew born in Uzbekistan, his family having moved there also from the Siberian work camps - most of his family were killed in Belzec. For the last ten years he has been working on a series of 15 large drawings of aerial views of death camps, called *Fourteen Stations / a kaddish for shoah victims* .
- 10 *Zionist Record*, 27.11.1942
- 11 *South African Jews in World War II*, 85



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MACHALNIK PILOTS IN THE ISRAELI WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

*

Barbara Rigden



A brief introduction is necessary to understand the complex events that preceded the 1948 Israeli War of Independence and formation of an independent state of Israel, born out of self-sacrifice, perseverance, ingenuity, blood and loss of precious lives.¹

Six weeks before the expiry of the British Mandate, the Zionist leadership, in desperation, sent the frail, unwell Chaim Weizmann as their representative to New York to try to meet with President Harry Truman. Because of a previous meeting between Truman and a Zionist delegation led by Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver, who made disrespectful gestures and demands on Truman regarding taking action on Palestine, the President, although sympathetic to the plight of the Jewish refugees and victims of the Holocaust, had resolved never again to have an audience with any of the Zionists and washed his hands of Palestine. This incident with Rabbi Silver more than anything sank all hope for the establishment of a Jewish state!

In view of a close friendship of more than forty years between Eddie Jacobson and Truman, B'nai B'rith chairman Frank Goldman urgently approached Jacobson to appeal to Truman to grant an off-the-record emergency

meeting to discuss the fate of Palestine and the Jewish people. Jacobson did so and the meeting took place. Thus was a very delicate situation, with the fate of the Jewish state in the balance, miraculously rescued by a Diaspora Jewish friendship with the American President - Jewish geography in operation!

Soon after the unfortunate Rabbi Silver meeting, the Irgun bombed Jerusalem's King David Hotel, killing 92 people including 26 British soldiers. This was the last straw for the British, who announced their intention to terminate their mandate and hand Palestine over to the newly-formed United Nations to deal with. After deliberating for seven months, the UN proposed a solution to partition Palestine into two equal regions, one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted gratefully while the Arabs totally rejected the proposal. This led to an escalation of violence between the Jewish and Arab populations. For the partition proposal to succeed there would have to be a vote by the UN General Assembly, consisting of 56 members, which would take place on 29 November, 1947. A two-thirds majority was required to adopt the resolution.

Eddie and Harry's eleventh hour 'friendship meeting' of 28 November resulted in Truman reviewing the situation regarding how close the Zionist camp was to achieving the necessary majority vote. It could be achieved by persuading five or six rather insignificant non-aligned countries with their own specific agendas, namely Liberia, Greece, Haiti and

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the Philippines, as well as France. As a direct result of this meeting, Truman instructed his Secretary of State General George Marshall to put pressure on the above five countries. The next day - 29 November, 1947 – the UN General Assembly voted in favour of partition by 33 votes to 13, with ten abstentions. Resolution 181 was successfully carried!

Resolution 181 called for the partitioning of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and the other Arab. The Jewish state was to comprise of disconnected sections of land, militarily indefensible and economically unviable. Jerusalem would be an international city. The Zionists worldwide were nevertheless overwhelmed with joy, and in Palestine, David Ben Gurion accepted the proposal without reservation. The resolution was not accepted by the Arabs, who threatened to wage war against the fledgling Jewish state if it was implemented. On Friday, 14 May 1948, the independence of the State of Israel was declared by David Ben Gurion. United States recognition of Israel followed immediately.

The following day, with the encouragement of the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, Mohammed Amin Al-Husseini (an ally of Hitler), Israel was attacked by six Arab armies, confident that they had overwhelming numbers of fighters and armaments with which to drive the Jewish people 'into the sea' in a war of extermination. The UN, together with other Western powers, had an arms embargo on the Middle East, while Egypt and Jordan had been militarily well equipped, and to a certain extent trained, by Britain.

Four compelling reasons motivated volunteers from around the world to answer Israel's call in her time of greatest need:

- The legacy of the Holocaust
- Britain's shameful deportation of refugees back to the death camps of Europe and to Cyprus, Mauritius and elsewhere.
- The Arab threat to totally annihilate the Jewish population of Palestine.
- Jewish communal unity at times of major crisis.

In 1947, the word 'on the grape vine' sent out a message for Jewish ex-service men and women to volunteer for service for the largely non-existent Israeli air and armed forces. 3000 volunteers came from around the world, of which 810 were from South Africa. 150 were qualified and experienced aviators, many having recently served in World War II. They answered the call, not only to fight for Israel, but to obtain funding, armaments and in particular aircraft by whatever means necessary. South Africans comprised the largest contingent of *machalniks* (as the volunteers

were called) per capita of population! One such *machalnik* was Jack Weinronk of Port Elizabeth, who ran the pilot training camp at Rome's Urbe Airport. Another was Lt-Col Cecil Margo, a highly decorated SA Air Force veteran of World War II, who played a crucial planning, advisory and organisational role in the establishment of the fledgling Israeli Air Force (IAF).

Non-Jews from around the world also played an important role, either as volunteers or as mercenaries - they provided 30% of the *machalnik* pilots in the IAF at the time. They included 'Butch ben Yok' (née Milton 'Butch' Bottger)² of Johannesburg, who enlisted as a volunteer with two of his Jewish friends, Phil Kemp and Dennis Gochen. He had been friends with them for years in Doornfontein, where he went to school and even attended *cheder* (Hebrew school) with them. When Butch heard that his Jewish pals were queueing up at the Zionist Federation offices for applications to join, there was no stopping him. With his experience in the SA Air Force during World War II (as a radio operator and air gunner serving in the North African and Italian campaigns), Butch had the perfect credentials. Although a Christian, he was close to his Jewish childhood friends and totally dedicated to the cause and plight of the Jewish people. He was welcomed at the Zionist Federation with open arms by Phil Zuckerman, at that time the recruiting officer.

Machalniks included close to 200 medical doctors and nurses and 95% of the new IAF pilots. Of 425 flying crews, non-Jews comprised 21.6 % of the total. *Machalniks* established the foundation of what was to become the Israeli air force, army and the navy (whose first commander was an American *machalnik*, Paul Shulman). During the war, English was used as the lingua franca of the IAF. David (Mickey) Marcus of the US was in charge of the 'Burma Road Project' to relieve the siege of Jerusalem, which was cut off from supplies of armaments, food and water, and was a mere thread away from falling into enemy hands.

Ben Dunkelman, a highly decorated officer in the Canadian army during World War II, led the 7th Brigade which captured and liberated the Upper Galilee, an operation known as 'Operation Hiram'.

In an amazing mission, Al Schwimmer and Swifty Schindler, two American *machalniks*, managed to smuggle into Israel four B-17 Flying Fortress bombers, ten C-46 and C-47 commando transport aircraft and three constellation aircraft out of the US. Together with the Spitfire aircrafts retrieved and purchased from Czechoslovakia, these played a crucial role and were instrumental in helping to win the war. They were the foundation of the IAF.



Members of the famed Squadron 101, 1948



Insignia badge of 101 Squadron

Outstanding among the *machalnik* pilots was South African-born Jack Cohen. He had been a fighter pilot in World War II after initially being conscripted into the infantry. He was one of the early members of Squadron 101, which was a jewel in the crown of the IAF. When initially approaching Israel for a planned landing at Haifa, their flight was warned that the town was bristling with UN officials. Hence, they changed course and headed for Herzlia, which happened to be the airbase of Squadron 101.

On landing, Jack got the most wonderful surprise. The first two boys to greet him were Sydney Cohen and Arnold Ruch, who had been with Squadron 101 for some two months.

Sydney and Jack had flown together in 4 Squadron SAAF, and Arnold was on the same base in 40 Squadron - a photo reconnaissance set-up. The next person Jack was to meet was Ezer Weizmann (a future President of Israel). A feeling of being at home and one of the family, with a great spirit of camaraderie and unity, permeated throughout the unit!

The IAF had, among others, a few Dakotas, a Bonanza, Tiger Moths, a few Piper Cubs and various hybrid reconstructed planes, such as hybrid Spitfires and Messerschmitts. The Dakotas were used either for carrying passengers or freight, or were converted into night bombers when necessary. Bombs were sometimes even thrown overboard manually at targets, after being carried on the lap of the bombardier (4 x 25 lbs each). The fighters suitable for combat were Messerschmitt 109s (Czechoslovakian versions) or Spitfires. Up to this time, the Egyptians and Syrians had had it all their own way, with complete superiority of the skies, in particular bombing Tel Aviv mercilessly and with impunity.

Israel had negotiated a deal with the Czechoslovakian authorities for the purchase of fifty Spitfires, which the British had given them at the end of World War II. Jack, together with Sam Pomerance, was assigned to bring them back to Israel from Zatec, a short ride from the village and approximately 50 kms

**Jack Cohen**

from Prague, as soon as possible in a mission termed 'Operation Velvetta'. Pomerance was an American pilot as well as an aeronautical engineer, and was highly qualified to do this job. The two became close friends, in addition to Sam making an excellent partner for Jack!

The Spitfire's flying range was approximately one and a half hours, yet they had to be adapted so as to stay aloft for at least six hours in order to reach Israel. Hence, they had to be stripped of all non-essential components, even guns, cannons, oxygen bottles, radios, armour plating, so as to lighten their weight as much as possible, and provide whatever additional space possible for extra fuel tanks (internally and also in cigar-shaped tanks attached beneath the wings, and belly of the planes). All personnel at the airfield, including the Czech ground-staff, assisted in these conversions, under the able guidance of Pomerance. After the ground crew completed the servicing and getting the aircraft ready for testing, Jack took over and test flew each machine as they came out of service. Meticulous care was taken to ensure that each aircraft was working perfectly. Also part of the team was a highly skilled American mechanic by the name of Bob Dawn, who hailed from Little Rock, Arkansas. And he was worth his weight in gold! Not only was he very good company, but he was also an outstanding technician. Everyone concerned with the operation, including the manager of the airfield, engineer Novak and the Czech ground staff, went all-out to assist in the operation.

The pilots responsible for flying the six Spitfires to Israel were Jack Cohen, Sydney Cohen, Sam Pomerance, Modi Alon (a charismatic Israeli who was trained in the RAF and commanded squadron 101), Boris Senior and Tuxie Blau. The Spitfires would

be led by the 'mother ship' Velvetta, and would be guided by following closely behind in formation. This strategy was used for both Velvetta 1 and 2.

Operation Velvetta 1 was not without incident, with two planes being rescued from Rhodes island after emergency landings, and one abandoned after crash-landing. However, in spite of this the mission was an absolute epic achievement in aviation history, and the remaining three spitfires landed at Telnof airbase with just about a few drops of fuel in their tanks.

Operation Velvetta 2 followed. Two groups of six Spitfires left Zatec in extremely bad weather - it was snowing quite heavily. Having no oxygen with them, the pilots had to watch their altitudes very carefully. However, tragedy struck when Sam Pomerance crashed the plane he was piloting into a mountain and was killed. It appears that in a severe storm that got steadily worse, he lost sight of the other planes, including the 'Mother ship', in dense cloud flying over Yugoslavia. He apparently inadvertently gained altitude, probably trying to fly above the storm, and blacked out because of lack of oxygen, resulting in the fatal crash. The tragedy was confirmed by the Yugoslav authorities.

In Operation Velvetta 3, the remaining planes were dismantled, put into crates, and shipped to Israel, where they would be re-assembled. Jack Cohen was involved in all three operations, which was to be the South African air drama of the Israeli War of Independence!

On 3 June Squadron 101 CO Modi Alon, flying a Messerschmitt, shot down two Egyptian DC 3s which had been bombing Tel Aviv. Five days later, Israel launched its first bombing raid over Damascus, Syria, using a borrowed South African civilian DC 3. A further bombing raid was conducted, by Jack Cohen and Sydney Cohen and the American Rudy Augarten, on the Egyptian's most forward air base of El Arish, from which constant attacks on Israel

**Rudy Augarten**

were being launched. The pilots initially flew out to sea. Turning inland at low level, they then bombed the runways, rendering them unusable, strafed planes on the tarmac and, flying almost at ground level, fired into the hangers. The base was demolished, probably never to be used again, after the ground forces moved in to finish the job.

Between 22 December 1948 and 7 January 1949, the climactic battle against the Egyptian forces in the Negev and Sinai was fought. Noteworthy were aerial dog-fights between Israeli Spitfires, and Egyptian aircraft in the southern Negev, and subsequently by the IAF against Spitfires manned by British pilots over the Sinai (a case of former comrades-in-arms in World War II fighting one another). Three out of four of the British Spitfires were shot down. This victory over the RAF provided a most dramatic and spectacular conclusion to the war. On 8 January, a cease-fire was brokered by the UN Security Council.

Machal veteran Harold 'Smoky' Simon believes it fair to say that *machalniks* played a pivotal role in Israel's victory over its Arab enemies. At the 60th anniversary of independence in 2008, he made the following observation: "Considering that 1 300 000 to 1 500 000 Jews worldwide served in the Allied forces during World War II, had just another 15 000 to 20 000 WWII veterans volunteered to help Israel, there would probably not be a West Bank or East Jerusalem problem today. Unfortunately, History is unforgiving, and so today the State of Israel is faced with these intractable and irreversible problems!"

Prime Minister David Ben Gurion honoured the South Africans first in his tribute to the IAF volunteers:

Pioneers of the air force in the earliest period were sons of the land of Israel, and the part played by Israeli pilots in the operations, victories, and battles of the air force is not small. But we would not have reached and maintained an air force that, in a short period, became one of the decisive forces in the War of Independence without volunteers from abroad, professionally trained and experienced in the armies of the Allies during the Second World War - never has the unity of Israel been revealed in so tangible and clear a manner, and there has never been, it seems to me, a body of Jews which has so embodied so fully an ingathering of exiles as the defence force of Israel - but in no fighting force did the volunteers from abroad fulfil so important, responsible and blessed a role as in the air force of Israel, since this force demanded more expertise, professionalism and experience than any other branch in our armed forces and from the midst of the Jews of

South Africa, England, America, Canada, and other countries, were forthcoming the experts and men of experience who volunteered their lives to the war of independence in our land.

Victory very rarely comes without a high price in human lives. In the 1948 war, 121 *machalniks* were killed – the flower of our youth whose lives were tragically truncated before they could properly be live.³ Among those killed were eight South Africans, who are remembered on the memorial wall at the Sha'ar Hagai Forest near the "Burma Road". The writer of this article was given the honour of laying a wreath in their memory at the 60th anniversary ceremony. May their memories be for a blessing, and may their families be comforted in their loss and grief. They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions -

They gave up their lives and their futures so that Israel and the Jewish people should survive!

May Israel prosper and find Eternal PEACE.

Acknowledgements:

In writing this article, important sources used included *South Africa's 800* (Henry Katzew, SA Zionist Federation, 2003), 'Harry and Ed'-Notes in preparation of a play (based on true facts) by Victor Gordon, Smokey Simon's speech of 7 May 2008 and 'My Story' by Jack Cohen (<http://101squadron.com/101real/people/jcohen.html>). My thanks, also, to Wilfred (Wilf) and Eddie for help with typing and computer preparations.

NOTES

- 1 Of Israel's Jewish population of approximately 650 000 in 1948, over 6500 (1%) were to lose their lives in this War of Independence!
- 2 After Ben Gurion called for the 'Hebraisation' of volunteers' names, Butch Bottger proudly adopted the name 'Butch Ben Yok' ('Yok' being South African Jewish slang meaning 'Christian' or 'Gentile!').
- 3 Nine non-Jewish fliers lost their lives, and are buried in the Christian military cemetery in Haifa. May their souls find eternal peace and blessing for the supreme sacrifice they made!

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KFAR ETZION - NOW *THIS* WAS A MASSACRE

*

Kenneth D Penkin

In the Chanukah 2014 issue of *Jewish Affairs* ('Deir Yassin – The Massacre that Wasn't'), I wrote about the research which clearly proved the mendacity of worldwide allegations claiming the battle of Deir Yassin to have been a massacre.

On 13 May 1948, one month after the attack on Deir Yassin on 9 April, the massacre at Kfar Etzion took place. Both villages were south of and close to Jerusalem.

It is significant to briefly review the history of Kfar Etzion. This is the area where our Father Abraham pitched his tent when he entered the Land of Promise and grazed his flocks. It is the oldest and largest of the four settlements of the Etzion Bloc, where the settlements flanked the road from Hebron to Bethlehem. Orthodox Jews purchased the area of Kfar Etzion from an Arab sheik in 1928. Before the Arabs drove the Jews out in 1929, it was a fruit plantation; in 1936, another Arab uprising destroyed it. After the repurchase by Jews in 1939, sixty concentration camp survivors arrived. In 1947, the community was flourishing, with the fruit trees being productive. Early that year, attacks on it began. These led to Kfar Etzion being cut off from Jerusalem.

The United Nations partition resolution for Palestine (29 November, 1947) placed the Gush Etzion Bloc in the interior of the intended Arab state. Very soon afterwards, the Arabs launched attacks against the Jewish settlements in many parts of Palestine. Although the heavily armed Arab Legion in Palestine was theoretically under British command, they began to operate more and more independently. The Etzion Bloc was strategically placed in the defence and relief of Jerusalem.

On 15 January, 1948, 35 Haganah members under the command of Danny Mass made their way on foot from Har Tuv (near Beit Shemesh) to re-supply Gush Etzion. However, there were not enough hours of darkness to get them to their destination. Arab shepherds from Tzurif spotted them at dawn and summoned

a large group of armed locals to block their way. The battle lasted all the next day and the soldiers fought to the last bullet until, at about 16h30, the last of the group was killed. The Arab attackers mutilated the bodies of "the 35" (Hebrew: *Lamed Hey*). A British soldier who took pictures of the mutilated bodies of the *Lamed Hey* convoy left his roll of film to be developed in Jerusalem, but never came back for it. Several decades later, the negatives were discovered, but it was decided not to publicize the atrocities.



Lamed Hey Memorial, commemorating the 35 soldiers who fell while coming to the defence of Gush Etzion.

In March 1948, a Jewish convoy from Jerusalem seeking to supply the Etzion Bloc was ambushed, and fifteen soldiers of the Haganah died before the remainder were extricated by the British. There were many similar incidents involving both sides. Starting early in May the Arab Legion, together with thousands of irregulars (mostly local Arab villagers) began a series of assaults on the Etzion settlements. Haganah command in Jerusalem was unable to provide any useful assistance.

On 12 May, two days before the proclamation of the State of Israel, thousands

Kenneth D Penkin, a retired Chartered Accountant, has been active for many years in Jewish communal affairs in Cape Town. This includes serving on the committees of various shuls, Highlands House, Herzlia High School and the Cape committee of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, and as chairman of the United Communal Fund (Cape) for one campaign.

of Arabs and Arab Legionnaires attacked the Etzion Bloc. Kfar Etzion's 600 settlers, including women and children, were no match against two Arab Legion infantry companies, with armored cars and light artillery, and thousands of local Arab irregulars. The fighting went on for nearly three days. On 13 May, when the hopelessness of their position became undeniable, the remaining defenders of Kfar Etzion laid down their arms. The following day, the three other kibbutzim making up the Gush Etzion Bloc also surrendered. The number of people killed and the perpetrators are in dispute. According to one account, the main group of about fifty defenders were captured by a large number of Arab irregulars, who shouted "Deir Yassin!" They ordered the Jews to sit down, stand up, and sit down again. Suddenly, a legionnaire opened fire on the prisoners with a machine gun from an armoured car, and Arab irregulars joined in the killing. Those Jews not immediately cut down tried to run away but were pursued and killed.

Almost the entire population of Kfar Etzion was massacred, soldiers and civilians alike. The last fifty survivors escaped to the cellar of an old German monastery within the grounds. An Arab pulled the pin of a hand grenade, handed it to a Jewish woman and forced her to throw it inside. Further grenades were thrown into the cellar, completing the blood bath.

According to Itzhak Levy (*Jerusalem in the War of Independence*, Tel Aviv, 1986), a total of 157 defenders died in the battle of Gush Etzion, about two-thirds of who were residents and the remainder Hagana or Palmach soldiers. The remainder were taken to Jordan as prisoners. The four kibbutzim were totally destroyed. In total, 240 settlers and Haganah and Palmah fighters were killed at the Etzion Bloc during five-and-a-half months of war. Bodies lay in the fields for a year-and-a-half before Jordan allowed Israel to retrieve them, for burial with full military honours at Mount Herzl in Jerusalem.

In my article on the attack on Deir Yassin, I defined a massacre with various alternative semantics. How do these terms bear comparison with what happened at Gush Etzion?

- *annihilation* – yes, the members of the Kfar Etzion Kibbutz were annihilated.
- Was it a *blood bath*, a *mass slaughter*? Could anything be more of a blood bath than the throwing of grenades into a cellar crowded with civilians?
- Was it a *wipe out*, a *killing*, an *extermination*, a *mass slaughter* – virtually all the members of the Kibbutz Kfar Etzion were indeed destroyed.


In short, this was certainly a massacre, one of extreme proportions. And as we have seen

time and again, it was neither an unusual nor an unprecedented act on the part of the Arabs. According to Abba Eban, the United Nation described the attack as an act of defiance against the law of nations and the judgement of the world.

Nineteen years after the fall of Gush Etzion, during the Six-Day War of June 1967, the Israeli Defence Force recaptured the area. The settlements were rebuilt and new ones added.

For almost half a year, the battles of the four Etzion Bloc kibbutzim twenty kilometres from Jerusalem tied up large Arab forces from all over the Hebron hills - forces that consequently were unable to take part in the attacks on the Jews in Jerusalem. The battles of the Etzion Bloc thus helped save Jewish Jerusalem. Prime Minister David Ben Gurion recorded the importance of Gush Etzion, saying, "I can think of no battle in the annals of the Israel Defence Forces which was more magnificent, more tragic or more heroic ... If there exists a Jewish Jerusalem, our foremost thanks go to the defenders of Gush Etzion".

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THE VOYAGE OF THE SS NEGBAH 1956 (or, 'The Curious Tale of the Disappearing Cookies')

*

Lionel Slier

So, there were these two nice Jewish boys, twentyish, from Johannesburg, floating around Italy in the winter of 1956. In point of fact, they were my friend, Boris, and me. It was cold, really cold, even in Rome, so we decided to go to Israel and live on a kibbutz. That was the idea, anyway. It happened that we passed a travel agency with a notice in the window advertising a Greek liner (If I remember correctly, it was the *ss Pireaus*) that was leaving in a few days' time for Haifa from Naples. The trip included a day at the port of Pireaus, with a day tour of Athens.

"Wonderful!" we decided, and stepped inside. A kindly looking man, fifty-something, was behind the counter. In our broken Italian, we explained that we wanted to book on the Greek ship to go to Haifa. The man said nothing for a few moments. Boris's hands were on the counter; then the man put his two hands over those of Boris, looked him straight in the eye and said to both of us, in English: "Jewish boys go to Israel by Zim boats". That was it, then. Goodbye Athens and farewell Greece.

A couple of days later, a Sunday, we were in Napoli. A taxi took us to the harbor and dropped us off by the *ss Negbah*, looking bold with its Star of David fluttering proudly in the grey sky. It made us feel pleased that we had listened to the man in the travel agency. A luxury liner, it was not. A ship it wasn't either - it was a boat, 9000 tons! It looked small and not particularly inviting. There was quite a lot of movement around the gangway, but we pushed our way up and got to the reception area. There, we were given our cabin number and led, literally, into the bowels of the boat, into what I am sure was originally the cargo section. Subsequently, I learnt that the *ss Negbah* had been built prior to World War I and later became a cargo (coal?) boat under the Swedish flag, obviously with a different name. The approach of World War II apparently saved the vessel from the salvage yard. I could not ascertain what it had contributed to the war. In 1947, Zim Lines bought the boat and changed its name

to *Negbah*. It was used to bring immigrants to Haifa from the despair of war-ravaged Europe and also from North Africa.



Zim is a Biblical name meaning 'a large vessel.' I cannot verify, this but that is what I was told on the boat and I have lived with that information for 56 years and I do not feel like adjusting it now.¹ In our sleeping quarters, there were eighteen bunks, six sections of three bunks high. One had to be a mountaineer to get to the top bunk, and the bottom and middle bunks had the disadvantage of being in the firing line if the occupant of the top bunk was seasick or otherwise discommoded. Some bunks had already been taken and suitcases left on them showed claimants. Boris, being more agile than me, took the top bunk and I had the bottom one, with all its discontents. We asked the crew member who had shown us our cabin where our luggage was to be kept. He shrugged, indicating by sign language that no such luxury as cupboards existed and that our luggage was to be left under the bottom bunk. We then went back up on deck as the time for departure was approaching. There was a great deal of scurrying around and a terrible odor of diesel and smoke was belching from the single chimney stack. Eventually we set off. There was a crowd of Jewish youth on the quayside singing and catching streamers thrown from the boat by a group of Habonim-niks, or similar such people, on board with us. It was very moving to hear the Hebrew songs as we moved slowly away from the dockside. We passed an American aircraft carrier which to us looked as high as the Empire State Building; by comparison, we seemed to be on a rowing boat.

Lionel Slier is a regular contributor to South African Jewish publications, including Jewish Affairs and the South African Jewish Report.

As we hit the open sea, the *Negbah* lurched forward and there were muffled screams from some of the passengers. Then the boat went up, struggling it seemed, and down, and up, and we knew that this was the kind of movement that we would have to live with for the next five days.

While we were in Italy, Boris and I had been on a starvation diet, mostly spaghetti, as this was about the only item which we could comfortably pronounce to a waiter. On the boat, we had to eat dinner in the second session, which did not help our hunger. Eventually, we did enter the dining room and were given a table together with two Brazilian businessmen. The latter spoke passable English and seemed jovial and friendly enough, although this did not extend to offering us any of the wine they had ordered. There was no menu, so the choice was 'take what you are given or leave it'.

Many of the passengers were leaving for a new life in Israel from Morocco. There was also a youth group from Argentina, including some girls, extremely pretty in a South American sort of way. We could look and appreciate, but that was about it. After-dinner entertainment was a movie in one of the lounges. It was crowded, but we found seats and the Argentine group came in and sat on the floor in front of us, chatting merrily in Spanish. The film was *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, an MGM musical comedy starring Ester Williams and Frank Sinatra; there was more swimming than

baseball. The film was shown without subtitles. It was obvious that the Argentinian *olim* did not understand it at all because whenever a witty remark or a wisecrack was made, there was total silence from their area.

It wasn't pleasant going onto the deck. The smell of diesel was very strong indeed and the movement of the boat crashing forward into a wave was not very comfortable, nor was the climb back up the wave. This move was constantly there, and not at all to our liking. Some passengers were already standing by the rails, returning their dinner to the depths. I must say that sleep was difficult. The rocking of the boat took one back to our days in the cradle and the loud noise of the engines did not help either.

Breakfast the next morning was on a first-come-first-served basis. Boris and I sat at the same table that we had been given at dinner the previous night. On each of the four settings was a hot cookie. Buttered, these were delicious, truly. We had a mundane breakfast. But while sitting there the two remaining scones looked at us accusingly - or was it invitingly? I looked at Boris. He looked at me. Then, simultaneously and wordlessly, we each took a cookie off the Brazilians' plates, buttered and devoured them. Then we crept away from the breakfast room, a trifle guiltily, I must admit. Our table companions had not yet come down.

Back on deck, the passengers were settling



New immigrants on the Negba about to disembark at Haifa (undated photo in the I A Maisels Library, S A Zionist Federation)

down. There was a weak sun, yet some people were in swimming costumes, even though there was no pool. The Argentinians were in a corner, grouped together, learning *Ivrit*. We tried to make eye contact but they ignored us, two nerdish dorks from *Drom Afrika*.

Thus did we all slip into a routine, and it was not all that great - bumpy, noisy, smelly. It was not an option to go and lie down on our beds during the day, as only the old, sick and lame did that. Our daily routine was breakfast (with purloined cookies), lunch, a second session dinner and chatting to the Brazilians, followed by the movie. Again, it was *Take Me Out to the Ball Game*, and again the Argentinians sat mute right through it. The same movie was shown every night and every night we would see the Argentinians trooping into the cinema. One day, the Brazilians appeared at breakfast a little earlier than usual, but fortunately we had eaten their cookies already.

Finally, on Thursday night, there was an announcement from the captain advising us, in Hebrew and English, that at 5 a.m. the next morning we would be able to see the lights of Haifa and should therefore be on deck

at that time to see *Eretz Israel*. Needless to say, there was a crowd on the deck the next morning and the lights of Haifa and of the Holy Land beyond caused great excitement, particularly amongst the Moroccan *olim*. The Argentinians were singing. It was quite thrilling and very emotional.

Once we'd had enough of seeing 'Haifa by Dark', Boris and I went down to breakfast. To our shock, the two Brazilians were already at the table. There were the usual cookies, but only on Boris' and my plates. After the '*Boker Tovs*', one of the Brazilians told us happily, "Look, they gave us a special treat today - a hot cookie for breakfast! It was excellent. It must be because we are landing in Israel". Boris and I looked at each other. Boris muttered something inaudible, and sat down. "Must be", I managed to reply.

NOTES

- 1 The author was correctly informed – see *Bamidbar/Numbers* 24:24: *V'tzim miyad Kittim* ('But ships [*tzim*] will come from the coast of Kittim....')

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THE CONGRESS OF THE PEOPLE REMEMBERED

*

Leon Levy



Leon Levy at the SAJBD's 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter event, held at the Rabbi Cyril Harris Community Centre on 23 June 2015. With him is Joy Kropman, a long-serving ANC City Councillor who was also present at the original Congress of the People in Kliptown.

Thank you for inviting me to share with you the 60th anniversary of the creation and adoption of the Freedom Charter on 26 June 1955, as well as my memories of the two-year campaign for the "Call to a Congress of the People" which led to the great gathering at Kliptown.

I gladly agreed to speak this evening because I was much involved in the Congress of the People campaign and personally witnessed the acceptance of the Freedom Charter. At the time, I was President of the South African Congress of Trade Unions and an activist in the liberation movement. The Freedom Charter was at the center of the subsequent four year-long Treason Trial and [as one of the accused in

Leon Levy is a veteran anti-apartheid activist and trade unionist. As President of the SA Congress of Trade Unions, he was much involved in planning the Congress of the People, held in Kliptown, Soweto, on 26 June 1955, and was one of the five original signatories to the Freedom Charter, adopted at that gathering. This article is adapted from the address he gave at a commemorative function to mark the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, held under the auspices of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies on 23 June 2015.

the trial] I can bear witness to the incredible legal effort to brand it as subversive. It was not - and in its own right, it endures as a democratic beacon which proudly belongs to all of us.

Sixty years is a very long time, and one would expect an historic occasion like this to have gathered many myths, which future historians would have to sift for fact and fantasy.

This is not necessarily so in this case. For, unlike any event of this nature, the Freedom Charter and especially the campaign leading up to it, has been the subject of intense recording and political and legal scrutiny both before it was adopted and for many years afterwards.

I shall explain this a little later in this thumbnail sketch of the occasion, but first, I want to try and transport you to the event at Kliptown.

Sunday, 26 June, was a bright and clear winter's day. Early in the morning delegates from every province in the country began to arrive, at first in small numbers and then in large groups. Those who came from outside Johannesburg were accommodated the night before by Congress volunteers in the townships or elsewhere. The site - a fairly large strip of veld - was well-prepared with what seemed endless rows of benches and a well-constructed raised platform in front.

The size of the assembled crowd rose to between 2000 and 3000 delegates. Many busloads of delegates from all over the country were stopped by police and prevented from attending.

Nevertheless, there was much for those present to discuss about the future type of society for South Africans. There was the draft of a 'Freedom Charter', which was crafted from thousands of demands written on scraps of paper at hundreds of meetings held in factories and farms, townships, rural areas, universities and wherever people lived or worked.

They talked in many different languages and in their own way - about the right to vote and stand for election, equality for all national groups, sharing the wealth of the country and the land for those who work it, equality before the law, human rights, work, and education, housing, peace and friendship and so on.

There were scores of detectives who came

to take notes of what was being said, but we were used to this and carried on without allowing ourselves to be distracted. I remember clearly the final acceptance of the Freedom Charter. I was standing on the platform with other speakers and suddenly saw what seemed like hundreds of police, mounted on horses, swooping into the meeting area and surrounding it so as to cut off any opportunity for exit.

The chairperson asked the people to stay calm and remain seated while a police major told the meeting that it was believed that a treasonable act had been committed and no one was to leave before all the names of the delegates, officials and volunteers were taken. We had been expecting some police action to prevent the Congress of the People from adopting the Charter and were wary of possible violence and bloodshed and, of course, mass arrests. But this was a hazard we had to accept, while relying on the discipline of those present. The people remained calm and dignified, singing freedom songs and also composing their own. The name and address of each person present was taken before all were allowed to leave - but not before the police confiscated whatever poster or private letter they could lay their hands on.

The next seventeen months saw police raids on the homes and work-places of hundreds of the people who voted for the Charter, as well as those of officials and activists of the liberation

organisations. Thousands more documents, books and posters were confiscated – all for the purpose of proving that there was indeed a treasonable conspiracy.

On 5 December 1956, police swooped on 156 Congress leaders and activists – black and white - who had led the Campaign for the Congress of the People and arrested them on charges of conspiracy to commit high treason. This was a capital offence punishable by the death sentence. The prosecution was determined to link all the accused in a conspiracy to overthrow the state by force and violence and replace it with a Communist state.

The trial lasted for over four years. Twenty thousand documents and speeches made at hundreds of meetings by the accused were put before the Court and examined for mention of any suggestion of violence to overthrow the state. Every word and paragraph of the Freedom Charter was examined and argued. The state presented experts on Communist philosophy. The accused were acquitted and the full story of the Freedom Charter, its meaning and aims and objects as well as the role of the people who made it, is available on record.¹

NOTES

- 1 Soon after Nelson Mandela was released from prison, he was presented with bound copies of the record by the Treason Trial's presiding Judge Frans Rumpff.



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60 YEARS OF THE FREEDOM CHARTER

*

Kgalema Motlanthe



60 Years of the Freedom Charter evening, 23 June 2015. From left: Kgalema Motlanthe, Leon Levy, H.E. Parks Tau, Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, and SAJBD President Zev Krengel.

I am grateful for the opportunity to speak today on the subject of the 60th Anniversary of the Freedom Charter.

Both at the level of historical value and political philosophy, the Freedom Charter's importance subsists in its advancement of the human agenda. That in itself elevates the Freedom Charter to the level of some of the politically seminal documents in modern history.

At the risk of drawing the long bow, one could argue that at least at a symbolic level, the Freedom Charter ranks alongside such documents as the Magna Carta (the

Great Charter), a political statement that revolutionised the character of Great Britain, locking its future trajectory into a political rationality that would change the cause of its history even as it impacted further afield.

However, what levels off the Freedom Charter with documents such as the Magna Carta, which precede it both in time as well as the depth and breadth of the historic influence, is that the former is a product of popular participation. Indeed, that it is the product of all classes, ethnic and racial groups, religious affiliations, gender and geographic representation, equally impassioned by the same moral vision, makes it a historically unique coinage.

Most historic documents that heralded a new era in human affairs were the mental labours of those born to the purple, in a manner of speaking. This would include philosophers, scholars, the clergy, the barons, the aristocrats, and many others from the upper crust of society.

The Freedom Charter, by contrast, is an inclusively shared vision whose abiding value as a formative document carves its place in

The Hon. Kgalema Motlanthe is a distinguished South African political leader, whose career includes having served as Acting President (25 September 2008 - 9 May 2009) and Deputy President (9 May 2009 – 26 May 2014) of South Africa. This article is adapted from the address he gave at a commemorative function to mark the 60th anniversary of the Freedom Charter, held under the auspices of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies on 23 June 2015.

historical monumentality.

What makes the Freedom Charter an iconic document is its projection of the notion of justice as the inter-generational political imperative. The Magna Carta, as were many religious, philosophical and political discourses before and after, similarly revolved around justice as the deepest yearning of the human soul.

For the purposes of this gathering, I wish to reflect on the preamble of the Freedom Charter, as it is foundational to the democratic vision that defines post-apartheid South Africa. The Freedom Charter's preamble becomes all the more cardinal when one considers that it sets out the ideal political state most desirable for us as a people. Looked at this way, the Freedom Charter is a politically constitutive document in that it prescribes for a particular form of human society, on the strength of its exalted moral authority.

The Preamble reads:

We, the People of South Africa, declare for all our country and the world to know: that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;

that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex or belief;

And therefore, we, the people of South Africa, black and white together equals, countrymen and brothers adopt this Freedom Charter;

And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.'

In seeking to understand the meaning of the Freedom Charter's preamble today it is instructive to first explore, if only briefly, the historical context that necessitated its emergence. In this exercise the aim is not to rehash the historical process by sharing a descriptive picture of the process leading up to the drawing up of the Charter. That much is common knowledge.

Of importance is revisiting the rationale for this historical episode, the better to sharpen our understanding of the Freedom Charter's key injunctions in post-apartheid South Africa.

While historical detail may be all too cumbersome at times, that should not dissuade us from pruning the historical hedge for context. The historical context serves as a catalytic mechanism which enables succeeding generations to cultivate a discerning mind into what has shaped current reality.

To paraphrase Hegel, what history teaches is this: that people have never learned anything from history. In itself this observation makes a comprehensive, three-dimensional and yet dispassionate reading of history all the more pivotal to connecting the present with the past in a coherent form that elevates human understanding.

In this regard, historical imperatives compel one to preface one's approach in this address with singling out the role of the African National Congress (ANC) as a prime mover that wrought the incipient contours of non-racial consciousness embodied in the Freedom Charter. Granted, the Freedom Charter is the product of multiple political formations who shared a common vision about the future of our nation in the face of debilitating political oppression. These formations included the ANC, the Congress of Democrats, the SA Indian Congress and the SA Coloured People's Organisation, as well as the SA Congress of Trade Unions. Subsequently known as the Congress Movement or Alliance, these forces rallied behind the ANC after its banning, drawing sustenance from the cohesive philosophy of the Freedom Charter.

As such, the Freedom Charter is ultimately the collective imagination of multiple progressive forces ranged against systemic racism who, as an alternative, posited alternative ontological possibilities. Yet of all these formations the ANC had been the representative of the biggest section of the people of South Africa, and therefore the most potent force. History will also credit the ANC on another level. The ANC was formed as a nationalist organisation, to unite and represent the African people, who had been left out of the body polity. Similarly, during this historical period the African continent was steeped in heroic nationalist struggles for freedom from European colonialism.

South Africa, unlike many other African societies, was a nation that had drawn to its shores many different nationalities from all corners of the world. For one thing, the discovery of mineral resources such as gold and diamonds was among prospects that attracted some of these waves of migrations. For another, the global political environment of the period marked by religious and political persecutions entered South Africa into the list

of ideal destinations for many.

Modernisation and the state formation in our country stem from these socio-political and economic developments. Unfortunately, this also spawned greed, which expressed itself in racial oppression. In turn racial oppression was defined by political domination, economic exploitation and social discrimination.

By definition, the anti-colonial struggle had a racial character, driven as it was by an emerging ideology of African nationalism in the face of white European domination.

It is against this background that the historical provenance of the progressive and indeed humanist nationalism of the ANC is thrown in bold relief. On closer inspection one sees the ANC evolving in opposite ways to the popular sea of Africanist consciousness engulfing the African continent. Partly this explains the grounds for the breakaway from the ANC of what became the Pan-Africanist Congress, when the former espoused the key tenets of the Freedom Charter contained in the preamble, which says that: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white...'.

Yet, as the abiding legacy of the Freedom Charter testifies, the non-racial outlook that the ANC developed as a result of its sophisticated theorisation about the nature of the South African state would prove enduring. In retrospect, it is clear that it was a precocious outlook grounded in superior philosophical claims. With this in mind our focus should now turn to the character of the ANC's political theory regarding the apartheid society and related to that, the future of post-apartheid society.

The ANC benefited from the long historical sweep that included the Satyagraha principle of Mahatma Gandhi, the African People's Organisation under the leadership of Abdullah Abdurahman, individuals who studied abroad, Marxist activists at the turn of the century and other influences. All these influences shaped the nascent consciousness of the ANC in ways that disposed it to the expressly non-racial cast that would emerge at the time of the Freedom Charter. To this extent, a case could be made that the historical environment percolated non-racialism into ANC consciousness.

Interestingly, the formation of the ANC Youth League in the early 1940s saw an emerging radical Africanism represented, among others, by no less a figure than the young Nelson Mandela. Yet with time, even the radical but exclusionary Youth League nationalists would mature into a non-racial outlook with a cutting-edge understanding of the South African political character. They would, in turn, be counted among the hardened devotees of the ascendant non-racialist thought in the ANC.

In sum, the theoretical justification

underlying the Freedom Charter was that whereas the geographic territory known as South Africa belonged to the indigenous Khoisan people and Africans, modern day South Africa was the product of the labours of all who had made it their home. This theory therefore posited antithetical political and moral perspective to that espoused and enforced by the racist regime. Thus, the Freedom Charter was not a document seeking revenge for the historical injustices visited upon the oppressed South Africans. To the contrary, it was a document that envisaged the unity of the South African people in a unitary state.

In the final analysis what made the Freedom Charter a morally acclaimed political statement universally appealing to the majority of South Africans, especially from the section of the oppressed, was its humanist political and moral claims.

As we have seen, the preamble of the Freedom Charter itself suffices to explain these impeccable starting points that put the human person at the centre of political existence, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, class or historical origins. In spirit and substance, the Freedom Charter is anchored on and moves from a human-centric angle. Against this background, what is most logical to ask more than two decades after the defeat of the racist regime is whether the preamble of the Freedom Charter comports with the unfolding South African realities.

Do South Africans feel that post-apartheid South Africa belongs to all of us, black and white? While I cannot presume to provide the answer to this weighty question, I can share my understanding of what the drafters of the Freedom Charter meant for a post-apartheid landscape.

At an abstract level, South Africa belongs to all those who have embraced it as their country. What this means is that no one is more South African than the other. To belong is to have an unconditional sense of belonging. Conceptually, this comes down to an inclusive form of nationalism, steeped in common values that appeal to all the people of our land within the framework of our system of democracy. The preamble to South Africa's constitution resonates stirringly with that of the Freedom Charter.

However, this may be the necessary but by no means sufficient condition for all South Africans to feel that they belong. What makes people feel attached to their country and to each other is an inter-generational, all-inclusive nationalism manifested on the social, economic and political planes. An inclusive form of nationalism is framed by a sense of social cohesion not just at the level of rhetoric but in practical terms. National events or holidays that speak to our history should draw all South

Africans to the celebration of such events. Such events should evince neither party political bias nor ethnic or racial connotations. Instead, historical and national events should override our group differences even as they cement a common sense of nationhood.

An inclusive form of nationalism is the highest form of social cohesion, where what unites us is much stronger than what divides us. There has to be imperatives that supplant our historically pre-defined identities and artificially constructed consciousness. It is patently possible to be a multi-confessional, multi-ethnic, multi-vocal society and still be a united people within the context of shared nationhood, unencumbered by the deadweight of particularistic nationalism spawned by the past.

Indeed, our past need not imprison us. Our differences in appearance and outlook on life need not equal enmity or reflexive discrimination. Ironically, in spite of apartheid social engineering South Africans have over the years seen an evolution of cultural hybridity consisting of all elements of its diverse people. We have to consciously work to cement these commonalities, which are in reality rooted in our historically co-extensive social space.

At a deeper level, such instinctual South African nationalism boils down to the dignity and worth of the human person. Nelson Mandela and his generation symbolised this form of nationalism in word and in deed. It remains our challenge today to interrogate our commitment to this grandest ideal that valorises unity as the basis of the development of the human spirit. At the same time we are called upon to understand this transformative nationalism in the context of history that has shaped our current socio-political landscape. It is not and will not be easy.

Full and inclusive citizenship in modern democracy is predicated on economic well-being. Short of this, political rights become nominal and a pro forma state that induces cognitive dissonance in ordinary South Africans who bear the brunt of history. Full citizenship, an inclusive society, presupposes fairness and justice in the distribution of economic gains.

This is the central feature of post-apartheid South Africa which flies in the face of both the defining philosophy and the spirit of the Freedom Charter. While this may be the concern of the government of the day, the ascendant moral framework attendant to the historical import of the Freedom Charter behoves all of us, private citizens, civil society and more importantly big business, to equally embrace this responsibility to see the goals of this document through.

No less a figure than Chief Rabbi Sacks has contended that 'change has become part of the texture of life itself, and there are few things harder to bear than constant flux and

uncertainty.' Because change is pain, leadership becomes a hectic exercise that calls for the Wisdom of Solomon, or in our case, Nelson Mandela. Those who have benefited from the past need to also understand that as long as economic inequalities define our social landscape we cannot yet speak of South Africa belonging to all who live in it. Such high level of consciousness enables both sides to acknowledge the long shadow of the past over the present and the commensurate need to fade it away. All of us have the duty to understand that without including a broad cross-section of society in the project of social transformation within the framework of commonly embraced moral vision, very little change can and indeed will happen.

During the course of this social transformation, mistakes happen that detract from the nobility of the cause. Among other things, economic greed, the desire to accumulate wealth and enrich ourselves in cynical ways, is taking a hand in the matter. During this process of national reconstruction and development, those tasked with the responsibility of bringing about social change and leading the nation to a clearly defined moral vision cannot afford to falter. I would argue that those of us charged to run the affairs of the state have the moral obligation to respect this responsibility by being as irreproachable as humanly possible. From this viewpoint all South Africans, black and white, have the onerous task to be a critical mass of moral authority ensuring that the nobility of the Freedom Charter is not compromised today, tomorrow or anytime in the future. I would argue that inclusive, instinctual nationalism means the ability to give vent to our views, no matter how critical, with no self-consciousness with regard to our race, tribe, religion or gender.

Before concluding, let me take this opportunity to congratulate members of the Jewish community who sacrificed so much for the liberation of South Africa. Most of these illustrious individuals made a sterling contribution to the Freedom Charter itself. It goes without saying that all those Jewish souls were men and women who had learnt from history. Motivated by the long history of antisemitism, their consciousness would not hear of human oppression in any way, shape or form. Among many others, the list includes Joe Slovo, Ruth First, Ronnie Kasrils, Hilda Bernstein, Harold Wolpe, Eli Weinberg, Dennis Goldberg, Albie Sachs, Wolfie Kodesh, Arthur Goldreich, Ray Alexander Simons, Benjamin Turok, Leon Levy, Raymond Suttner, Rowley Arenstein and Max and Audrey Coleman. Through their efforts, we are reminded that denial of justice to a specific people knows no geographic boundaries. The Holocaust, pogroms, genocides, ethnocide, massacres,

Trans-Saharan slavery and apartheid are among shameful episodes in human history. Such demented human acts detract from the inherent grandeur of the notion of being human.

Equally debasing to the human soul are mass starvations, poverty, malnutrition, environmental degradation, illiteracy, racism, pigmentocracy, sexism, religious discrimination, and, generally, the racially defined state of under-development that robs a huge section of humanity of its innate right to exist to the fullest extent within the strictures of the human condition. Most shockingly, these abominations still persist under our noses at a time when the human species has reached the very height of social development.

I wish to call on all South Africans, not least the Jewish community, following on the example of the historical figures mentioned above, to be an active part of the process of reconstruction and development of South Africa. My limited research tells me that the Torah is a moral blueprint on how to live a good and honest life. Not only is it a book about laws governing a person's relationship with God, but it is also about laws relating to how to treat other people. It addresses fundamental values such as the sanctity of life, justice and

equality, kindness and generosity, the value of education and social responsibility.

Interestingly, these are the values the Freedom Charter champions. In this regard, I am confident that the Jewish community will continue in the vein of those named above to make this a better country for all of its people and for posterity.

In conclusion, the Freedom Charter was an honest attempt by inspired masses of humanity to fire up elevated forms of human consciousness with the object of raising all South Africans, oppressor and oppressed alike, above the dehumanising level of racial oppression. In its expansive conception of the human agenda, it projected the notion of justice into the post-apartheid future, envisaging a human society defined by some of the noblest principles of the modern era: liberty, equality and fraternity. By juxtaposing its exalted, democratic moral claims to those of the prevailing system of racial oppression, the Freedom Charter was able to undermine the whole edifice of apartheid racial ideology.

Looking back at the sixty years since the adoption of this iconic document, we cannot but marvel at the resilience of the human spirit.



REVISITING THE TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION'S FAITH COMMUNITY HEARING

*

Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein

Editor's Note: On 8-9 October 2014, the Beyers Naudé Centre for Public Theology at Stellenbosch University, in collaboration with the Desmond & Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, hosted the "Re-enactment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Faith Hearing". This consultation, co-chaired by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu, placed specific focus on reconciliation in a post-TRC South Africa, revisiting the commitments and recommendations made by faith communities during the TRC process of 1997. This article is adapted from the presentation made on behalf of the Jewish faith community by Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, Chief Rabbi of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues of South Africa.

National reconciliation in South Africa requires focus and development of three areas.

Firstly, poverty alleviation and reducing the gap between the various levels of financial means across society is crucial and urgent. This is imperative, both from a moral point of view, to assist people escaping the awful ravages of poverty, but also from a perspective of social cohesion. There cannot be long term social stability in a country where the gap between those who have and those who do not is extreme.

Secondly, national reconciliation and social cohesion depend on articulating a shared moral vision for the future. This vision must relate to universal moral values that all South Africans share in common. Through such a shared vision people are brought together to work towards a common purpose and are inspired by a higher cause of creating a country based on certain precious values.

Thirdly, social cohesion and national reconciliation depend on tolerance and respect of differences between communities who have diverse views of the world and diverse perspectives on events and society. This tolerance goes to the heart of creating a South Africa which is non-racial and non-sexist, one which embraces the diversity of all of our peoples.

The efforts of the South African Jewish community over the last twenty years have been directed towards addressing these three strategic imperatives as goals of national reconciliation

and social cohesion. This submission sets out our efforts in this regard, as well as concerns that we have in respect of certain challenges that have arisen in recent times with regard to national reconciliation.

1. Poverty alleviation and humanitarian outreach

I have served as Chief Rabbi since 1 January 2005 and in the last almost ten years, one of the things that have surprised me almost more than any other is the sheer number of humanitarian outreach project led by members of the Jewish community. There are obviously too many to mention within the confines of this submission. To give a sense of the scale of variety, a short overview of some selected initiatives can be found in an appendix of this document [*not reproduced here – ed.*].

2. Shared Moral Vision: The Bill of Responsibilities

I first presented the idea of The Bill of Responsibilities to then Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, and thereafter led the drafting process of The Bill of Responsibilities, with the support and involvement of the National Religious Leaders Forum and interacting with the Department of Education. The Bill of Responsibilities is an important document for our country because it articulates a clear value system and can make an important contribution to social cohesion between various communities. It seeks to bring to life the values of the Bill of Rights by reframing each right as a responsibility. The Bill of Responsibilities has now been included as part of the school curriculum in the Life Orientation subject (see Appendix).

Sceptics will say that the Bill of Responsibilities can achieve nothing. Words are cheap. Lip-service means nothing. These are the conventional wisdoms, but they are wrong. They presume that the importance of something is measured by its market price. Oxygen is also cheap, but we cannot live without it. Words are the oxygen of human identity on every level, whether emotional, intellectual, social, moral or spiritual. We think, speak, pray, conceptualise and communicate with words.

Words create worlds. Human beings are unique in the natural world in that we do not only experience reality but we construct it with our words as we try to understand the world around us. The Book of Genesis says that one of the first things that Adam and Eve did was to give names to the animals. In fact, we even construct our day-to-day reality through our own internal conversations and 'self-talk'. Our human relationships are also constructed through words we communicate; good relationships through kind words, bad relationships through cruel words. The way that we think about other people is also constructed by our 'self-talk' and what we say and hear from others. That's why according to Judaism one of the very worst sins is to speak badly about other people.

The modern world in particular is influenced by words. There is a constant deluge of words coming at us from the news media, print or electronic, the internet is awash with words and we are constantly bombarded with advertising slogans screaming at us from every billboard and from virtually every piece of paper we encounter. All of these words construct reality for us and for our children. Our children are growing up in an ever more complex world where they are being influenced by the words of so many people in a dynamic and ever-changing environment. The Bill of Responsibilities is an exciting initiative aiming to provide our children with a set of truly valid and valuable words that can hopefully compete with all the other messages. It is an attempt to help our children construct their reality with the values of human rights, duty, integrity, compassion, giving and concern for others instead of the values of Hollywood.

At the beginning of time before creation the Book of Genesis says that there was "chaos and void, and darkness over the abyss". The enterprise of building human civilization is about bringing order and light to the "chaos and void". Words create the moral universe that we occupy. The Talmud points out that G-d created the universe with words. As described in the Book of Genesis, G-d opening words to begin creation were: "Let there be light". Words are important. Words create worlds.

This is what the Bill of Responsibilities is about. It is directed at our children who enter the world with open minds. There are so many forces constructing their reality for them. Their world-view on violence, sex and life itself is being constructed all the time by the loud and confident voices of the volatile and aggressive world around them. Into the noise of the bombardment of words from all sides enters the Bill of Responsibilities to give our children new words and a new spirit; the words and spirit of giving and contribution, of accountability and responsibility, of respect

and decency, of tolerance and understanding, of integrity and loyalty, of kindness and compassion.

3. Tolerance and Respect for Diversity

The interfaith movement in South Africa is an important part of addressing the third strategic imperative of national reconciliation, that of tolerance and respect for diversity. At the initiative of President Nelson Mandela, the National Religious Leaders Forum was established. Since then the official interfaith umbrella body of South Africa has changed its name and currently operates under the name of the National Religious Leaders Council, but whatever its name, its mandate is the promotion of good relationships between various faith communities. I think this stands as one of the singular achievements of the new South Africa. We live in a time where there is tension and even violence between faith communities in the world, and South Africa stands as a beacon of light. I am sure that I speak on behalf of my fellow religious leaders when I say that we treasure the positive and warm relationships that have developed over years of working together.

However, we cannot be complacent about this. I would like to use this submission to raise serious concerns regarding national reconciliation. One serious threat to social cohesion which directly impacts the Jewish community is that of the importing of the tensions of the Middle East conflict into South Africa.

It would be a great tragedy if we allow our South African dream of unity in diversity to be poisoned with the bitterness of the Middle East conflict, which we cannot hope to solve. To allow angry divisiveness, blatant hatred and racism into our society would betray the legacy of Nelson Mandela, who taught us through his words, and even more powerfully through his life, that we can create a South Africa of love and respect in spite of seemingly deep divisions.

I would like to use this opportunity to call upon all fellow religious and political leaders, and indeed all South Africans, to join hands in the spirit of friendship and brotherhood, in spite of our differences, and particularly at a time which is so emotionally charged such as this, and to reaffirm our loyalty and commitment to the South African dream of a society suffused with tolerance, respect and dignity. Let us show the world the beauty of our South African dream of unity in spite of diversity. We need to export our South African dream, not to import the nightmares of the Middle East here. With the right of free speech comes the responsibility to treat our fellow South Africans, and indeed all human

beings, with dignity and respect. It is in this context that it is so important that we all join hands to lower the levels of animosity that exist between the two sides of this conflict. In particular, the Jewish and Muslim communities of South Africa have strong and opposing views of how to interpret the conflict in the Middle East. Both of our communities need to respect the other and indeed, all South Africans, and need to foster an atmosphere of tolerance and human dignity, within which we can all engage in these discussions.

The Jewish and Muslim communities have over the years made, and continue to make enormous contributions to the betterment of South African society. Neither of these two communities should at any stage feel alienated or marginalised because of their identity or their religious or political views. Indeed no South African should ever feel marginalised or alienated because of their identity or religious or political views. We need to remind ourselves at a time of heightened emotions

such as this that with the right to freedom of expression comes the responsibility to engage with every single human being with dignity and with respect.

But the issue is broader than just tension between South African Jews and Muslims. Unfortunately, dialogue and protests have often descended into outright hate speech and vitriolic racism, which threaten the most precious values of the New South Africa. We need to find a way of unapologetically defending our own opinions, while at the same time respecting the right of others to disagree, and to even disagree strongly. No opinions should delegitimised. Most South African Jews believe earnestly in the justice of the cause and actions of the State of Israel. We are democratically and morally entitled to this opinion. Others are equally free to disagree but not to demonize supporters of Israel. Both sides of the debate need to acknowledge the dignity and indeed legitimacy of their ideological opponents on this issue.



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A BILL OF RESPONSIBILITIES FOR THE YOUTH OF SOUTH AFRICA

Preamble

I accept the call to responsibility that comes with the many rights and freedoms that I have been privileged to inherit from the sacrifice and suffering of those who came before me. I appreciate that the rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa are inseparable from my duties and responsibilities to others. Therefore I accept that with every right comes a set of responsibilities.

This Bill outlines the responsibilities that flow from each of the rights enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to equality

The right to equality places on me the responsibility to:

- treat every person equally and fairly, and
- not to discriminate unfairly against anyone on the basis of race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language or birth

South Africa is a diverse nation, and equality does not mean uniformity, or that we are all the same. Our country's motto: 'IKE E: /XARRA /KE, meaning "Diverse people unite", calls on all of us to build a common sense of belonging and national pride, celebrating the very diversity which makes us who we are. It also calls on us to extend our friendship and warmth to all nations and all the peoples of the world in our endeavour to build a better world.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to human dignity

The right to human dignity places on me the responsibility to:

- treat people with reverence, respect and dignity
- be kind, compassionate and sensitive to every human being, including greeting them warmly and speaking to them courteously.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to life

The right to life places on me the responsibility to:

- protect and defend the lives of others
- not endanger the lives of others by carrying dangerous weapons or by acting recklessly or disobeying our rules and laws.
- live a healthy life, by exercising, eating correctly by not smoking, abusing alcohol, or taking drugs, or indulging in irresponsible behaviour that may result in my being infected or infecting others with communicable diseases such as HIV and AIDS.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to family or parental care

This right expects me to:

- honour and respect my parents, and to help them,
- be kind and loyal to my family, to my brothers and sisters, my grandparents and all my relatives.
- recognise that love means long-term commitment, and the responsibility to establish strong and loving families.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to education

The right to education places on me the responsibility to:

- attend school regularly, to learn, and to work hard,
- cooperate respectfully with teachers and fellow learners and
- adhere to the rules and the Code of Conduct of the school.

and concurrently places on my parents and caregivers the responsibility to:

- ensure that I attend school and receive their support

and places on my teachers the responsibility to:

- promote and reflect the culture of learning and teaching in giving effect to this right

My responsibility in ensuring the right to work

This right carries with it the responsibility for all learners, parents, caregivers and teachers to:

- work hard and do our best in everything we do.
- recognise that living a good and successful life involves hard work, and that anything worthwhile only comes with effort.
- This right must never be used to expose children to child labour.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to freedom and security of the person

The right is upheld by my taking responsibility for:

- not hurting, bullying, or intimidating others, or allowing others to do so, and
- solving any conflict in a peaceful manner.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to own property

The right to own property places on me the responsibility to:

- respect the property of others.
- take pride in and protect both private and public property, and not to take what belongs to others.
- give generously to charity and good causes, where I am able to do so.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to freedom of religion, belief and opinion

The right to freedom of conscience requires me to:

- allow others to choose and practice the religion of their choice, and to hold their own beliefs and opinions, without fear or prejudice.
- respect the beliefs and opinions of others, and their right to express these, even when we may strongly disagree with these beliefs and opinions. That is what it means to be a free democracy.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to live in a safe environment

This right assumes the responsibility to:

- promote sustainable development, and the conservation and preservation of the natural environment.
- protect animal and plant-life, as well as the responsibility to prevent pollution, to not litter, and to ensure that our homes, schools, streets and other public places are kept neat and tidy.
- In the context of climate change, we are also obliged to ensure we do not waste scarce resources like water and electricity.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to citizenship

The right to citizenship expects that each of us will be good and loyal South African citizens. This means that we are responsible for:

- obeying the laws of our country,
- ensuring that others do so as well, and
- contributing in every possible way to making South Africa a great country.

My responsibility in ensuring the right to freedom of expression

The right to free expression is not unlimited, and does not allow us to:

- express views which advocate hatred, or are based on prejudices with regard to race, ethnicity, gender or religion.
- We must therefore take responsibility to ensure this right is not abused by ourselves or others, to not tell or spread lies, and to ensure others are not insulted or have their feelings hurt.

Conclusion

I accept the call of this Bill of Responsibilities, and commit to taking my rightful place as an active, responsible citizen of South Africa. By assuming these responsibilities I will contribute to building the kind of society which will make me proud to be a South African.

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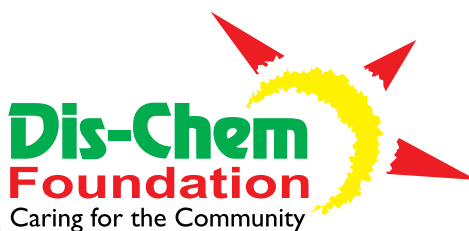
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THE YIZKOR BOOK OF RAKISHOK AND ENVIRONS

*

Naomi Musiker

Rakishok is situated in North-Eastern Lithuania near the Latvian border. In the early 20th Century, vibrant Jewish communities existed in the town and in various towns all within a fifty-km radius of it, namely Salok, Utian and Kupishek. Further afield were Poswohl, Ponevezh and Vilkomir, all in the north east of the country. Prior to World War II, Rakishok had a Jewish community of about a thousand families, accounting for perhaps half the population of the town. It was one of the first towns occupied by the Germans when they attacked Russia in 1941 and it was bombed immediately after the declaration of war on 22 June. By 1944, all traces of the Jewish population had been eradicated.

In 1951 the Rakisher Society of Johannesburg, founded in 1912, resolved to prepare for publication a Yizkor book commemorating the life and death of the Jews of Rakishok and the surrounding villages of Kamai, Abel, Ponydel, Anisishok, Skopishok, Sivenishok, Ozerena, Dusat, Ponemunok, Svados and other neighboring villages. The Society sent out an appeal to all *landsleit* for documents, letters, photographs, information, articles and monographs relating to the history of Jewish life in these centres. A questionnaire was also distributed regarding pre-World War II population size, communal institutions, individual characteristics of each town and particulars regarding survivors.

The Yizkor Book appeared in 1952, as part of the marking of the 40th anniversary of the Johannesburg Rakisher Society's founding. A

monumental record, it detailed, in 626 pages of essays, sketches, articles and illustrations, the life and history of the Jewish community of Rakishok and neighboring villages. It was in preparation for two years under the editorship of Meilach Bakalczuk-Felin, working with a committee. "The pattern of life in Rakishok was similar to that of many smaller-town Lithuanian Jewries", wrote the editor in his preface, 'Here Jews lived as closely-knit, separate units, often discriminated against and not less often in fear'.

The purpose of the book was to draw the pattern of Jewish life in those villages, for "a book is still the most enduring memorial to a past that has perished." Some fifty contributors depict the wide-ranging activities of an energetic community whose survivors are spread throughout the world. Writers such as Levi Shalit (a survivor of the concentration camps), J. Batnitzky, Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz and B. Stein cover the subject from a general and historical point of view; Chief Rabbi Israel Abrahams, R. Feldman, Z. Feldman and B.I. Kriel, among others, describe the town as they remembered it. Other contributors deal with the town's personalities, institutions, trade and cultural activities. The most moving section is probably that dealing with the destruction of the town, based on the evidence assembled by Bakalczuk-Felin of M. Rotholz-Kur, Gisa Levin, Herzl Ben-Yehuda and individual letters from Jewish community members to relatives overseas.

The book includes intimately written reminiscences, a hundred pages 'in memoriam', rare photographs and a symbolic woodcut by Herman Wald as frontispiece. The book was described as 'a most impressive achievement by a group of people who wished to hand down a memory of a community that perished in war and terror'.¹

One contribution is an article by Reb Moshe Katz, later to become minister of the Ophirton Hebrew Congregation. He describes his tenure at the *heder metukan* (reformed

Naomi Musiker, a veteran contributor to Jewish Affairs and long-serving member of its Editorial Board, has contributed numerous biographical articles for the Dictionary of SA Biography and the Standard Encyclopedia of Southern Africa and, as an indexer, has worked for some of South Africa's leading publishers and indexed many important reference works. She has held the position of archivist at the SA Jewish Board of Deputies since 1992.

cheder) which he ran for a brief period in Rakishok before World War I. Sarah Spivak writes about the *Kultur-Liga* in the town, founded in 1919 and supported by the *Arbeter Yugend* (Working Youth) who were greatly influenced by the Russian Revolution. The *Kultur-Liga* established a library, a *Yiddishefolkshul* and adult education classes. After 1923, the Lithuanian government banned the *Kultur-Liga* because of its leftist ties, with its leaders being arrested and the library closed. A sports organization was established as a front for Jewish socio-cultural activity. Later, the Society of *Liebhobber fun Vissen* (Lovers of Knowledge) was established with Yiddish intellectuals more acceptable to the Lithuanian authorities. This Society succeeded in reopening the library and the confiscated books were returned.

Another strong organization was Maccabi, also established after World War I and the publication of the Balfour Declaration. It was a Zionist organization which, in addition to sporting activities, catered for cultural and recreational needs, including the teaching of Hebrew, Jewish history and Yiddish literature. There was an amateur dramatic group and an orchestral group of violinists, a clarinet player and a balalaika player, among others.²

The highlight of the Rakisher Society 40th anniversary commemorations took place in July 1954 at a dinner held in the Selborne Hall, attended by 500 guests. Ralph Aarons, chairman of the Society, presided. Among the numerous speakers were Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz, Councilor Hymie Miller, Mr BA Klipin on behalf of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies and Z Infeld on behalf of the SA Zionist Federation. Greetings were brought from various *Landmanschaften* and other Jewish institutions. Rabbi Rabinowitz surprised everyone by addressing the audience in Yiddish (as he pointed out, for the first time in this country). He spoke in the most glowing terms of the *Rakisher Landsmanschaften*, who had set an example which others could well emulate. "Rakishik may be dead, but its memory lives in the heart of every Rakisher", he said. The evening was concluded by some sketches of Jewish life by the actor Jacob Mansdorf and by the rendering of some Yiddish songs by Cantor S Mandel.³

With the passing of years, the Rakisher Yizkor Book has become a rare item of Jewish Africana. Thanks to the generosity of Ethel and Yerachmiel (Ralph) Aarons, a few copies were donated to the SA Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, where they are regarded as amongst its most treasured items. In addition, Ethel Aarons donated various photographs of great historical value concerning the Rakishok community of the early 20th Century.

It became increasingly necessary over time

to provide an English translation of the Yizkor Book for descendants of Jewish emigrants who have lost familiarity with written and spoken Yiddish but still feel a bond with their forebears. This task was entrusted by the editor, David Sandler, to Bella Golubchik, daughter of Ethel and Ralph Aarons. Golubchik describes in the foreword how she watched the book being assembled by members of the *Rakisher Landmanschaft* in the dining room of her parents' home in Mayfair, Johannesburg, prior to the editing process by Bakalczuk-Felin. The task was therefore a labor of love for her.

Sandler's initial aim, to publish the complete Yizkor-Book of Rakishok and Environs in English, was forestalled by JewishGen Inc, who informed him that they had already translated about 80% of the book. Sandler decided to assist JewishGen with translations and illustrations and confine his own publication to the Memorial Section of the book, originally covering pages 539 to 620 of the volume and now renumbered in 82 pages. There is a reproduction of the original 1952 Preface by Bakalczuk-Felin followed by an alphabetical index of those remembered.

Sandler, in his foreword, mentions that he also intends to publish a companion volume of his own compilation, entitled *Our Litvak and South African Jewish Inheritance*, hopefully to appear in 2015. JewishGen.Inc and the Yizkor Book Project have produced online a Table of Contents of their forthcoming translation of the Memorial Book of Rokiskis. This may be viewed at www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/roksikis.html

An examination of Golubchik's translated text reveals an earnest desire on her part to do justice to the original text by an extremely literal, word by word rendition. Where she is uncertain of the exact meaning, an alternative meaning is provided in brackets. The text is thus faithfully adhered to but frequently appears strange and stilted to the reader. The photographs have not reproduced well but were not of high quality in the original volume. The entries in the memorial section were submitted by families of the deceased, most of who were murdered at Rakishok and surrounding areas in 1941 or in the remaining years of the war. There are some entries commemorating those who died during World War I. A few entries pay tribute to those who died in South African towns, having been fortunate enough to escape the horrors of World War II.

The book is a valuable contribution to those seeking to trace their family histories. The editor, David Sandler and the translator, Bella Golubchik are to be commended for undertaking this momentous task with such dedication. Their efforts help ensure that the memory and achievements of Lithuanian Jewry will be preserved.

Translation of the Memorial (In Remembrance) Section of the Yizkor-Book of Rakishok and Environs, originally published in Yiddish in 1952 by the Rakisher Landmanschaft of Johannesburg, South Africa. Translated by Bella Golubchik. Compiled by David Solly Sandler, Perth, The Editor, 2014, pp569 to 620 of the original volume.

NOTES

1. 'Book is a monument to community Germans destroyed', *Rand Daily Mail* 3 August 1953. The author is given as L.S. (Levi Shalit?).
2. Cedric Ginsberg, 'Rakishok - the biggest Shtetl', *Jewish Affairs*, February 1988, pp8-10.
3. 'Rakisher Society celebrates 40th Anniversary', *Zionist Record*, 2 July 1954; *SA Jewish Times* 2 July 1954.

THE CANOPY: WARRIORS FOR JUSTICE, FACING THE TICKING TIME BOMB

*

Suzanne Belling

Dr Harold Serebro has distinguished himself in many walks of life – initially as a compassionate gastroenterologist, who went on to apply his knowledge and the Hippocratic Oath not only when administering treatment, but implementing its principles to all facets of his personal life and career. This career incorporated his being senior executive director of the giant international Allied Electronics Corporation (the Altron Group), and a distinguished author, specializing in the Holocaust, Nazi hunter and campaigner for human rights. Dr Serebro has an honorary doctorate in economics and business science management from the University of the Free State and has served as a trustee of the State President's Empowerment Award Programme of South Africa and of the Duke of Edinburgh's Trust for many years.

The author's empathy with suffering on every level is depicted on each page of his latest book, *The Canopy: Warriors for justice, facing the ticking time bomb*. In this riveting and disturbing magnum opus, fact is incorporated with fiction, lending credence to the utterance of Dori, one of the characters, "Hatred has always been the curse of the Jews..." This time-proved dynamic, experienced by the Jews of Persia, the cruelty of the Amalekites, the genocide perpetrated by the barbaric Nazis under Adolf Hitler - countless historic atrocities over the ages all coming full circle to the leader of Iran (formerly Persia) Ahmed Ahmadinejad, are woven into a terrifying tapestry illustrating the victimization of the Jewish people, with their salvation in the State of Israel.

The book begins with a tribute to Rosa

Robota Gates who, with three other women, Ella Gertner, Regina Sapirstein and Estera Weisblum, slave labourers in a German explosives factory during World War II, hid explosives in their clothing and smuggled out enough to blow off the roof of one of the crematoria in Auschwitz-Birkenau while the Soviet Army was advancing towards the death camp. Their actions provided the catalyst for the Nazis to destroy the four other crematoria in an attempt to cover up their crimes, resulting in countless lives being saved. Rosa was caught and tortured, but refused to give information about her accomplices. However, the Nazis found out and Rosa and the three other women were hanged only eleven days before the Soviet Army liberated the camp. The book is dedicated to the memory of these heroines.

Rosa's final words were "Be strong and brave", a credo adopted by Holocaust survivors, led by Lazar from Kiev, who made his way to the Holy Land after the victory of the Allies. Lazar (renamed Yadin) – not his real name – was determined to hunt down Nazi perpetrators of the despicable acts against humanity. He became a highly professional soldier in the Israel Defense Force and trained other survivors in a crack team to travel the globe in efforts to mete out justice to wartime criminals. His team included Remona, a beautiful young woman saved by a female camp guard who took a fancy to her, gave her a new identity and brought her to Berlin before herself being killed in the bombing of the German capital. Remona joined a group of Jewish refugees and survivors, made her way via southern Italy to Palestine and joined the Israel Defense Force. Her bravery in the face of torment and her faith in G-d molded her into a vital force in

Suzanne Belling is an author, journalist and member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs.

the retribution of the war criminals.

Then there was Hans, from Amsterdam, who was victimized by his former school friends when they became part of the Hitler Youth. After a series of spine-chilling episodes and his eventual escape to Palestine, clutching his treasured mezuzah, he became a skilled helicopter pilot and was recruited to Yadin's team. In Israel, he became known as Dori.

Awraham Gurt, who became Avi, was skilled in explosives and in operating behind enemy lines. He, too, was a survivor from Holland and an asset to Israel and the team.

Gidi, who witnessed the murder of his father and older brother, was sent to Auschwitz and found himself cared for by Russian doctors. When he saw the truck with the Magen David of the Jewish Brigade and heard the shouts of "Am Yisrael Chai" and the sounds of the shofar, he joined other young Holocaust survivors in Italy at a training base used by the Irgun. He and his group eventually boarded an old ship to Israel. The passengers were described as "a boatload of human skeletons". A linguist proficient in Russian, Polish, German, Yiddish, English and Hebrew, he was enlisted in Yadin's group.

Meantime, Serebro tells of his friendship through school and university with another doctor, identified only as Brett, from whom he was separated through distance and circumstance.

While Serebro changed his career to that of a businessman, mainly for family reasons Brett, in the secret part of his life, both in United States and as part of the Israeli crack team, narrated to his friend the experiences of the team and their successful hunting down of Nazi war criminals. This provided much of the material for the book, although related

in the form of a novel. The characters were larger than life, but the author keeps them unidentifiable.

Serebro in turn shared with his friend the transition in South Africa, the release of Nelson Mandela, the 1992 referendum, the assassination of Chris Hani and Codesa until, finally, "On the tip of Africa, without bloodshed, on election day, Mandela became President of South Africa in a Government of National Unity."

Back in the Middle East, the team's intelligence helped locate an Iranian-managed nuclear laboratory in Syria attempting to produce an atomic bomb. They tracked down a key scientist and organized his defection to the United States in the final stages of manufacturing the bomb.

The modern Amalek responsible for this was former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his 21st Century allies. They were thwarted by the brilliantly planned and executed bombing of the nuclear facility.

To appreciate this expertly conceived and written work, one has to concentrate and understand how the various pieces fit together. It is by no means leisure reading, but is both thought-provoking and disturbing, bringing about a new understanding of both the historical and 21st Century obstacles and dangers faced by Jews everywhere. It would make a brilliant and enlightening movie, and the author is to be congratulated on this contribution to Jewish literature and on documenting the ongoing plight of the Jewish people.

The Canopy: Warriors for Justice, Facing the Ticking Time Bomb by Harold Serebro, Bilbury Lane, Bath, UK, 2015.

MUIZENBERG – THE STORY OF THE SHTETL BY THE SEA

*

Ralph Zulman

This is a fascinating account of a place that for many years was the favorite and fashionable annual holiday resort of many South African Jews. The author, a teacher, lecturer, researcher and social historian, has

Mr Justice Ralph Zulman, a long-serving member of the editorial board of Jewish Affairs and a frequent contributor to its Reviews pages, is a former Judge of the Appeal Court of South Africa.

made every effort to trace and acknowledge sources and has made extensive research to ensure accuracy.

The book consists of nine chapters (each detailing the period that it covers), acknowledgements, collections, institutions, various interesting photographs, bibliography, newspapers and periodical references, directories, a glossary and an Index. Each chapter is accompanied by a number of

interesting photographs of the period. In Chapter One, a perhaps little-known early history of the place between 1880 to 1903 is recounted. The activities of Isidore Hirsch, who is considered to be the founder of Muizenberg, and his conflict with his nemesis, Professor James Gill, is described. Hirsch acquired the Farmers Peck Inn in 1880. His wife, Rosa, established herself as a cook par excellence, and stories of her talent were spread far and wide. On Sundays, Cecil John Rhodes would often ride out to Muizenberg on horseback with a group of friends and enjoy the fine dishes that she had prepared. The chapter ends with the death of Rhodes in Muizenberg in March 1902, the announcement of which ensured that the name of Muizenberg would 'reverberate' all over the world.

Chapter Two deals with the years 1904-1926, during which period the Muizenberg and Kalk Bay Hebrew Congregation was established. At the turn of the century, there were no facilities for Orthodox Jews, who had to send to Wynberg for their kosher meat and walk to Retreat for a *minyan*. Lily Guinsberg, a member of one of the early Jewish families who settled in Muizenberg, left an account of her family's role in the formation of the congregation. The author reveals the involvement of those who would form its first committee. On 14 February 1914, the Reverend A Bender laid the foundation stone of the new synagogue, to seat 400 congregants.

Amongst the first Jews to settle in Muizenberg after 1900 were Chana and Abraham Krikler, who established the first kosher hotel there in 1914. At the end of 1916, a private kosher boarding house, run by a Mrs Goldberg, was opened. In February 1918, Muizenberg Jewry hosted the SA Zionist Conference, which was held in Muizenberg for the first time. On 1 January 1919 Reverend Sam Michelson, who had arrived in Cape Town from London with his young wife, was appointed minister, chazzan, *shochet* and Hebrew teacher. He was succeeded in June 1924 by Reverend E S Walt.

The first rabbinical appointment held by the present Chief Rabbi of the United Kingdom, Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis, was that of the Muizenberg Hebrew Congregation (over the High Holidays in 1981). During his brief visit to Johannesburg in August 2014, he was presented with a copy of this book by the author.

The magnet of Muizenberg at the time was probably the efficient train service, the safe bathing and the endless miles of soft white sands, not to mention the fresh '*luft*'. From 1921, therapeutic baths could be taken at the Astoria Hotel and Hydro. The hotel was advertised as a "High Class Private Residential Hotel." It was next door to the Elite Bioscope

and the nearest hotel to the Wooden Pavilion, where one could hear stirring music by visiting bands and which drew huge crowds. For many years there was only one pharmacy. Dankers Stores was the only family outfitter. There was huge excitement at the end of 1919 when the Solomon brothers offered flying trips from Muizenberg Aerodrome. The highlight for many who visited Muizenberg was to watch the fishermen haul in their heavily laden fish nets on the beach. The most famous person to come to Muizenberg in those years was probably Agatha Christie.

By 1925, 28 hotels and boarding houses had been established. The Alexandra Hotel was one of the most popular, and in season was always packed to capacity. Other well-known hotels were the Belgrave (run by Dave and Bertha Jonas), the Mountain View, the Queens, the Royal, the Seacliffe and the Seacombe Private Hotel.

Chapter Three covers the period 1927-1935. The wooden pavilion, one of the landmarks built in 1911, was demolished in 1929 when the new concrete Pavilion, with an accompanying promenade, was built. At that time, too, the unique colored bathing boxes were erected. The famous Snakepit, no doubt the birth of many a '*shidach*', also came into being.

Chapter Four introduces the reader to the amazing '*balabostes*' – the women of Muizenberg. Chapter Five details the 1941-1945 wartime period, Chapter Six describes what is called the 'the golden heydays' of the '*shtetl*' and Chapter Seven, entitled 'The decade of change', covers the years 1953-1962. In Chapter Eight (1963-1972), we are told that Muizenberg is no longer "the darling of the masses", while Chapter Nine (1973-1980) describes Muizenberg as the "Cinderella of Cape Town". It was certainly not the '*luft*' that led to the town's decline. Perhaps it was the short season and the emergence of more fashionable holiday resorts.

Muizenberg, the story of the shtetl by the sea is a comprehensive and well written history. Reading it brought back many happy childhood memories for me, and I am sure that it will do the same for other readers.

Muizenberg, the story of the shtetl by the sea by Hedy I Davis, 263 pp., 48pp. illus., paperback, Johannesburg, 2014. For details of where to buy the book, see the author's interesting website: www.muizenbergshtetl.com.



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and well over
the Fast



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new POETRY

Dream Subverted

Benighted Nations unyielding in your Argus-eyed façade.
Your unfounded pride
Like a tower you raise
High above the city;
Fraudulent deceivers possessed by false hope,
betrayed trust.
And behind your dark portals lie your creators,
Prisoners of your discontent.

They are more compromised than you,
Stripped of their honesty, of their virtue,
Bereft of their compassion, of their humanity,
And of all hope.
Nary a glimmer of an honest soul
In this oppressive air —
Captive to their fear.

The founders' dreams now re-forged by your delirium,
Eroding all people's lives.
Millions dead, ignored in the name of Zion's persecution.
And with each passing day—night.
Yes the night, its inky darkness
Possesses our minds
Without limits on time or hate.

Bigotry is the coin of your corruption.
Boldfaced lies are your devalued currency.
Blinkered minds eschew the simple truth.
Fairness, honesty and right do you abjure.
But, yet, there is a voice almost inaudible
That somehow finds an ear, a mind, a soul.
Can this be the faint stirrings of awakening God?

The sun, the enervated sun,
Its feeble light awakes the suppressed tide of righteousness.
Undertones of blood, of marrow,
The dashing of feeble wings against grotty windows
Like weak flashes that melt the pervasive darkness within.
Voices raised above the cacophony of ignorance and hate,
Can we yet arise in time to preserve chaste mankind's fate?

Rodney Mazinter

Mein Leben

Mein Leben is shoin a lange tzait
Fil lebens-bilder zain varby
A tsvaite Milchoma gedaint mit
Shreklige Gesheeshish!
Tsu lernen fun die Shoa un Durg derkenen
der veitiken fun Falorene Neshomas!
Vie ken a yugentlech dos iber leben?
Es vet stayn in unser hertzen bis-vanet
Mir gain tsu Yenem Velt

Maurice Skikne

(MY LIFE: My Life is now a long time/Many life images have flitted by/A second War in childhood days remembered/as shocking scary events!/To learn of the Shoah and acknowledge/the pain of lost Souls/How can adolescence survive that?/These will stay in our hearts until we enter the World to Come).

Mountains in Mourning (composed in the wake of the Table Mountain fires, 2015)

Fires, Flames
Furious .. Feckless
Reckless .. Ruthless .. Fuming .. Blazing
Grabbing .. Gripping .. Gorging .. Raging
Cinders .. Timbers .. Flattened ... Blackened
Wildlife, Earth-life
Burning .. Dying
Broken .. Stricken .. Parched ... Scorched
Scarred .. Charred .. Searing .. Smoking
Blistered .. Twisted ... Trampled ... Torched
Manic, savage devastation
Ruthless, merciless ruination

And when the water
Douses the heat
It cries with the rocks
That stand stark
And weep

Charlotte Cohen

Erratum: In the Pesach 2015 of *Jewish Affairs*, Charlotte Cohen's name was accidentally omitted from the bottom of her poem 'Nothingness'. We apologise for the error.

READERS' LETTERS

*

A few observations regarding Bev May's review of Reform Rabbi Dana Kaplan's book (Pesach, 2014):

Firstly, the re-evaluation of negating most particularistic ritual within Judaism (*Kashrut*, *kippot*, etc.) did not spring from within Reform Judaism in North America - I was there and saw it happen. It came about because of the influence of Reconstructionism and its founder, Mordecai Kaplan. Kaplan's book *Judaism as a Civilization* has this message. Most Reform Rabbis took that message to heart. It influenced the most serious Reform thinker, Rabbi Eugene Borowitz, whose book *Renewing the Covenant* has many citations from and references to Kaplan.

At the same time, there has been a tremendous effort to refashion Judaism as just one more Protestant denomination within the overall American religion, with congregations choosing rabbis on the basis of how well they will fit in at the Rotary Club or a United Clergy for Social Justice organization, rather than for their knowledge of Jewish law and ability to inspire others to learn it.

Finally, there is no mention of the way individual Reform Rabbis, and sometimes the whole movement (at least in the USA) have gone along with 'Liberal' espousing of the 'Palestinian' cause, and other leftist causes harmful to Jews in general. The latter would include inviting Bill Clinton to be keynote convention speaker just after he had escaped, by one vote, being impeached for lying under oath before Congress.

David-Lloyd Klepper
Jerusalem

No such thing as a silly goose

Gabriel Sivan's story (Pesach, 2015) of the adventurous metallurgist and mineralogist Joachim Gans and his likely close relationship to mathematician and astronomer David ben Shlomo Gans (1541–1613) brings to mind the story of a possible descendant, another Shlomo Gans. This relationship is very possible as it is traditional among Ashkenazim to name children after deceased family members. For example, the full name of a mediaeval French rabbi was Meshullam ben Moses ben Ithiel ben Moses ben Kalonymous ben Meshullam ben Kalonymous ben Moses ben Kalonymous ben Ithiel ben Moses ben Meshullam ben Ithiel ben Meshullam – just four names in fourteen generations.

Furthermore, both Shlomos lived in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany - David ben Shlomo Gans in Lippstadt and Shlomo ben Sussman Gans in Minden on the Weser. Both David's grandfather, Seligmann, and Shlomo's father, Sussman, were moneylenders.

We know about the younger Shlomo Gans because he was the brother-in-law of Glückel of Hameln (1646–1742). In her memoirs, Glückel writes that one day her father-in-law, Joseph Hameln, went drinking with the wealthy Sussman Gans (worth 100 000 Reichsthalers) and they arranged to marry off their children. The next day, when Sussman had sobered up, he regretted the bargain. However, a deal was a deal and as the children were still too young to marry, he sent Shlomo off to Poland to study Talmud.

Soon afterwards, Sussman died. His wealthy widow married Feibisch Gans, and the fortune vanished. The young bridegroom returned to find his fortune reduced to a few hundred thalers. Joseph Hameln was of a mind to break off the match, but his wife reminded him that a deal was a deal; she did not want to shame Shlomo. Thus, the young couple were married.

Some years later, Feibisch married off his own son. Shlomo's suspicions were aroused at the great wealth displayed at the celebratory feast, including the sight

of much of his late father's silver plate. He thus quietly went into Feibisch's counting room and removed a box of written documents that he regarded as being his of right. Feibisch suspected Shlomo and went to law. Joseph Hameln took his son-in-law Shlomo's side and the resulting court case cost them 2000 reichsthalers apiece. Feibisch put Joseph in prison, and Joseph did the same to Feibisch a couple of times. They kept at it until Feibisch ran out of money, whereupon third parties persuaded them to go to the Beth Din.

Wrote Glückel, "The rabbis... came, they pondered the case at due length, but they accomplished nothing – except to depart with fat fees. One of the rabbinical judges, from Gelnhausen, made off with enough to build for himself a handsome study-room; and he had painted on its wall three or four rabbis in their clerical hats, plucking the feathers from a goose (*gans*)".

Joseph later settled his daughter and Shlomo Gans in Hanover, where Shlomo achieved great wealth but died young.

Gwynne Schrire
Cape Town

In a footnote to her article 'On Writing the History of Oranjia, Cape Town's Jewish Orphanage' (Pesach, 2015), Veronica Belling unnecessarily belittles my own book *Memories of Oranjia*. In response, I wish to clarify my reasons for compiling and editing this book. As explained in my foreword, the aim of *Memories of Oranjia* was to provide a forum for former residents of Oranjia to share their memories. My hope was that by doing so, the children of Oranjia would feel better about themselves, as was the case when the children of Arcadia (previously The South African Jewish Orphanage) shared their memories in the Arcadia Centenary Book - *100 Years of Arc Memories*, published in 2006. As I wrote in the foreword of *More Arc Memories* (a second volume on Arcadia, published 2008): "The publication, distribution and sales of the Arc Centenary Book 100 Years of Arc Memories has been a catalyst, enabling many Old Arcadians and their families to 'come out' as it were, and to be proud that they were from Arcadia, and to make contact with their fellow Arcadians. I now sense that for many 'coming from Arcadia' is now a badge to be shown off with pride and that the sense of shame in being an orphanage child has somewhat dissipated".

The second purpose of this book (as with all previous books relating to South African Jewish orphans that I have brought out) was to raise funds for Oranjia and Arcadia. Published in July 2014, it has to date raised about R80 000 to that end. Copies are available from the author: sedsand@iinet.net.au.

The third purpose was to preserve the memories of the children of Oranjia and its history for posterity and to provide a legacy that the children of Oranjia could hand down to their children and grandchildren.

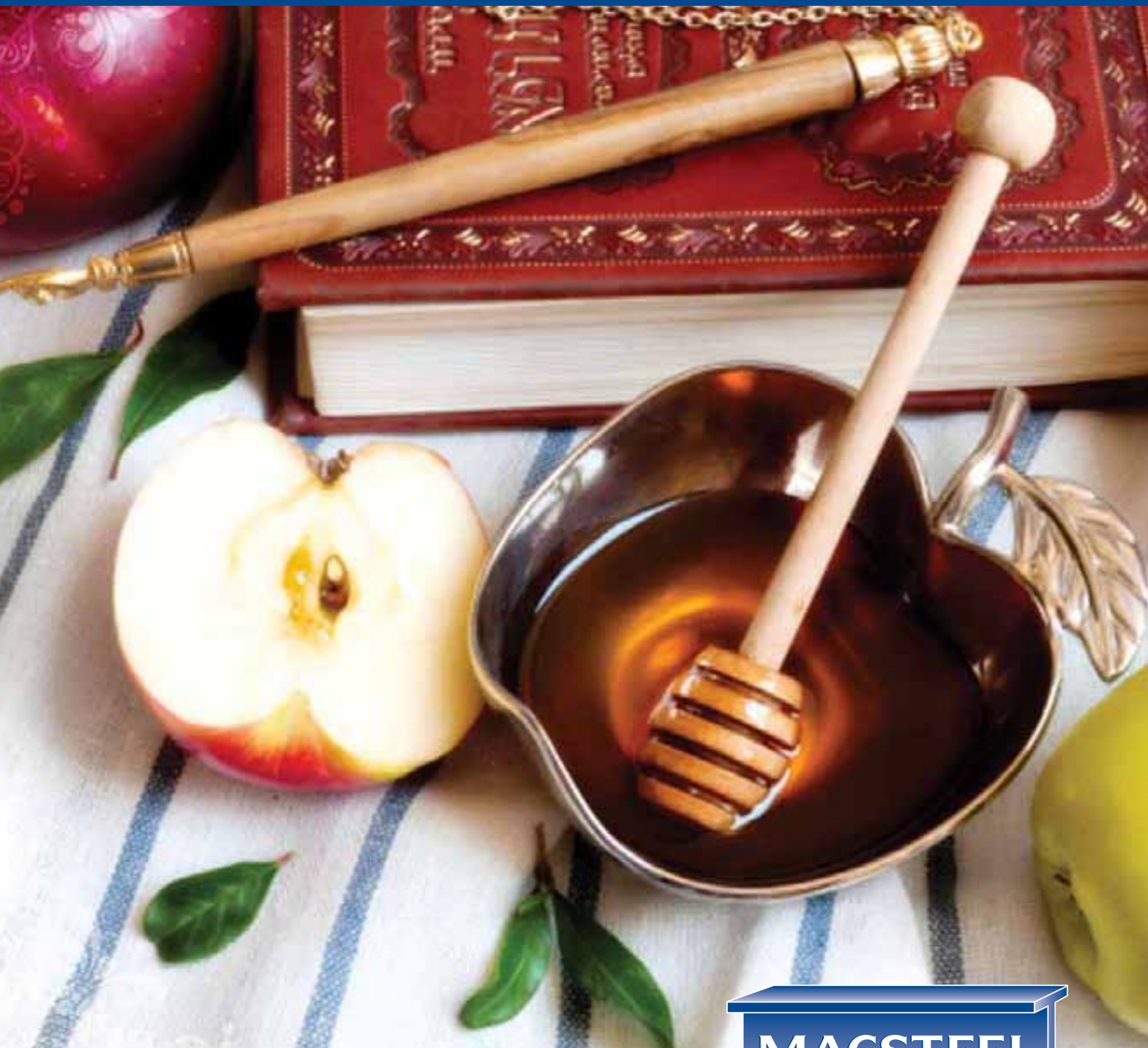
Veronica and I initially agreed to collaborate on the official book. In April 2014, however, Veronica informed me that according to the Oranjia committee's concept, there were sufficient memories of the children and they did not wish these memories to overwhelm the History section, the book's main purpose. I strongly disagreed with this. As I saw it, the committee wanted to *silence the children*, which hit a very raw nerve and spurred me on to publish their memories. In my reply, I wrote, "From my point of view the memories of the children of Oranjia and their feelings and wellbeing are much more important than the history of Oranjia and I have always felt that this should be the major focus of the book, with the history taking a backseat." I also made it clear that I was going to continue collecting the children's memories and publish *Memories of Oranjia*.

I wish the committee success with their official Oranjia centenary history. Their book, focusing on the history, and mine, focusing on the memories of the children, in my view complement one another perfectly.

David Solly Sandler
Perth, Australia

L'Shanah Torah

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