

WORLD MACHAL



# MACHAL

OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERS  
IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF  
INDEPENDENCE

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## OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERS IN ISRAEL'S WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

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מח"ל – מתנדבי חוץ לארץ במלחמת העצמאות

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## COUNTRIES FROM WHICH MACHAL CAME



Algeria	Ireland
Argentina	Italy
Australia	Kenya
Belgium	Libya
Brazil	Mexico
Bulgaria	Morocco
Canada	New Zealand
Chile	Nicaragua
China	Norway
Colombia	Panama
Costa Rica	Peru
Cuba	South Africa
Czechoslovakia	Spain
Denmark	Spanish Morocco
Ecuador	Sweden
Egypt	Switzerland
Finland	Tunisia
France	Turkey
Great Britain	United States of America
Holland	Uruguay
Hungary	Venezuela
India	

## FOREWORD

Israel's War of Independence, which lasted from the end of 1947 till the summer of 1949, can be divided into two main periods. The first began on November 30, 1947, the day after the United Nations adopted the resolution calling for the partition of the Land of Israel, and culminated on May 14, 1948, with the end of the British Mandate, the proclamation of the establishment of the State of Israel and the invasion of Israel by regular Arab armies. The second period began the very next day and ended with the signing of the last of a series of armistice agreements, the agreement with Syria, on July 20, 1949.

The military campaign conducted by the Haganah and, later, by the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), endeavored to make the utmost of the human and economic potential of the Yishuv (the Jewish community in the pre-state Land of Israel) and of the Jewish people throughout the world. Their efforts were directed to mobilizing military equipment and manpower in Israel and from the Diaspora. More than 20,000 of all those called up in the course of the war were newcomers to the land, recruited and organized by Haganah emissaries in Europe and in the camps in Cyprus where the British interned "illegal" immigrants. Most arrived in Israel after May 15, 1948 – that is, after British Mandatory rule had ended and the State of Israel had been established. This vital reinforcement was called Gachal, an acronym of the Hebrew term "*Giyus Chutz La'aretz*", or, literally, "Recruitment Outside-the-Land."

During this period approximately 3,500 overseas volunteers, mostly Jews, but non-Jews as well, were also recruited and integrated into the military network. Most of the volunteers were recently discharged soldiers who had served in the Allied armies during World War II. The name chosen, in the autumn of 1948, to designate this group was – "**Machal**", an acronym of the Hebrew words, "*Mitnadvay Chutz La'aretz*", "Volunteers from Abroad," **Overseas Volunteers**, or **Machalniks**, as they came to be known.

Machal was established through the organizational efforts of the Haganah and the Zionist movement to meet the urgent need for military manpower and to respond to the demand of newcomers and volunteers who were eager to come to the aid of the Yishuv and be part of the effort to create and defend a Jewish state.

The contribution of these volunteers was crucial to the strengthening of the IDF and to its achievements in decisive stages of the War of Independence.

This booklet does not aim to tell the story of the war per se, or to present a comprehensive history of Machal, but concentrates on describing the involvement and contribution of overseas volunteers who rallied to the aid of the Yishuv, thereby expressing their solidarity as Jews and as human beings.

Today, there is a constant stream of young overseas volunteers from all over the world who continue to come to Israel to serve in all branches of the IDF, many in combat units; a number have died in action.

Machal veterans living abroad maintain ties with Israel through **World Machal** and its affiliates in many countries.



*En route to Israel: A group of 25 South African volunteers from the Betar Zionist movement, together with refugees and staff at Ladispoli displaced persons camp, Italy, July 1948.*

## WHO WERE MACHAL?



During Israel's War of Independence some 3,500 volunteers, men and women, Jews and non-Jews, from 43 foreign countries, rallied to the defense of the Yishuv and the nascent Jewish state. Most of the overseas volunteers arrived during the second period of the war, after the British Mandate had ended. However, a considerable number enlisted in the Haganah, the Palmach and other underground forces, and were active in the struggle against the British even before the State of Israel was proclaimed on May 14, 1948.

The IDF General Staff's Manpower Branch defined Machal as: those who came to Israel to enlist in the IDF to help establish the state during the period of war, with the intention of returning to their lands of origin at the end of the war.

This definition, which had been determined while the fighting was in progress, was not all-inclusive and did not take into consideration the volunteers' lands of origin and other factors. When the fighting ended, and there were complaints from volunteers about not having been given due recognition and appreciation, the definition was broadened to emphasize the unique nature and special circumstances of the volunteer from abroad.

Over the years, a variety of definitions were formulated by the IDF Manpower Branch and by non-military groups as well. Today, the accepted definition of Machal is as follows: all those who left their permanent homes overseas anywhere in the world and enlisted voluntarily

in the defense of the Yishuv or of the fledgling Jewish state, and intended or were free to return to their lands of origin on completion of their service.

This definition includes those who manned the Aliyah Bet ships; students who arrived after World War II to study at the Hebrew University or the Technion and joined the defense forces on the spot; as well as those who came at the specific request of the Yishuv's institutions or of the IDF.

### **THE HAGANAH SWEARING-IN CEREMONY**

Zipporah (Borowsky) Porath, an American student, arrived at the Hebrew University for a one-year scholarship program, in November 1947. Caught up in the war, she enlisted in the Haganah, served as a medic during the siege of Jerusalem and, later, in Israel Air Force Intelligence.

Below is an excerpt from her book, "Letters from Jerusalem 1947-1948." (See Bibliography)

*Dear Mother, Dad and Naomi,*

*...While I was sitting one day in a student hangout, Café Brazil, someone I didn't know passed me a note setting a mysterious appointment with another unknown party, who asked if I would do my share to help defend Jerusalem. With typical impulsiveness I said, "Yes," never realizing what I was letting myself in for. The swearing-in ceremony was in the best cloak-and-dagger tradition and very impressive. A dark room in the basement of the Rehavia High School, with only a dim light shining on a table draped with a Jewish flag. Sitting behind the table were three men, their faces hidden in the shadows, who questioned me carefully. Then, confronted with a Bible and a pistol, I was sworn in...Only a select group had been chosen....and I was proud to have passed muster...Presto, we were part of an illegal army, the most unsoldier-like soldiers ever seen...*

*Love, Zippy*

Jerusalem, December 1947



## WHAT MOTIVATED THEM?

There are as many personal stories about overseas volunteers, and as many factors that motivated them, as the number of countries from which they came. Primarily, they were motivated by Jewish solidarity and concern for the security of the small Yishuv in its struggle for survival. Most had been soldiers in the armies of their countries of origin during World War II and felt the need to offer their military experience, skills and technical knowhow. Some were members of Zionist youth movements. They came with a sense of mission, with feelings of pride and privilege, knowing they were helping to create a state and defend a Jewish homeland.

Some, including non-Jews, were moved by the plight of the Jewish people. They had witnessed the calamity of the Holocaust and wanted to come to the aid of the beleaguered Yishuv. For some, their participation in the Yishuv's struggle was an expression of their anger at the British Empire and of anti-imperialism in general. Others believed that an independent and strong State of Israel was essential for the Western countries' need to maintain a presence to protect their interests in this important strategic region. And there were some who were motivated by a sense of adventure.

*Three Canadian Machalniks  
awaiting transportation to  
Israel at Grand Arenas  
displaced persons camp near  
Marseilles, France, July 1948.*

*Left to right:  
Mel Silver, Len Fein, and  
Sidney Leisure, who was killed  
in action in September 1948.*



## THE FIRST VOLUNTEERS

Even before the War of Independence, the Haganah recognized the need for guidance from professionally trained soldiers with battlefield experience to help transform the defense force into a full-fledged military organization. The need became even more acute with the outbreak of hostilities in the first period of the war, towards the end of 1947.

The first volunteers, some 240 men, operated within the framework of the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet, the organization bringing "illegal immigrants" to Mandatory Palestine. Most of these volunteers were Americans, 16 were



*Machalniks who arrived on the Pan York in August 1948. Most were posted to the 7th Brigade.*

*Back Row, left to right:*

*Jack Kesselman (U.S.), Dick Feurman (U.S.), Barry Ross (Canada), Sol Freeman (Canada), Louis Lourie (Canada), Luke Elias Paschkoff (U.S.).*

*Center Row, left to right:*

*Sheldon Schnite (U.S.), Harry Eisner (U.S.), Ivan Conn (England).*

*Front Row, left to right:*

*Paul Katz (U.S.), Al Feinberg (U.S.), Ralph Lowenstein (U.S.), Neil Goodman (U.S.).*

Canadians and there were several from Britain and other countries. Among them were U.S. Navy veterans of World War II who had just been discharged. Some had served in the Merchant Marine, a few had pre-war service, but a large number of them had no professional maritime experience.

The search for volunteers and the recruitment of crews was conducted mainly by word of mouth and by checking the employment bureaus where former naval and merchant-marine officers sought work. This search was carried out as covertly as possible, for fear that Britain would intervene, as she indeed did, and try to influence the U.S. government to put a halt to the recruitment and the sale of ships.

The volunteers, primarily the Americans and Canadians, helped to prepare and outfit the ships that became the "shadow navy" of the Mossad l'Aliyah Bet. Had the Mandatory Government arrested them, they would have faced trial for violating the Emergency Regulations forbidding illegal immigration, regulations carrying sentences of up to eight years' imprisonment and/or a fine of 10,000 Pounds Sterling.

Ten vessels were purchased in the U.S.: the "Josiah Wedgwood," "Haganah," "Hayim Arlosoroff," "Ben Hecht," "Hatikvah," "Exodus 1947," "Geula," "The Jewish State," "Kibbutz Galuyot," and "Atzmaut." Volunteers who had been recruited in 1946-1947 manned the ships, sailed them to Europe and, in most instances, continued on to Palestine with the "illegal immigrants". A substantial number of the volunteers were



*Bill Bernstein (U.S.), Aliyah Bet volunteer, Third Mate on "Exodus 1947", the first Machal casualty.*

captured by the British Navy and interned along with the “illegals” in the Cyprus detention camps. One of the volunteers, **Bill Bernstein**, an American, Third Mate of the “Exodus,” was beaten to death by British soldiers. He was the first Machal casualty.

At least half of the vessels purchased were obsolete, some of World War I vintage. Only the “Atzmaut” (“Pan York”) and “Kibbutz Galuyot” (“Pan Crescent”) were of any real value and could be described as merchant ships in the full sense of the word. Nevertheless, five of them went on to form the basis of the Israel Navy. The rest were rusty tubs making their final voyages. Four continued to serve Israel faithfully, even though they could hardly be called modern battleships. But they were the best available at the time. Those ten vessels, acquired and manned in the U.S., sailed for Aliyah Bet between June 1946 and January 1, 1948. They transported more than 32,000 people.

Most of the volunteers serving on the “illegal” vessels had just completed between two and five years of service in World War II. They could have gone on to study at universities fully financed by the U.S. government’s G.I. Bill of Rights; indeed, some were already doing just that. None of them had the slightest idea when they set sail how long the voyage would take or that they might end up in a British internment camp. Generally speaking, a volunteer’s service ranged from seven to 12 months. It began in the U.S. while the ship was being prepared for service, after which came the Atlantic crossing, followed by preparations in Europe to take aboard a large number of “illegal” immigrants, then the voyage in the Mediterranean Sea and finally arrest by the British and, usually, internment in Cyprus or at Atlit. The length of the journey depended on the point at which the volunteer joined the ship’s crew.

These volunteers made a tremendous contribution to the establishment of the “illegal immigration’s” shadow fleet, and were the main maritime force manning the ships purchased in the U.S.

## **"ILLEGAL" SHIPS PURCHASED IN THE U.S.**

**"Josiah Wedgwood"** (Beauharnois) was a Canadian corvette. It took on passengers near Savona, Italy, and arrived at Haifa on June 27, 1946. Its 1,257 passengers were interned at Atlit. Later, it served the Israel Navy as the warship "Hashomer," K-18.

**"Haganah"** (Norsyd) was also a Canadian corvette. Took on passengers at Sete, France. At sea, transferred the passengers to the "Biryah" (Akbel II), which was intercepted and towed to Haifa on July 1, 1946. Its 999 passengers were interned in Haifa. The ship sailed again, this time taking on passengers at Bakar, Yugoslavia, from where it sailed on July 24, 1946. It was intercepted five days later and taken to Haifa by the British Royal Navy. Its 2,678 passengers were interned. Later it, too, served the Israel Navy as a warship, K-20.

**"Haim Arlosoroff"** (Ulua) had been a revenue cutter and a U.S. Coast Guard ship. It loaded passengers at Trelleborg, Sweden and Metaponte, Italy. After a battle with the British, it ran onto a reef at Bat Galim, Haifa, and 15 of its passengers and crew were interned at Atlit and 1,348, including 20 stretcher cases, were deported to Cyprus. The vessel was eventually sold for scrap.

**"Ben Hecht"** (Abril), a private yacht, engaged in smuggling operations during the Spanish civil war and later served the U.S. Navy in World War II on coastal patrols. It loaded passengers at Port de Bouc, France, was intercepted and taken to Haifa on March 8, 1947. Its 599 "illegals" were interned in Cyprus. It later served the Israel Navy as the "Maoz," K-22, a mother ship for seaborne commandos.

**"Hatikvah"** (Tradewinds), was a revenue cutter and had served as an icebreaker on the St. Lawrence River and later as a Coast Guard cutter. It loaded passengers for two consecutive nights at Portovenere and Bogliasco on the Italian Riviera. It was intercepted and taken to Haifa on May 17, 1947. Its 1,414 "illegals" were interned in Cyprus. It then served the Israeli Navy till July 27, 1948, and was sold for scrap.

**“Exodus 1947”** (President Warfield) was formerly a Chesapeake Bay excursion liner. It took on passengers at Sete, France. It was intercepted near Haifa after a struggle with the British on July 18 1947. Its 4,530 “illegals” were returned to France, where nearly all of them refused to disembark, and they were taken to Hamburg, Germany. There they were forced by British troops to get off the ship and were jailed. The ship was eventually moored in Haifa harbor, where it caught fire in August 1952 and burned to the waterline. The hulk was towed out of the way of harbor traffic and was abandoned at a nearby beach. Eventually it was scrapped.

**“Geulah”** (Paducah) was originally a gunboat and then a Coast Guard cutter. It took on passengers at Burgas, Bulgaria, was intercepted and taken to Haifa on October 2, 1947. Its 2,644 “illegals” were interned in Cyprus. After the establishment of the state it was sold for scrap.

**“Jewish State”** (Northland) had been an icebreaker in the service of the Coast Guard. Like the “Geulah,” it too took on passengers at Burgas, Bulgaria, and was intercepted and taken to Haifa on October 2, 1947. Its 2,644 “illegals” were interned in Cyprus. After the establishment of the state it became the Israel Navy’s principal training ship, the “Eilat,” A-16.

**“Kibbutz Galuyot”** (Pan York) had been a banana carrier. It, too, took on passengers at Burgas, Bulgaria. By agreement with the British, it sailed directly to Cyprus, arriving on January 1, 1948. Upon the establishment of the state, “the Kibbutz Galuyot,” now called the “Pan York,” along with its sister ship, the “Atzmaut” (Pan Crescent),” joined Israel’s state-controlled Zim line, becoming the mainstay of Israel’s fledgling merchant fleet.

**“Atzmaut”** (Pan Crescent), like its sister ship, the “Kibbutz Galuyot” (Pan York), had also been a banana carrier. After taking on passengers at Burgas, Bulgaria, it too sailed directly to Cyprus by agreement with the British, arriving there on January 1, 1948.

## RECRUITING MACHAL

Volunteer recruitment was set in motion and began to take shape in the first months of the fighting (end of 1947 and early 1948), in line with a course of action laid down by the Haganah High Command, who were fully aware of the fighting potential, the training experience and the ability to provide logistic assistance of Jews from the Diaspora. With this in mind, recruitment activities were concentrated mainly in the U.S., Canada, and South Africa.

A recruitment office, called "**Land and Labor for Palestine**," was opened in New York, headed by Major **Wellesley Aron**, who had been an officer in the Jewish Brigade of the British Army in World War II. Land and Labor recruited people with vitally needed military skills, sending to Palestine/Israel more than 250 of the 1,100 American and 232 Canadian volunteers who participated in the War of Independence.

In February 1948, a separate agency was set up in the United States, headed by **Hyman Shechtman (Shamir)** and assisted by **Al Schwimmer**, to recruit air force veterans – both aircrew and ground crew – for the Haganah's "Air Service." While this wide-ranging activity was in progress, a Haganah Purchasing Mission was acquiring military equipment throughout North America. The American authorities soon halted the Purchasing Mission's activity under a law that came into force on April 15, 1948, which required a government permit for the exportation of both civilian and military aircraft and in effect placed an embargo on the shipment of munitions to the Middle East.

In Canada, recruitment began in early 1948, and yielded excellent results within a very short time when some 100 infantry and armored corps veterans of World War II enlisted in the service of the Haganah. They were sent to a training camp run by the Haganah's European command at St. Jerome, near Marseille, France, and from there were transferred to Palestine. The first group of some 30 arrived as one consolidated unit in April 1948, and fought as a platoon in the 52nd Battalion of the Givati Brigade.

In Western Europe, the Haganah delegation organized and supervised the recruitment of hundreds of volunteers in France, Britain, Switzerland, Belgium, and Holland. In Scandinavia, camps were established to give recruits "agricultural training." Training camps were set up in Sweden: one of the biggest was in Denmark. In the winter of '48, 28 young Finns, including four girls, were enlisted. All the men had served in the Finnish army in World War II.

In South Africa, the "League for the Haganah" registered the volunteers, including recruits from Kenya, Rhodesia and the Belgian Congo. Some 3,000 enlisted, including a considerable number of Zionist movement youth. Training was carried out over weekends on Jewish-owned farms throughout the country. Those with special qualifications and military service were the first to be sent; many were assigned to the air force and the medical service. As the military situation in Israel improved, fewer volunteers were needed and in the end only about 800 arrived, leaving over 2,000 disappointed recruits behind.

The first overseas volunteers, several dozen men, arrived in Palestine as early as February 1948. (Twenty-four volunteers fell in battle by May 31, 1948.) The numbers of volunteers grew steadily as the day of the proclamation of the state drew nearer. There was a further spurt in the numbers after the first cease-fire, which ended in July 1948.



*The South American platoon, 91st Battalion in the 9th Brigade.*



## COL. DAVID (MICKEY) MARCUS

Col. David (Mickey) Marcus, nom de guerre **Michael (Mickey) Stone**, personified the volunteering spirit that motivated overseas volunteers to rally to Israel's defense. A West Point graduate, he was recruited at the end of 1947 to serve as military adviser to David Ben-Gurion and the Haganah. A New Yorker, a lawyer, a former prizefighter, a retired regular army officer, he had been a Pentagon planner during World War II and Commandant of the U.S. Army's Ranger School. He had served as a staff officer at Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) in the European campaign, and among other assignments, had been an adviser to President Franklin D. Roosevelt at the Yalta Conference.



Marcus arrived in Palestine secretly in January 1948. In a report submitted to Ben-Gurion, he said he had found "less than he had expected and more than he had hoped for," and praised the Haganah's "remarkable human material." He considered the fighters' "innate intelligence and resourcefulness, combined with their outstanding devotion and spirit of self-sacrifice, to be powerful weapons in themselves." He believed they had the makings of a first-class army. Marcus personally wrote the training manuals for the pre-state officers' courses and urged the Haganah to deal with the practical side of military organization.

During the fighting in the Negev, he initiated the hit-and-run tactics that kept the Egyptian army off balance. He was in the forefront of the effort to build the heroic "Burma Road" to Jerusalem. Appointed Commander of the Jerusalem front by Ben-Gurion, with the rank of Aluf (Major-Gen.), he led four Brigades and helped plan the strategy for a combined operation that eventually freed the beleaguered capital and changed the outcome of the war. Tragically, on the night of June 10, 1948, two weeks after his appointment, only hours before a U.N. negotiated cease-fire went into effect, Marcus was killed by 'friendly fire' of a sentry.

Mickey Marcus is the only American soldier buried in the West Point Military Academy cemetery who died fighting for a foreign country. Marking his grave is a headstone inscribed: "A Soldier for All Humanity."

## INTEGRATION INTO THE ARMED FORCES

Most Machalniks, as noted, came after the establishment of the state mainly because of restrictions the British Mandatory authorities had imposed on the entry of men of fighting age, and because their countries of origin forbade such recruitment. Under the circumstances, a number of volunteers, mainly aircrew whose duties took them behind the Iron Curtain, assumed fictitious names.

The overwhelming majority of the volunteers came from English-speaking countries and were generally posted to units according to their skills and war experience. Artillerymen, engineers, signalers and armored vehicle specialists were much in demand. Machal soldiers set up the first artillery units, which included heavy-mortars. From 15th May to early June 1948, British, South African, Canadians and some Americans were posted to the 3rd Brigade (Alexandroni), which also included volunteers from Holland, Denmark and New Zealand. Subsequently, Machalniks were posted to numerous other



*A group of Machalniks, mostly British, in the Alexandroni Brigade.*

units. In addition to the Machal groups in these units, the 9th Brigade had a Spanish-speaking platoon from South American countries in their 91st Battalion. The Palmach Negev 9th Battalion had a French-speaking commando company commanded by a non-Jewish French officer, **Thadée Difre (Teddy Eitan)**, who spearheaded the attack on Beer Sheba.

When problems arose in the acclimatization of volunteers, many English speakers were posted to the reorganized 7th Armored Brigade. The military authorities thought that concentrating them in one unit would ease their absorption, solve social alienation, overcome the language problem, and in general make it easier to handle the special difficulties of the motley group of overseas volunteers. At that time the commander of the 7th Brigade was himself an overseas volunteer, **Ben Dunkelman**, a decorated World War II veteran of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Division.

To further ease their acclimatization into the military network, the IDF Manpower Branch, in September 1948, set up a special department to deal with overseas volunteers. It was at this time that the group's name was officially designated as **Machal**, the Hebrew acronym for "Overseas Volunteers." A team of three men headed this Machal Department: **Akiva Skidell**, a member of Kibbutz Kfar Blum and a U.S. Army World War II veteran; **Lee Harris**, an American volunteer, who had originally come to the country to serve as manager of the Mortgage Bank; and **Gideon Baratz** of Kibbutz Deganiah Alef, a British Army World War II veteran.



*The Commander of the 7th Armored Brigade, Ben Dunkelman (Canada), at the opening of the Machal Club in Tel Aviv.*

Initially, the department's activities were unplanned and relied on assistance from community volunteers, but eventually it focused on publishing newspapers and informational material for Machal in several languages (mainly English and French). The department endeavored to provide social and welfare assistance to overseas volunteers, distributed pocket money, dealt with difficulties encountered in their military units, their personal problems, and much more. It also set up a club in Tel Aviv, on Hayarkon Street, where volunteers could meet during furloughs.

But for all its good intentions, and for all the efforts of Skidell and his team, the IDF Manpower Branch's Machal Department did not last very long. The military authorities were soon beset by numerous problems including: the expenses involved in maintaining the volunteers, especially the outlay of foreign currency; disciplinary problems; difficulties of acclimatization involving both individual volunteers and groups of volunteers; the constant changing of directives; the issue of sometimes mutually contradictory directives regarding the conditions of volunteer service and the posting of volunteers. All of these factors resulted in a gradual tightening of restrictions regarding the acceptance of overseas volunteers. By the end of the War of Independence only a trickle of Machal was being accepted to the IDF, mainly specialists in specific fields, selected according to need.



*Irvin (Swifty) Schindler (U.S.), being questioned in Halifax, Nova Scotia, by Royal Canadian Mounted Police while attempting to smuggle a B-17 bomber to Israel. Schindler was later tried for violating the U.S. Neutrality Act.*

## MACHAL AND THE ISRAEL AIR FORCE



*David Ben-Gurion with overseas volunteers alongside the Rapide aircraft that flew him to the Herzliya airfield. Left to right: Sol "Sonny" Wosk (Canada), who served with the Palmach, David Ben-Gurion and fighter pilot Chris Magee (U.S.).*

The fledgling Israel Air Force (IAF) was unique in the annals of modern history in that it was born in battle and most of its aircrew and technical personnel were overseas volunteers. The influence of overseas volunteers was felt at every stage of the shaping and development of the Yishuv's armed forces in the course of the war, and this was especially true with regard to the Israel Air Force (IAF).

Today it is clear that without Machal, it would not have been possible to operate the various aircraft that reached the country: the Flying Fortress (B-17) bombers, the Messerschmidt (M-109) fighter planes, the Spitfires, the Commando (C-46) cargo planes, and the Dakotas. These aircraft gave the Air Force control of the air, and their action tipped the scales in Israel's favor in several battles.

The Haganah's Air Service was set up in November 1947. Many local Jews had volunteered for the British Army during World War II, but only a few had been accepted into the Royal Air Force (RAF). Hence there was a shortage of skilled, experienced manpower in the country. This gap was

filled mainly by airmen who had been recruited in North America by the Haganah mission headed by **Hyman Shechtman (Shamir)**, **Al Schwimmer**, and **Yehuda Arazi**.

About 70 percent of the IAF personnel were overseas volunteers who had been recruited in sixteen countries. They served as pilots, navigators, radio operators, air gunners, aerial photographers, and bomb-chuckers. Of the 607 air crew personnel, 414 were overseas volunteers, as were 168 of 193 former World War II pilots serving in the IAF in the War of Independence.

One of the first volunteers was **Harry "Freddy" Fredkens**, a former RAF pilot. He was sent to Britain late in 1947 on Ben-Gurion's instructions to acquire planes for the IAF in-the-making. After acquiring several training craft, he was preoccupied with getting them out of Britain without revealing their destination. In early 1948, he acquired the light Norseman transport planes that provided the crucial air link to Sdom at the southern end of the Dead Sea, which was isolated from the rest of the State of Israel.



*Pilots of No. 35 Flight alongside a Norseman transport at Ekron.  
Left to right: Abie Nathan (India), Roy Schapera (South Africa),  
Irving Feldstein (U.S.), and Ben "Red" Sturrey (Canada).*

## PILOT EDDY KAPLANSKY AND OPERATION TASKIT

Operation Taskit's purpose was to map the deployment of enemy forces west of the Jordan River. On five consecutive nights, at exactly pre-planned times, an Israel Air Force plane dropped pyrotechnics over a number of specifically targeted areas. At the same time, Signal Corps operators monitored various frequencies for enemy signal activity. The amount and content of such signals, aided by the observations of the airplane's crew, provided the required picture. After the operation, the IAF's Director of Operations sent a letter of congratulations and appreciation to Eddy Kaplansky, who had piloted all five flights. The letter was in English, as were most IAF documents then. Since most of the aircrews were overseas volunteers, English was then the IAF's operational working language.

ISRAEL AIR FORCE

11th October 1948

Confidential

M/189/Air

To: E. Kaplansky, Pilot, No. 1 Sqd., Tel Aviv

From: Director of Operations

I wish to advise you that the Army has expressed its complete satisfaction with the results of Operation Taskit.

I wish to add my personal congratulations for a job well done.

*David Judah*

Director of Operations

**Jack Freedman (Ya'acov "Freddy" Ish-Shalom)**, of Britain, secretly helped the Haganah's Air Service while still a member of the RAF. In February 1948 he deserted from the RAF, after 11 years of service, and joined the Air Service, bringing with him vital experience and expertise in airplane maintenance and overhauling. He headed the team that restored most of the 20 former RAF Auster light airplanes that had been bought from the British as scrap. He also set up and supervised the team that built the Israel Air Force's first Spitfire from scrapped airplanes the British had abandoned when they left Palestine. Perhaps his most important contribution, however, was making his vast technical knowhow available to the young



*B-17 crew at Zatec, Czechoslovakia, before takeoff.*

aircraft mechanics he trained, many of whom later assumed key positions of command.

Unique among the Machal pilots was **Boris Senior**, a former South African Air Force World War II pilot. He arrived in Palestine in December 1947 and joined the Air Service. Shortly afterwards he was sent back to South Africa to recruit air and ground crews and buy aircraft.

In South Africa, he set up a dummy airline based in Johannesburg, through which he transferred to Palestine three DC-3 transports and other aircraft and armaments. Senior was a fighter pilot in 101 Squadron, and tested the IAF's first Spitfire, the one built by Freddy Ish-Shalom's team. Later he served in the IAF's Manpower and Training Branches.

**Al Schwimmer**, an American, a former TWA flight engineer and a licensed pilot, left his job at TWA in 1947, at the express request of David Ben-Gurion to recruit airmen and buy planes for the IAF-in-the-making. With the help of Haganah agent Yehuda Arazi, he bought a number of C-46 and other heavy transport planes, which were secretly flown to an air force base in Czechoslovakia. He played a key role in building the air bridge between that country and Israel, and in the creation of the IAF's Transport Command. Later, he was commander of the IAF's Engineering and Maintenance Wing. After the War of Independence he founded the



Bedek Company, which eventually became the Israel Aircraft Industry (IAI) that he headed for many years.

Most of the IAF's volunteer pilots were seasoned veterans. Among the more famous of the World War II aces was **George "Buzz" Beurling**, a Royal Canadian Air Force pilot who had shot down over 30 enemy planes in World War II, and **Leonard Cohen**, an RAF veteran. The two men perished when the Norseman plane they were preparing to fly to Israel mysteriously burst into flames and crashed at a small airport near Rome in May 1948.

One of the IAF's outstanding achievements during the war was the more than 100 flights carried out in Operation Balak, the name given to the air bridge that brought Messerschmidt fighter planes and military equipment from Czechoslovakia to Palestine/Israel.

### **OPERATION BALAK**

The airlift to Israel of fighter planes and military supplies acquired in Czechoslovakia in 1948 was named "Operation Balak." The first aircraft was a Skymaster that had been chartered, together with its crew, from an American company. It flew directly from Prague to an airstrip near Be'er Tuviah, landing there on March 31. The military hardware it carried went into action straightaway in Operation Nahshon. Under pressure from the U.S. government, the Skymaster's owners refused to execute further flights from Czechoslovakia, and the Haganah had to seek other routes.

Following weeks of searching, they found a suitable airfield at Ajaccio, Corsica. A private Swedish company flew the armaments from Brno, Czechoslovakia to Ajaccio, from where Skymaster planes flew the cargoes to Palestine. Two flights reached the country on the eve of the establishment of the state, bringing arms, explosives, and spare parts.

After the proclamation of the state, transport planes arrived carrying dismantled Messerschmidt planes with their spare parts, and armaments.

Almost all the air and ground crews handling these flights, which involved complex logistic problems, were Machalniks with World War II experience. The combat aircraft brought to the country were assembled here, and served the IAF in various ways. Their first mission on May 29, 1948, was halting the Egyptian forces, near Ashdod, in their advance northward toward Tel Aviv. In that mission Machal pilot **Eddy Cohen** of South Africa was shot down by anti-aircraft fire and killed.

Spitfire fighter planes, bought soon after from Czechoslovakia, were ferried to Israel by Machal pilots in two operations called Velvetta I and Velvetta II. One of these pilots, **Sam Pomerance**, of the U.S., an aeronautical engineer, made unusually long operations possible by installing special long-range fuel tanks of his design. He was killed while ferrying a Spitfire to Israel during Velvetta II.

Another notable IAF achievement was the November 1948 downing by **Wayne Peake**, a U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) veteran, of an RAF Mosquito aircraft photographing Israeli military installations from high altitude. Yet another mission was Operation Avak, begun in August 1948, flying military supplies and soldiers to the besieged Negev, in preparation for Operation Yoav.

In addition to the Machal pilots and squadron commanders, overseas volunteers also occupied important posts in the IAF's operations, training, engineering, and intelligence branches. An American volunteer, **Harold "Pappy" Green**, headed the flight-training program. All the flight instructors were Machal men. Outstanding among them was **Rudy Augarten**, a former USAAF fighter pilot and Harvard student who ran the course to train pilots to fly the Spitfires, the IAF's main combat aircraft in the war.

A group of forty overseas volunteers with radar experience under the command of **Moshe Ettenberg (Eitan)**, of the U.S., founded 505 Squadron, the IAF's first radar unit. Only a few people knew of the existence of this

unit. All the radar operators were women who had been trained by two volunteer women, one from England and the other from South Africa.

Machal people also featured prominently as instructors in courses conducted overseas while the fighting was in progress. In the spring of 1948, a special flying course for Israelis studying in the U.S. was opened in Bakersfield, California. Instructors from South Africa and the U.S. conducted the courses at the Urbe airfield near Rome, Italy. Machalniks sent from Israel were among the instructors in Czechoslovakia checking the progress of IAF pilots undergoing supplementary training there in 1948.

Of the 33 IAF fliers killed or missing in action in the War of Independence, 19 were overseas volunteers – eight from the U.S., six from Canada, three from Britain, and two from South Africa. Six of the seven fliers captured by the Egyptians during the war were overseas volunteers – three from the U.S., and one each from Britain, Holland and South Africa.

Major-General (Reserves) Herzle Bodinger, who was IAF Commander in 1992-1996, said of the overseas volunteers: “The non-Israeli airmen played a crucial role in achieving the IAF’s objectives and in laying the force’s organizational infrastructure.”



*C-46 crew during a refueling stop in Corsica, in May 1948.  
Left to right: navigator Harvey Nachman (U.S.), co-pilot Gordon Levett (Britain), pilot Al Raisin (U.S.), radio operator Jack Goldstein (Canada).  
At that time aircrews had neither uniforms, nor ranks.*

## MACHAL AND THE ISRAEL NAVY

Dozens of overseas volunteers served in the Israel Navy, as commanders and as seamen. Overseas volunteering for maritime service began even before the establishment of the state, when American and Canadian seamen enlisted to serve alongside the Aliyah Bet people of the Haganah and Palyam (the Palmach's naval unit) bringing the "illegal immigrants" to Palestine's shores. Seamanship was not widespread among the Jews of the Diaspora or Palestine, so that this involvement of professional, experienced seamen from abroad was a most valuable contribution.

The new State of Israel needed a Navy to protect its Mediterranean coast and insure access of supplies to its ports. A Machal man who played a key role in the establishment of the Israel Navy was **Paul N. Shulman**. Born in 1922, Shulman graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. During World War II he had combat experience in the Pacific. In 1947 he resigned from the U.S. Navy and joined the Aliyah Bet staff, assisting in purchasing vessels and making them fit to carry passengers. In May 1948, at Ben-Gurion's request, he came to Israel to help organize and establish the Israel Navy. The following October, 26-year old Shulman was appointed Navy Commander.

His appointment roused controversy within the Naval High Command, because of his youth, and because some questioned his fitness for the task. He commanded naval actions in Operation Yoav, which included the sinking of the Egyptian flagship "Emir Farouk" by a naval demolition squad headed by Yoha'i Bin-Nun. Four American volunteers served in this unit. In March 1949, Shulman was appointed Naval and Maritime Adviser to the Prime Minister.



*Paul Shulman (U.S.), the first Commander of the Israel Navy.*

Among the other Machal naval officers were **Jonathan Leff (Lev)**, like Shulman an Annapolis graduate, who served as naval gunnery officer; **Philip Strauss**, who

*The first American volunteers to serve in the Navy's underwater demolition unit (Shayetet Shlosh Esrav, Navy Seals), on maneuvers off the coast near Caesaria, late 1948.*

*Bottom left to right:  
Paul (Kaminetzky) Kaye,  
Al (Alazaroff) Ellis.*

*Upper left: Lenny Cohen,  
Hal Fineberg (known as Zvi Galil).*



was in the naval engineering and mechanics section; **David Baum**, a U.S. Merchant Marine Academy graduate, served as an engineering officer on K-18 and K-28; **Allen Burke**, a former Corvette commander, consultant to Corvette captains, became commander of one of Israel's first frigates; **David de Lange**, a highly decorated British Navy officer, organized Israel's Coast Guard; **Ben de Roy**, a former U.S. Navy officer, was active in shipboard communications and radar, and **Sender Pinard**, a U.S. Navy submariner, worked in operations. With the arrival of the "Yucatan" (K-24), in August 1948, the number of overseas volunteers in the Navy increased. Included were: **Avraham Pizzaro** of the Dutch Navy, Mate and later Captain, and **Ben Halperin**, of the U.S. Navy, engineering officer. The crew included U.S. Navy veterans: **Marty Gross**, **Sid Weinhaus**, **Gerry Cohen**, **Aaron Cohen**, **Dave Hanovice** and others.

These and other Machalniks played a key role in laying the foundation of the Israel Navy, as the Haganah's naval fighting force moved from a covert partisan operation in the framework of Aliyah Bet and Palyam to a respectable navy operating according to Western standards. In the process, there was friction between the volunteers and the local seamen, most of them Palyam people. Consequently, many Machal people left the navy, complaining that they were being discriminated against and being deliberately overlooked for promotion in favor of the core group of local seamen.

## MACHAL AND THE ARMORED CORPS



*Armored car crew, 79th Battalion, 7th Brigade. From the top: Jack Gold (Canada), Frank Pearlman (U.S.), Solly Ossin (South Africa).*

Overseas volunteers also played an important part in the shaping of the Armored Corps. Towards the end of the first cease-fire the number of fighting volunteers in the IDF increased. As there were difficulties related to their absorption in some battalions, it was decided to try and concentrate them in one unit.

The 7th Armored Brigade was chosen: it was then being reorganized under a new command cadre in the wake of its heavy losses at Latrun (Operations Bin-Nun

I and II late in May 1948). **Ben Dunkelman**, a Canadian volunteer, was appointed Brigade Commander, and **Joe Weiner**, also a Canadian, was appointed Commander of the Brigade's 79th Armored Battalion (armored cars and half-tracks). Later, **Baruch Friedman-Erez**, a volunteer from Kenya, replaced Weiner. **Jack Nursella (Lichtenstein)**, an American, commanded the 72nd Infantry Battalion. **Derek Bowden** (then known as **David Appel**), a non-Jew and an ex-British Army paratroop officer, commanded a company in this battalion. (Previously, he had been captured by the Germans and sent to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp because letters from Palestinian Jewish friends were found in his pockets.)

The 7th Armored Brigade, which included two Infantry Battalions (71st and 72nd), became in effect the “Machal Brigade.” In the summer of 1948 it had 170 English-speaking volunteers, with one of its infantry companies consisting entirely of English-speakers. The Brigade took part in Operation Dekel, in which Lower Galilee and Nazareth were taken, Operation Ten Days (July 1948), and Operation Hiram, in which the entire Galilee was cleared and the “Arab Liberation Army” led by Kaukji routed. In late October 1948, near the end of the war, the 7th Brigade had some 300 Machal, nearly all of them English-speakers. The 79th Armored Battalion alone had some 60 Machalniks.

There were also many Machalniks in the 8th Armored Brigade. They were part of a kaleidoscope of men recruited in various countries, speaking a medley of languages. In the heavy-tank company, commanded by Machalnik **Clive Selby**, English was the language of communication; in the light-tank units it was Russian. The commander of the 82nd Battalion (the only unit with tanks in 1948), spoke in Russian with the commander of the 8th Brigade, Yitzhak Sadeh, and in German with the deputy



*Crew of armored car, “Sandwich”, 3rd Brigade, with overseas volunteers from England, Norway, South Africa and the U.S.*

commander. Since no one in the brigade spoke both Russian and English, someone translated from Russian into Yiddish and then the Yiddish was translated into English. Despite this Tower of Babel of tongues, the Brigade took part in Operation Danny (July 1948) on the central front, and in the decisive battles on the southern front (Operations Yoav, Horev, Ten Plagues, and Ayin). The 88th Mortar Battalion had some 30 volunteers from Switzerland, Holland, Britain, the U.S., South Africa, China, Brazil, France and the Belgian Congo, as well as a number of Machal mortar crews from North African countries. The 89th Mechanized Commando Battalion, which also had an English-speaking platoon, saw action at Auja el Hafir (December 1948), where one of the American volunteers, **Philip Balkin**, was killed.



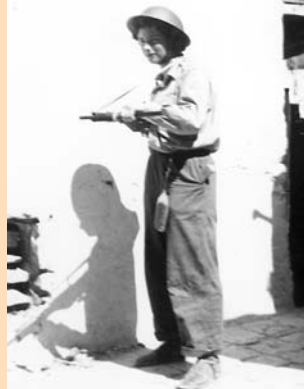
*Machal fighters of the 8th Brigade's 89th Battalion following the capture of Auja el Hafir (Nitzana) in December 1948. The platoon comprised men from England, Germany, Holland, Rhodesia, South Africa, and the U.S.*



## DEFENDING THE JEWISH QUARTER IN JERUSALEM'S OLD CITY

London born Esther Cailinggold came to teach English at the Evelina de Rothschild Girls School in Jerusalem. When the war broke out she enlisted in the Haganah and volunteered to join the forces defending the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, where she was killed in battle in the spring of 1948.

The following letter was written a year later by Moshe Rousnak, the last commander of the Jewish garrison in the Old City, on his return from a P.O.W. camp in Jordan.



*Esther Cailinggold*

*I feel it is my duty to tell you about the late Esther Cailinggold. She arrived in the Old City at the end of April 1948 with the last group of teachers, and was assigned to guard duties, as were all the other teachers.*

*When the fighting began, all the teachers were drafted to full-time service and took an active part in the battles. Esther fulfilled her duties beyond the normal call. As a brave fighter and as an experienced soldier she stood steadfastly at her post and repelled every enemy attempt to charge. Her determination was an example and a source of strength to the other fighters who were with her... She stood at her post for fully two weeks. In the last stage of the battle, when most of the Jewish Quarter was already in enemy hands, Esther and a number of other young fighters fought fiercely and valiantly in defense of the Bet-El bloc, the last remaining sector. In the course of the enemy onslaught, Esther was mortally wounded and died a short while later. Her death was a serious blow to all those who knew her and admired her bravery and her gallant stand as a fighter who knew no fear.*

*In the report that I submitted to G.H.Q., I made special mention of her as being worthy of commendation.*

Moshe Rousnak 155529  
C.O. The Jewish Quarter of the Old City

Jerusalem, April 7, 1949

## MACHAL AND FIELD UNITS

Machal who arrived in the first month of Israel's existence were posted to the Alexandroni Brigade, as noted previously, which included a company of armored jeeps and anti-tank weapons. The presence of the volunteers was felt in the battle for Kula (July 9-12,1948), where they were led by company commander **Shaul Ramati (Rosenberg)**, who had been a captain in the 51st Scottish Division and in the British Army's Jewish Brigade in World War II. When the brigade was transferred to the north for reorganization, several men from the jeep company "deserted" and joined the 9th Armored Battalion of the Palmach's Negev Brigade, fighting in the decisive battles in the south.

This 9th Armored Battalion had a considerable number of Machal English-speakers, including 22 South Africans. Volunteers from France



*Machalniks of the Armored Car and Jeep Company, 9th Battalion, Palmach Hanegev Brigade, after the capture of Beer Sheba.*



*Jeep company on the road to Sdom. Driver, Harvey Sirulnikoff (Canada); next to him, Albert (France); behind them, Gerry (U.S.); and "Rusty" Centner (South Africa).*

and North Africa served in the French Commando Company of this Negev Brigade. The brigade also included a group of South Americans serving at Kibbutz Nitzanim, one of whom, a 19 year-old combat medic, **Deborah Epstein**, from Uruguay, died of her wounds defending the kibbutz.

Numerous Machal from France, North Africa, Canada and Britain, fought with the Givati Brigade, mainly in the 51st and 52nd Battalions. Three friends from England, all Kindertransport boys who had served in the Jewish Brigade during WWII, died together in a last ditch stand near Beit Daras (June 10, 1948), after the rest of their company had withdrawn.

The group of some 30 Canadians who arrived in April were posted to the Givati Brigade, and thrown into battle on May 11th at the Arab village of Bashit, as part of Operation Barak. Amongst them were Air Force mechanics and Navy men, veterans of WWII, who only much later were posted to units where their specialties were needed.



*Machalniks (U.S.) in the Givati Brigade, who arrived March 1948.*

*Standing left to right: Art Sockol, Arnie Sternberg, Bert Bean, Sid Rabinovich.*

*Middle Row: Mandel Math, Jerry Kaplan (both fell at Latrun).*

*Kneeling: Elly Harris, friend, friend, Al Glassman, Naish Band, Harry Kay (Kravitsky).*

About a dozen volunteers served with the Golani Brigade. Several held command positions in the Infantry, Engineering, Signals and Artillery Corps, and fought in battles at various fronts. One Machal officer, **Gerhard Weil**, a Swiss volunteer, was killed while training Palmach fighters in the use of demolition materials.

## **MACHAL AND MEDICAL SERVICES**

The ratio of physicians to population in the Yishuv in 1948 was very high; but most of the doctors were no longer young, and only a few had wartime medical experience. Some had served in the British Army during World War II, but most of them had not been assigned to combat units in the battlefield. There was therefore an urgent need to recruit specialists as well as nurses, pharmacists, and paramedics.

Recruitment efforts were concentrated mainly in the English-speaking countries, and in fact most of the volunteers in medical services came from South Africa; others came from Britain, the U.S., Canada, and several from South America, Switzerland, and Spanish Morocco.

All told, about 80 doctors, 50 nurses, and a smaller number of pharmacists, dentists, physiotherapists, bacteriologists, and laboratory technicians came as overseas volunteers to the newly established state. They served as commanders of field hospitals, as specialists in trauma, orthopedics and plastic surgery, as internists, and as psychiatrists, making a vital contribution. The volunteer doctors constituted more than 20 percent of the doctors serving in combat units.

Two of these doctors were killed in action. **Dr. Isaiah Morris**, of Britain, had received the Military Cross while serving in the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) in World War II. After the war he volunteered as a doctor in displaced persons' camps in southern France. He arrived in Israel in the spring of 1948 and was appointed Chief Medical Officer of the Golani

*Dr. Leo Bornstein (U.S.), experienced battlefield surgeon, one of the first volunteer doctors to arrive. Seated center, on the left, with patients and staff at a Military Hospital, 1948.*





*Machal nurse, Gloria Pelzig (U.S.), at Military Hospital No. 10, Tiberias, 1948.*

Brigade. He was killed by a mortar shell in June 1948 while caring for wounded soldiers at the Sejera (Ilaniya) front, which was under attack by Kaukji's forces. **Dr. Solomon Morley-Dahan**, of Spanish Morocco, served as a doctor in a battalion of Druse and Circassian troops. He was killed by enemy fire in October 1948 while tending a wounded soldier at the Yanoah front.

**Dr. Leo (Aryeh) Bornstein**, an American, was among the first Machal physicians to arrive. An experienced battlefield surgeon, he commanded Military Hospital No. 2 in Galilee before the state was established, and served as chief surgeon at Military Hospital No. 10. **Dr. Max Goldberg**, from Switzerland, and his wife, **Hilde**, a nurse, served as a husband-and-wife team in the Golani Brigade. The same shell that killed Dr. Morris seriously wounded Dr. Goldberg. **Mildred Schlumschlag** of New York, a physiotherapist, set up and supervised Israel's first center for the treatment of paraplegics in Military Hospital No. 5, which later became the Haim Sheba Medical Center at Tel Hashomer. **Dr. Jack Medalie**, a South African, was the medical officer of the 3rd Battalion in the Palmach's Yiftah Brigade. **Dr. Lionel Meltzer**, who had been a lieutenant colonel in the South African Army and was awarded the Military Cross, was in charge of planning and personnel at Medical Corps headquarters. **Dr. Simon Winter**, of Britain, a veteran of the RAMC, became the IAF's Chief Medical Officer.

When the War of Independence ended, many of the medical volunteers had a difficult time integrating into Israel's medical system, and more than half returned to their countries of origin. Those who remained helped to lay the infrastructure of Israel's medical services, and some went on to occupy senior positions in the country's health network.

## OVERSEAS VOLUNTEERS AND THE ESTABLISHMENT

Occasionally, there was friction, and misunderstandings in connection with the service of a number of Machalniks – at times between the volunteers and the military establishment, at times with the local fighting recruits. Some misunderstandings were rooted in the diverse cultural backgrounds and mentalities. Some were arguments over salaries not paid when promised, some over service conditions that were less than what the volunteers had been led to expect, and some volunteers felt they had been assigned tasks not commensurate with their skills and experience. Most of the complaints were of a personal nature but on the group level a problem arose over the distinction drawn between the Machal people and those who had come from abroad through other channels. This conflict came to light because the category “Machal” volunteer did not take into account the circumstances of special fighting units or those who belonged to units that had been formed on the basis of ethnic origin or professional category. One example was the “French Commando” unit, established and commanded by **Captain Thadée Difre (Teddy Eitan)**, a French Catholic who joined the IDF after a long career as an officer in the French Army. The men of the Commando had been promised special conditions and privileges, which were not always forthcoming. Moreover, IDF Manpower Branch directives classed some of them as immigrants, like people recruited by Gahal, and not as volunteers destined to return to their land of origin.



*Right: Thadée Difre (Teddy Eitan), of the “French Commando”.*

## ASSESSING MACHAL'S CONTRIBUTION

Overseas volunteers had left home and family to fight for the Jewish people and the fledgling Jewish state. Many had just returned from years of service in World War II, and felt that the Israeli military establishment did not sufficiently appreciate the service they had rendered and the sacrifice it entailed. In time, their deeds faded from public consciousness. Indeed, during the War of Independence the activities of Machal recruits had been hushed up for fear that the embargo policies of the countries from which they had come, especially in the case of U.S. volunteers, would lead to legal action against them. In addition, the “underground” atmosphere and need to maintain secrecy were important factors in minimizing the professional contribution and the decisive role of Machal in turning the tide of a number of battles in Israel’s favor.

The leadership of the Yishuv and the military high command knew very well the true extent of the contribution of the overseas volunteers. David Ben-Gurion referred to them in his diaries of the period of the War of Independence. He saw their volunteerism and involvement not only as an augmentation of military manpower, but primarily as an expression of solidarity of Diaspora Jewry with the State of Israel. He regarded their departure, because the war ended or due to various disputes, as a moral defeat both for the country and for the volunteers themselves. On the other hand, many people in positions of leadership, especially in the army, thought it was important for the Israeli “nation-building” process to emphasize exclusively the role played by the Yishuv in the struggle for independence. And inasmuch as most of the volunteers eventually left the country, it was felt that there was no need to inflate the contribution they had made to the war effort.

Today in retrospect, with the passing of the years since the War of Independence, the full extent of the Machal contribution has become ever



clearer. Their expertise in a wide range of fighting skills, their familiarity with the military framework, and the combat experience of many were key factors which contributed significantly to making it possible for the IDF, in an emergency period, while fighting was still in progress, to establish a regular army, in a relatively short time, which went on to win the war.

In 1993, a monument was dedicated in memory of the 119 overseas volunteers who lost their lives in Israel's struggle for independence. Nine of them were non-Jews and four were women. The monument was erected by the Jewish National Fund at the initiative of the **World Machal** organization and with the help of Machal veterans all over the world. It is located at Sha'ar Hagai near the exit from the "Burma Road." A memorial plaque lists the 119 names: 98 were in the Army, 19 in the Air Force, one was in the Navy, and another was killed on an Aliyah Bet ship.

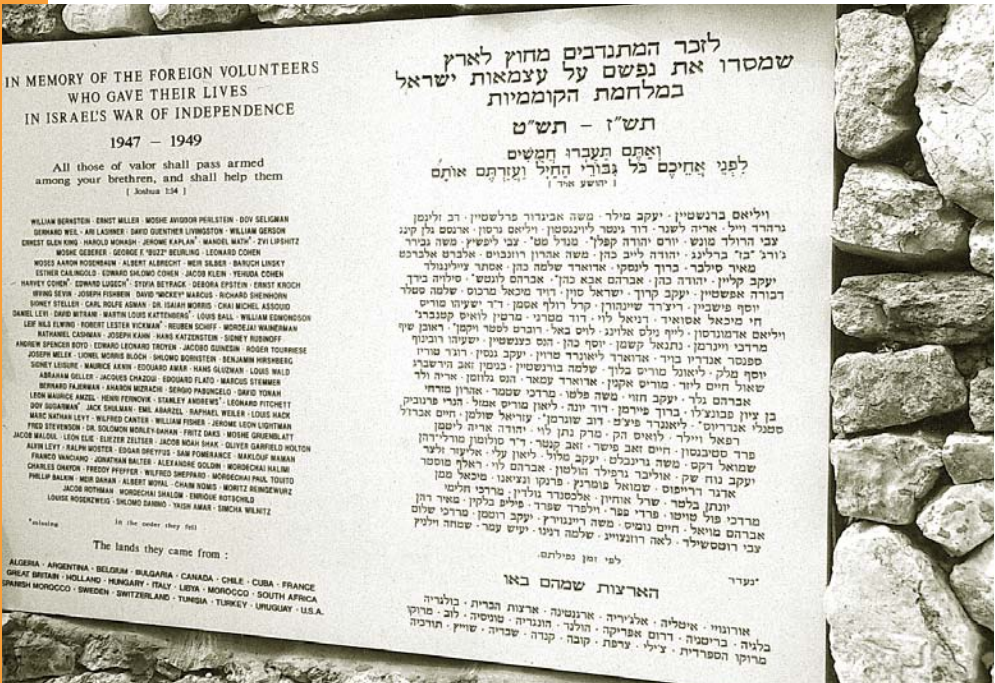
At the dedication ceremony of the monument, on Memorial Day, April 25, 1993, the then Prime Minister, **Yitzhak Rabin**, said: *"They came to us when we most needed them, during those difficult, uncertain days of our War of Independence in 1948..."*

**YIGAL ALON, IN HIS BOOK "SHIELD OF DAVID"  
WROTE OF MACHAL:**

"Another source of manpower to be tapped, mainly after the British had gone and the 'official' invasion had started, were the overseas volunteers, chiefly young Jews from the Western world, fired by the excitement and challenge of Israel's rise, and moved by the peril which faced her in the days of her infancy. In all, there were only a few thousand of these, but they were to play a significant role in the formation of Israel's armored corps, air force, medical corps and artillery corps. When the first shots of war rang out, however, they too were still far from Palestine."



The dedication ceremony of the monument in memory of the 119 overseas volunteers who fell in the War of Independence.



The plaque at the monument in Sha'ar Hagai bearing the names of the fallen Machal fighters.

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## FEATURE ARTICLES

**on Machal and Machalniks, available from the archives of the Jerusalem Post and Ha'aretz Anglo File, including:**

*Fighting Spirit*, Jerusalem Post Magazine article by Sue Fishkoff (4th July 1997), about Machal veterans.

*Giant Cast in the Shadow*, Jerusalem Post article by Michael S. Arnold (12th June 1998), about Col. David (Mickey) Marcus and his role in the War of Independence (Burma Road), with contributions by Machalnik Zipporah Porath.

*They Made a Difference*, Jerusalem Post Magazine article by Zipporah Porath, (25th April 2001), about outstanding American & Canadian immigrants who made a difference in the early years of the State.

*Dad's Army*, John Burrows' search for his non-Jewish father's Machal exploits – Jerusalem Post Magazine by Arie O'Sullivan (18th May 2001).

*The Oldest Combat Reservist who just can't get enough*. Ha'aretz Anglo File (18th January 2002), about Machalnik David “The Tower” Teperson, aged 75, the oldest combat reservist in the IDF.

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Machal Website: [www.sabra.net/machal/](http://www.sabra.net/machal/)

French Machal Website: <http://monsite.wanadoo.fr/machal>

Sionismo & Israel (Spanish) (Colaboracion con Machal)

MAJAL [www.jaim.com.ar/sionismo/sionismo.htm](http://www.jaim.com.ar/sionismo/sionismo.htm)

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