

**WORLD MACHAL REUNION**  
**YOM HAZICHARON SERVICE ON**  
**WEDNESDAY, 7<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2008**  
**SMOKY SIMON'S SPEECH**

Shalom everyone,

I wish to thank you for joining us on this Yom Hazicharon, this Day of Remembrance when we pay homage and express our gratitude to all the men and women, Jews and non-Jews, who have fallen in the defense of the State of Israel.

The word “MACHAL” is a Hebrew acronym for the words “Mitnadvei Chutz L’Aretz”, meaning “Volunteers from Abroad”, and the derivative word “Machalniks”, means the members of Machal.

Allow me to refresh your memories on some aspects of the historical background to the War of Independence. The famous United Nations Resolution of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1947, called for the partition of Palestine and for the establishment of two states – a Jewish State and an Arab State. Israel accepted the Resolution, but the Arabs rejected it immediately, and it can be said that the War of Independence had already started in November 1947 – a war waged against the Jews in the Yishuv by the Arabs of Palestine, with the support of volunteers from the neighbouring Arab states.

The British Mandate of Palestine was due to terminate at midnight between 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> May 1948, and on Friday 14<sup>th</sup> May, Prime Minister Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of the State of Israel, and without any declaration of war, Israel was invaded by six Arab armies – Egypt, Trans-Jordan (now known as Jordan), Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Kaukji’s Army of Liberation from the Galilee . Confident in the knowledge that the Arabs had overwhelming

superiority in numbers of men, aircraft, armour, artillery, etc., their declared aim was to crush the Jewish State at its birth, and to drive the Jews into the sea.

To exacerbate Israel's critically precarious position, and despite the Holocaust and Britain's disgraceful deportation of Holocaust survivors back to Europe, to Cyprus and to other countries, and notwithstanding the Arab's declared policy of crushing the Jewish State, the U.N. imposed an arms embargo on the Middle East. Whilst Egypt and Jordan had been militarily well-equipped by Britain, the great western democracies of the USA and UK left Israel to face the Arab onslaught on its own. Little wonder that the USA, UK, and the Arab states were totally convinced that Israel would be defeated within a few weeks.

**From the perspective of Jewish history, there can be no doubt that the Declaration of the State of Israel and the War of Independence were the absolute pinnacles of 2,000 years of Jewish history - a history of exile, oppression, and injustice.**

**The War of Independence was undoubtedly Israel's most fateful war - it was indeed a case of "To be, or not to be"! Out of a total Jewish population in the Yishuv of 600-650,000, over 6,300 Jews were killed in the War of Independence, namely 1% of the entire population. To put this figure into perspective - if 1% of the United States population of 300 million were to perish, this would represent 3 million Americans.**

**Now listen to the declaration by the Arab League's Secretary-General, Abdul Rachman Azzam Pasha on 1<sup>st</sup> May 1948: "If the Zionists dare to establish a State, the massacres we would unleash would dwarf anything which Genghis Khan and Hitler perpetrated".**

**On 15<sup>th</sup> May, the day on which 6 Arab armies attacked Israel, Azzam Pasha reinforced his previous declaration: "This will be a war of**

**extermination and a momentous massacre, which will be spoken of like the Mongolian massacres and the Crusades”.**

**Against this general background, enter the Machal story. Approximately 3,500 Machalniks – men and women, Jews and non-Jews, volunteered from 46 countries to help Israel in its “War of Survival”. Most of the Machalniks were World War II veterans. They served in 14 branches of the IDF – Air Force, Navy, Infantry, Armour, Artillery, Medical Corps, Engineers, Anti-Tank, Radar, Communications, etc., and they played a pivotal role in two crucial respects – firstly in winning the war, and secondly in establishing the foundations on which the IDF was founded – Ground Forces, Air Force, and Navy.**

I would say that four main factors motivated the Machalniks to volunteer their services – the Holocaust, the shameful deportations of Holocaust survivors by the British, the Arab threat of exterminating the Jewish population of Palestine, and the feeling of unity which unites the Jewish people in times of major crises.

The approximate breakdown of Machalniks from their countries of origin was as follows:

USA - 950; South Africa – 810; France and North African countries (Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia) – 500-700; UK – 350; Canada – 300; Latin-America – 300; other European countries and Scandinavia - 100.

Just a few words about Aliyah Bet which was an integral part of the Machal story. About 250 Machalniks, mainly from the U.S.A. and including some Canadians, served on the ten Aliyah Bet ships, which despite the British naval blockade against Jewish immigration, brought over 31,000 “so-called illegal immigrants” to the shores of Palestine.

At this point, I would like to mention the names of just a few prominent Machalniks:

The first commander of the Israel Navy was an American Machalnik, Paul Shulman. He played a key role not only in establishing and commanding the Israel Navy, but he was also active in acquiring vessels in the U.S.A. for the Aliyah Bet Operation.

David (Micky) Marcus, a West Point graduate and a Colonel in the American Army, wrote the operational handbook for the IDF. Micky Marcus was in charge of the Burma Road Project which relieved the siege of Jerusalem, and after Micky was accidentally killed, the rank of Aluf was awarded to him posthumously by Ben Gurion.

Al Schwimmer and Swifty Schindler, two American Machalniks, were responsible for organizing an amazingly “chutzpadike” operation. They smuggled four B-17 bombers (one of which was subsequently impounded), ten C-46 and C-47 Commando transport aircraft, as well as three Constellation aircraft, out of the U.S.A. They set-up a bogus Panamanian aviation company, which flew the Panamanian flag. These aircraft played an absolutely crucial role, both in the IAF and in winning the war.

Ben Dunkelman, a highly decorated officer in the Canadian Army in World War II, led the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade which captured and liberated the Upper Galilee (known as “Operation “Hiram”).

The Machal component was absolutely dominant in the Israel Air Force (the IAF). The Air Force itself was unique in aviation history. Firstly, about 95% of the 425 combat flying crews were Machalniks; secondly, the Air Force was born simultaneously with the State of Israel; and thirdly, the Air Force was born in the heat of battle.

The total of 425 Machal flying crews included 92 non-Jewish flyers – representing 21.6% of the total number of aircrews.

The Machalniks played an absolutely crucial role in the war. They were the dominant factor in the Israel Air Force. With their World War II experience, the Machalniks were key men in units throughout the IDF. 450 Machalniks served in the 3 Palmach Brigades – Yiftach, Harel, and Hanegev. There were close to 200 medical doctors and nurses, who manned most of the front-line casualty hospitals. Two doctors were killed in action. There were 310 Machalniks in the 72<sup>nd</sup> and 79<sup>th</sup> battalions of the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and they also served in Alexandroni, Givati, 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured, 8<sup>th</sup> Armoured, 88<sup>th</sup> Battalion of Mortars, 89<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Commando Battalion, and the Oded Brigade.

After the Air Force received its combat aircraft – bombers and fighters – B-17s, Spitfires, Messerschmidts, P-51s, Mustangs, Norsemen, Harvards, C-46s, C-47s, and Constellations, the IAF controlled the skies over Israel and the battlefields, and was able to give close air support to the ground forces.

In the early days of the war, the Egyptian Air Force had complete control of the skies over Israel, and they were able to bomb Tel Aviv and other targets with impunity. On 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1948, Modi Alon, the Israeli Commanding Officer of 101 Squadron (Israel's first fighter squadron), whilst flying a Messerschmidt, shot down 2 Egyptian DC-3's which were bombing Tel Aviv. On 8<sup>th</sup> June (the night before the first cease-fire), the IAF mounted its first raid on an Arab capital – Damascus. This was a night attack in a “borrowed South African civilian DC-3 aircraft.

On 29<sup>th</sup> June 1948, a formation of 4 Messerschmidts of 101 squadron bombed and strafed the Egyptian Army which had already advanced up to Ashdod – 20 miles from Tel Aviv. This attack stopped the Egyptian Army's advance, and

destabilized the Egyptian Forces. This totally unexpected air attack had a tremendously psychological impact on the Egyptian enemy.

On 15<sup>th</sup> July, 3 B-17s (known as “Flying Fortresses” (a truly icon aircraft in WWII), were flown to Israel from Czechoslovakia where they had been bombed-up and armed. On route to Israel, they carried out their first operational mission by bombing Cairo, El-Arish air-base, and a major military base at Rafiach.

On 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1948, the IAF made its first daytime attack on an Arab capital – Damascus. At the end of September 1948, the first 3 Spitfires were flown from Czecho to Israel, via Yugoslavia. This flight was an absolutely epic achievement in aviation history, , and the Spitfires landed at Tel Nof air field with only drops of fuel left in their tanks.

The IDF was also scoring victories over the Arab armies. In a campaign started in mid-October, the northern and central Negev, including Beersheba, was cleared of the enemy by the Palmach, in which the Machalniks played a major role. Many Anglo-Saxon Machalniks served in Gedud 9 of the Hanegev Brigade, whose men were known as “Chayot Hanegev” – “Beasts of the Negev”. The French Machalniks, led by a non-Jew (Teddy Eitan was his nom-de-guerre), played a major role in the capture of Beersheba.

At the end of October 1948 in “Operation Hiram”, the Upper Galilee was captured. Here again Machalniks played a major role. Ben Dunkelman, a highly decorated Canadian officer in WWII, commanded the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the Galilee Operation.

In November 1948, the heavily defended fortress of Iraq-Suweidan, under the command of Colonel Abdul Gamal Nasser surrendered to the IDF Forces.

In December 1948, 10 additional Spitfires were flown from Czechoslovakia to Israel. Shortly after the war was over, 46 Spitfires were brought to Israel by sea – if only these combat planes had been available earlier.

The climax to the battle against the Egyptians known as “Operation Ayin” was fought out in the southern Negev and in Sinai during 22<sup>nd</sup> December 1948 to 7<sup>th</sup> January 1949. In this major assault on the Egyptians, the IAF threw its full weight into the battle – B-17s, Spitfires, Harvards, Norsemen, C-46s, C-47s, and P-51s (Mustangs). To add to the drama of this last battle of the war, Aluf Yigal Yadin, the famous Israeli archaeologist who was Chief-of-Operations of the IDF during the War of Independence, used his knowledge of an old “Roman Road” built in 70AD which had been completely covered by sand, to outflank the Egyptian Army, and to mount an attack from a totally unexpected direction.

7<sup>th</sup> January, 1949 was a most memorable day. Five Royal Air Force aircraft - 4 Spitfires and 1 Tempest – were shot down over the Sinai Desert by Machal pilots in 101 Squadron. The Royal Air Force aircraft had been dispatched to do armed reconnaissance flights over the battle area. Three RAF pilots were killed, and two bailed out.

On 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1949, a Cease-Fire was declared by the U.N. Security Council, and the fighting phase in the War of Independence came to an end. The victory over the RAF was a most dramatic and spectacular conclusion to the War and to Israel’s triumph over 6 Arab armies, but as we realize only too well, the War of Independence continues to this very day.

Israel’s victory over 6 Arab armies was indeed a near-miracle. History has no parallels in its records – not only the few against the many, but having to fight a war with so many initial and crucial disadvantages. I believe it is fair to say

that Machal played an absolutely pivotal role in this victory over our Arab enemies.

At the same time, I wish to make a very sombre observation. Considering that 1,300,000 to 1,500,000 Jews served in all the Allied Forces during World War II –the USA; Russia; the British Commonwealth (Britain, Canada, India, South Africa, Australia); the free Polish Army; the free French Army; the Partisan Forces and the Ghetto Fighters - only 3,500 Machalniks volunteered to fight in Israel's War of Independence. If 15,000 or 20,000 World War II veterans had volunteered to help Israel, there would most probably not be a "West Bank or an East Jerusalem" problem today. Unfortunately, history is unforgiving, and so today the State of Israel is faced with these intractable and irreversible problems.

No matter how successful a victory in a war may be, there is inevitably a high price to be paid in human lives and war injuries. 121 Machalniks (117 men and 4 women) were killed, or went missing-in-action during the war. 9 non-Jewish fliers lost their lives and are buried in the Christian Military Cemetery in Haifa. We bow our heads in memory and respect for all of the Fallen Machalniks.

In 1993, the Machal Memorial where we are gathered today was erected, and stands close to the starting point of the famous Burma Road, which made it possible to relieve the 200-day siege of Jerusalem.

We have arranged a World Machal Reunion to celebrate the State of Israel's 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, with an exciting 8-day program culminating in a gala farewell luncheon, at which Mr. Moshe Arens (a former Minister of Defense and a former Israeli Ambassador to Washington), and Aluf Gershon Hacoheh will be



our guests-of-honour. This Reunion will effectively be World Machal's last round-up.

To round-off the Machal story, a second Machal group –known as Machal-Nachal 1956-1966, consisted of volunteers from South Africa who came for the Sinai Campaign in 1956. This original contingent in 1956 was followed by successive groups of volunteers for the IDF from South Africa, up to 1966.

And finally, over the past 15 years or so, there has been a constant yearly stream of between 150-200 young Jewish volunteers from the Diaspora to serve in the IDF. Our guard-of-honour today is made-up of these young Machalniks.

**May the spirit of volunteering for service in the defense of Israel thrive and prosper until the dawn of peace.**

**I'LL CONCLUDE MY TALK BY REFERRING TO THREE QUOTATIONS**

The late Yitzhak Rabin

In May 1993, on the occasion of the consecration of the Machal Memorial in the Sha'ar Hagai Forest, the late Yitzhak Rabin, who was then Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, stated in his address: **“You came to us when we needed you most, during those dark and uncertain days in our War of Independence. You gave us not only your experience, but your lives as well. The People of Israel and the State of Israel will never forget, and will always cherish this unique contribution made by you – the volunteers of Machal”**.

The late David Ben-Gurion

The late David Ben-Gurion summed it up this way, **“the Machal Forces were the Diaspora’s most important contribution to the survival of the State of Israel”**.

**Rav-Aluf Gaby Ashkenazi - 19<sup>th</sup> Chief of the General Staff, states:**

**“Machal and its volunteers were also among the founders and early trainers of the IDF, and as the 19<sup>th</sup> Chief of the General Staff, I will never allow myself to forget who were the people who made it all happen. We therefore owe a great deal of Israel’s success to the Machal volunteers”**.

**And so to sum up - I would say to my fellow-Machalniks – you came, you fought, you conquered, and you have the gratification of knowing that Machal’s participation in the War of Independence did indeed make a significant contribution to the eternity of the Jewish People and of the State of Israel.**

**There are 82 Christian States and 56 Muslim States in the world, and there IS going to be one Jewish State, THE STATE OF ISRAEL, until the end of time.**

**AM YISRAEL CHAI!!**

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