

CARROLL COLLEGE

BUILDING A *CHOL'S* NEST:  
ZIONIST POLITICS, PALESTINIAN PARACHUTISTS,  
AND THE HEROES OF A NASCENT NATION

A PAPER SUBMITTED  
IN THE FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS OF  
HI 499 HISTORY HONORS THESIS

BY

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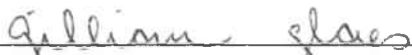
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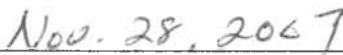
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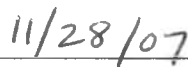
  
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## INTRODUCTION

A thousand feet was the perfect height for the drop. As the plane climbed to this desired altitude, Yoel Palgi huddled in a corner, uncertain of what burdened him more: his own thoughts or the heavy parachute bag strapped tightly to his back. Palgi observed his fellow comrades chosen for this special mission. All donned similar sturdy overalls replete with several zippered pockets. The men had loaded these pockets with various items necessary for survival, including weapons, ammunition, first-aid kits, signal lights, identification papers, and ample amounts of money. Parachuting over enemy territory was a treacherous endeavor; these jumpers had to be prepared for anything. On this evening in May 1944, not even the monstrous roar of the aircraft engines could stifle the anxiety, fear, and anticipation emanating throughout the cabin.

"We're approaching the target." The jumpmaster's voice snapped Yoel from his reflections. "Prepare to jump!" Even under the newly risen moon, the forested mountains and valleys of Yugoslavia remained a nebulous void. Considering the daily changes in partisan control, either friend or foe could be waiting below. Regardless of the uncertainty, Palgi found himself seated on the edge of the jump hatch, legs hanging freely in the night air, eyes firmly fixed on the red signal light. A far distance from both Palestine and his native Hungary, and now a thousand feet above land, Palgi literally teetered on the threshold of his important assignment. Suddenly, the light flashed green and men

disappeared before him, quickly swallowed by the black night sky. A moment later, the green light flashed again, a voice boomed “Go!” and Yoel Palgi pushed off into the opaque abyss.<sup>1</sup>

\* \* \*

Between 1943-1945, thirty-two volunteer Jewish parachutists from Palestine took flight over Nazi-occupied territory in Europe. Initially planned in 1943, the parachutists’ mission represented the response by the Yishuv—the Jewish community in Palestine—to accounts of the Holocaust that reached Palestine a few months earlier. From the Yishuv’s perspective, the parachutists’ mission demonstrated its desperate attempt to help Jews still living in Europe—primarily those located in the Balkans region.

When traveling to Europe, the parachutists from Palestine carried with them a message for the Jews of Europe: the message of Zionism. The term Zionism, derived from the biblical reference to Zion, or Israel, expresses love the Jewish people felt for the land they called Eretz Israel (Palestine). Zionism also describes the philosophy that the solution to the “Jewish Question”—a blanket term referring to many forms of anti-Semitism—relied on the establishment of a Jewish national home in the Holy Land. The parachutists believed this message and hoped it would inspire those Jews persecuted in the Diaspora.

Zionism began as an international political movement in the late nineteenth century and continued to gain popularity over the next several decades. As the Zionist movement grew, Jews—primarily from Europe and

Russia—began immigrating to Palestine in a series of mass migrations dubbed “*aliyahs*.”<sup>2</sup> Five *aliyahs* occurred between 1882 and 1939 as Jews willingly immigrated to Palestine to escape anti-Semitism, economic hardship, civil war, and pogroms and to pursue their commitment to Zionism.<sup>3</sup> Many Jews, however, opposed or remained indifferent to the Zionist movement up to World War II. The parachutists made appropriate emissaries from Eretz Israel to the European Jewry because they represented the transformation from a Diaspora Jew to a “new Jew” of Zionism. For instance, each parachutist immigrated or “made *aliyah*” to Eretz Israel from Europe. Upon arriving in Palestine, newcomers were encouraged to reject their Diaspora identity and assimilate within the Zionist Yishuv. The parachutists partook in two of the Zionist movement’s most innovative experiments: reviving the Hebrew language and living on a collective settlement. Learning Hebrew became imperative once one immigrated to Eretz Israel, as it was the language of public life. The collective agricultural settlements, called kvutzot and kibbutzim, provided some new arrivals with shelter and employment in a socialist environment that emphasized hard work and equality. The smaller settlements, kvutzot, usually contained less than twenty individuals, and started to disappear in favor of larger kibbutzim settlements in the 1920s. By 1939, 25,000 immigrants had joined the 117 kibbutzim in Palestine, accounting for 5.2 percent of the Yishuv’s population.<sup>4</sup>

This Zionist agenda dominated the Yishuv’s political scene as well. The Yishuv organized the Jewish Agency in Palestine in 1929 as the body recognized

by Great Britain to advise the British mandatory government on interests of the Jewish population. Originally it was meant to be a balanced representation of Zionists and non-Zionists. But so few non-Zionists assumed work with the Agency that by 1939 there was only one non-Zionist represented. By the onset of World War II, the agenda of the Jewish Agency was, for all intents and purposes,

that of the Zionist movement.<sup>5</sup> In the decades following the Second World War, critics accused Zionist leaders of ignoring the Holocaust and claimed that Zionists focused more on creating a Jewish state in Palestine than they did on reaching out to the suffering members of the Jewish Diaspora.<sup>6</sup> To counter these accusations, the state of Israel defended the Yishuv by pointing to one example of Holocaust aid sanctioned by the Jewish Agency: the parachutists' mission. This attempt became the "crown jewel" of the Agency's Holocaust rescue efforts as it worked to build a national homeland for the pre-war Yishuv and the waves of Holocaust refugees flooding the banks of Eretz Israel.

Historians have analyzed the parachutists' mission from several historical perspectives, but the historical scholarship lacks an extensive exploration of the Zionist influence. What is the connection between the Zionist movement and the parachutists' mission? What was the Jewish Agency's Zionist agenda in sending the parachutists? How did the parachutists' Zionist pride affect their mission? And finally, in the post-war period, what could the memory of the parachutists' mission contribute to the emergent state of Israel?

This thesis attempts to trace the parachutists' mission through the stages of planning, execution, and post-war commemoration in order to answer these questions and convey the mission's effect on the war effort, the Holocaust, and post-war Israel. This first requires examining the British and Yishuv politics that influenced the mission's creation and planning. For this section, I relied on the works from historians Yehuda Bauer, Yoav Gelber, and Bernard Wasserstein, as well as military documentation available from The National Archives in the United Kingdom. These primary sources proved quite valuable as they revealed British officials' opinions—negative and positive—about the Jewish Agency's proposals.

Next, this thesis tells the story of the mission itself, detailing both its successes and failures. Creating a comprehensive narrative of these operations required piecing together details about individual parachuting attempts from a vast array of secondary sources. Those written by Israeli historians Bauer, Gelber, and Judith Tydor Baumel were the most useful because they based their analysis on a wide use of material from Israeli and British archives. Primary sources consulted for this section included mostly those provided by the parachutists themselves. The personal diary and letters of parachutist Hannah Szenes, as well as accounts and memoirs from surviving parachutists such as Yoel Palgi and Reuven Dafni helped flavor this narrative.

While the story is dramatic enough by itself, the promotion of the mission by the Israeli state and Israeli historiography is the most interesting aspect of the



parachutists' tale. By incorporating a number of historical and theoretical approaches, this thesis assesses the formation an Israeli national narrative. It attempts to answer the question of why these historical figures—whose failures outnumbered their successes—became the paramount Holocaust heroes in Israel. Further explanation is offered as to how and why Hannah Szenes, a parachutist captured early in her mission, became the narrative's leading figure. To complete this investigation, this thesis integrates a variety of methodological approaches, including intellectual, social, political, and cultural history, and at times delves into the realm of gender analysis and formation of collective memory and national identity. It also evaluates this topic from an interdisciplinary perspective, incorporating work from scholars in the fields of psychology, sociology, education, and genocide studies. Important primary sources used include the diary and poetry of Hannah Szenes and articles from the *Palestine Post*. Other primary sources that helped the author place arguments within the Zionist context included Theodor Herzl's *The Jewish State*, and excerpts from David Ben-Gurion's personal diary.

When Yoel Palgi and other parachutists prepared to enter occupied territory, they knew little about the complex negotiations that lead to their mission, what awaited them in Europe, or the effect their actions would have on a state that did not yet exist. They knew only that when the time came, they had to "Go!"

## CHAPTER 1

### POLITICS AND PLANNING, RESCUE AND REVENGE

I know with certainty that I shall be able to overcome the  
obstacles and make my way among the non Jews. . .

Enzo Sereni, April 29, 1944

In the book entitled *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, the well-known Israeli journalist and historian Tom Segev leveled harsh criticism against the Zionist Yishuv for its response, or rather *lack* of response, to the Holocaust. Segev claimed that a singular focus on the creation of a Jewish National State consumed the Yishuv leadership's time and energy between 1941 and 1945 while genocide raged across Europe. He accused the Jewish Agency of caring more about building a home for the Jewish remnant rather than working to assure the survival of a larger number of Jews. To respond to a criticism from Segev or others, Israel has pointed to the one definitive action it took to reach out to the European Jewry: the parachutists' mission.

Detractors have scoffed at references to this small scale-attempt, labeling it "no more than a fig-leaf to cover the *Yishuv* leaders' nakedness. . . ." <sup>1</sup> Critics have alleged that the Agency used this "fig leaf" as a last-ditch attempt to exonerate itself from a charge of *complete* inaction during the Nazi slaughter of European Jews. The nature of arduous negotiations between the Jewish Agency and the British military suggests otherwise. For nearly two years, senior

leadership in the Jewish Agency relentlessly petitioned officials within the British military send Palestinian Jews into occupied Europe as a way to contact native

Jewish populations. The thirty-two parachutists who eventually carried out missions never matched the Yishuv's goal of large-scale Jewish missions in occupied Europe. This plan represented only one of the many ways that the Jewish Agency searched for methods to counter the Nazi persecution. The historiographical debate should not center on whether or not they wished to help, but rather a question of why. What were their motivations? Did the Yishuv take action to help fellow Jews, or did Yishuv leadership pursue a more complex, multi-layered agenda while planning the parachutists' mission? Furthermore, to what extent did the British suspect these political motives behind the Jewish Agency's proposals? The evidence suggests that British and Yishuv leaders' attitudes towards Zionism affected how the mission was proposed, received, organized, and controlled.

The Jewish community in Palestine knew little about the nature of the Holocaust until 1942. After receiving information via the exiled Polish government in London, Palestinian news sources began publishing stories regarding the destruction of the European Jewry. Even then, these singular accounts did not fully represent the magnitude of the genocide sweeping across Europe. Many members of the Yishuv did not accept the shocking news. Jewish communities in the United States reacted with similar skepticism and disbelief. The horror of the Holocaust exceeded what any Jew, Zionist or not, had expected. After hearing about the systematic extermination, Chaim Weizmann,

president of the Jewish Agency and the World Zionist Organization, secretly estimated that a quarter of the Jewish population in central Europe would perish. The actual death count came closer to seventy-five percent.<sup>2</sup>

Soon eyewitness testimony added credence to these stories. In August, a group of Polish women, recently exchanged for German prisoners, arrived in Palestine as the first witnesses of the Nazi genocide. After detention in Poland, another group of seventy-eight Palestinians returned home on November 18, 1942 as the result of a British-German exchange agreement. These refugees relayed the gruesome specifics of the Nazi Holocaust. By November 22, 1942, the Jewish Agency Executive<sup>3</sup> released an official report, detailing Germany's systematic genocide against Jews in Europe. This report about the European scene—with its ghettos, forced labor and concentration camps, and carefully crafted death camps—extinguished most of the denial present in Palestinian minds.<sup>4</sup>

When the horrific news spread among the Yishuv population, which had reached nearly 600,000, denial was replaced with what historian Yehuda Bauer has described as “stupification” and “helpless rage.”<sup>5</sup> The dreadful accounts accelerated Yishuv efforts to aid the Jewish Diaspora in Europe. But the Yishuv's limited political sovereignty hindered this desire. At the end of World War I, Great Britain assumed supreme authority over Palestine, part of the former Ottoman Empire, under the British Mandate granted by the League of Nations. Although Great Britain allowed Jews and Arabs increasing jurisdiction over their

internal affairs, the Mandate required that these groups remain subject to British policies.<sup>6</sup> Some Palestinian Jews realized how the Yishuv's restricted authority would limit their ability to reach out to European Jews. In early January 1943, several young Yishuv members met in Tel Aviv to discuss the Jewish situation in Europe. Members of the conference expressed the concern that "because of the indifference of the enlightened world, Jewish youth had no practical way of reaching European Jewry."<sup>7</sup> A year later, Great Britain and the United States confirmed that fear. At the Bermuda Conference, held in April 1943, Great Britain and the United States met to address the question of refugees in Nazi countries, which included scores of Jews. With their final decision, these countries decided to not allow additional Jewish immigrants into Palestine at that time, reaffirming the Yishuv's helplessness and the Allies' unwillingness to respond to the Jewish extermination.<sup>8</sup>

Many Jews living in Palestine had themselves emigrated from Europe, hoping to escape persecution and to rebuild a Jewish homeland. Naturally, the Yishuv longed to welcome Jews fleeing Europe. But the British White Paper of 1939 severely restricted Jewish immigration to Palestine. To protect Arab interests, the measure sought to keep the Jewish population from growing to more than a third of Palestine's overall population. The White Paper decision limited Jewish immigration to Palestine to only 10,000 immigrants a year for the next five years. Palestine could accept an additional 25,000 Jewish refugees over that time period. The White Paper allowed the admission of only 75,000 Jews

between 1939 and April 1944, at which point no further Jewish immigration would be permitted unless Palestinian Arabs consented.<sup>9</sup> Seventy-five thousand Jews represented only a minute percentage compared to the millions under Nazi torment. The Yishuv started to consider many other approaches to assist its suffering brethren, including bolstering international awareness, demanding further exchange agreements, mobilizing a Jewish fighting unit, and permeating the borders of occupied Europe with Jewish emissaries from Eretz Israel.

Some Yishuv officials began plans to infiltrate Europe with Palestinian Jews. In 1942, Eliahu Golomb, unofficial leader of the Haganah, the Jewish defense force in Palestine, proposed that individuals selected from the Palmach be sent to organize Jewish resistance, help enlist Jews in partisan armies, and create centers to facilitate the rescue and evacuation of Jews from occupied territories. In May 1941, the Haganah established the Palmach, which stands for Plugot Machaz-Strike Companies, as its own mobilized Jewish task force. The Haganah organized the Palmach to be the cornerstone of Palestinian defense against German invasion, but by late 1942, that threat had subsided.<sup>10</sup> Golomb expected that using the Palmach's service in the European theatre it could sustain the force's very survival. Furthermore, inciting Jewish resistance behind enemy lines would mean that the Palmach no longer defended British Palestine, but instead engaged in direct Yishuv action to assist European Jewry.<sup>11</sup>

Establishing Jewish forces to fight in the war appealed to Zionists. Participating in the fight against Hitler could gain recognition for Eretz Israel as

an Allied nation-state and further validate the claim for an independent state after the war. Small Palestinian Jewish units worked with British forces during World War I. From the Zionist perspective, the use of that Jewish Legion had helped cultivate the positive attitude expressed toward Zionism in the first Balfour Declaration of 1917.<sup>12</sup> Zionists hoped to gain similar political capital from their participation in the Second World War. They also reasoned that a well-developed Jewish army would encourage the British to withdraw troops

from Palestine slated for maintaining Palestinian security. Finally, Jews trained with extensive military training could be extremely useful to the Haganah in any post-war conflict.<sup>13</sup>

Golomb's emissary plan initially included Poland as a target country. The exiled Polish government, however, warned that without aid of the Polish underground, Jewish agents could not accomplish much or even survive for long in a country under brutal military occupation. During a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive on November 29, 1942, Chairman David Ben-Gurion stated that there was no serious plan to send Jewish emissaries to Poland. Instead, Balkan countries became more favorable targets for such an attempt. The United Kingdom recognized the strategic value of the Balkan theatre, but few British military personnel were well acquainted with the languages, customs, and terrain of southeastern Europe. That November, the head of Jewish Agency's Political Department, Moshe Shertok (Sharett), visited Cairo and met with General Harold Alexander, British Commander-in-Chief of Middle East Forces.

Shertok informed Alexander that at least two hundred Palestinian Jews who originated from Europe could provide invaluable service to the British war effort using their knowledge of the Balkans. This proposal intrigued British military officials. Balkan countries made feasible targets for infiltration because they had well-established networks of underground resistance, which could help ensure the success of clandestine operations. Countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania and Slovakia appealed to the Jewish Agency because they contained one of Europe's largest remaining Jewish populations. Even into early 1944, an estimated 1.25 million Jews resided in the Balkans.<sup>14</sup> While that may not have influenced British policy, it made southeastern Europe an area of high importance to the Yishuv. Sending Jewish emissaries into the Balkans represented the best chance for Eretz Israel to reach out to the surviving Jewish remnant.

By the end of 1942, the British expressed interest in parachuting Jewish operatives into the Balkans region. Yet the Jewish Agency hesitated to commit to a definitive plan. Instead, the Revisionist New Zionist Organization<sup>15</sup> made the first solid proposal to the British.<sup>16</sup> The Revisionists, dissatisfied with how the Jewish Agency responded to the news of the Holocaust, criticized the Agency for allegedly withholding information about the persecution, so as not to lower morale when General Irwin Rommel still posed a threat to the Yishuv.

Revisionists claimed that the Agency started to consider the question of Jewish persecution only after the victory of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, "not in a sincere desire to save



lives but rather with a view to exploiting the possibilities of contributions to national funds and material to ease the manpower problems of the Yishuv which would be offered by the arrival in Palestine of any refugees saved from the Germans."<sup>17</sup> The leader of the New Zionist Organization in Palestine, Arye Altman, proposed to General McConnell, the General Officer Commanding British Troops in Palestine, that members of the National Military Organization—or Irgun Zvai Leumi (IZL)—be organized into commando units for use in occupied Europe. Quickly the IZL called for volunteers and Altman presented his offer to Richard Casey, the Minister of State Resident in Cairo.<sup>18</sup> The action of the New Zionist Organization concerned leaders of the Jewish Agency because the two groups had tense, even hostile relations.<sup>19</sup> Years prior, Ben-Gurion had called the founder of the Revisionist movement, Vladimir Jabotinsky, "Vladimir Hitler" and accused him of being a fascist.<sup>20</sup> The Agency did not want what it perceived as a right-wing faction making the first steps toward aiding European Jews. In fact, it did not want the Revisionists involved in rescue at all. When the extreme Orthodox Jewish political party Agudat Israel suggested creating a "wholly representative committee" to develop ways to rescue Jews from persecution, the Revisionists agreed, but the Agency rejected the scheme. It did so asserting that "an initiative must come from themselves as the only official representation of Jewry."<sup>21</sup> Feeling threatened by the New Zionist Organization's latest action, the Jewish Agency on January 10, 1943, approved the creation of special fighting units to battle the Nazis in Europe.<sup>22</sup>

The Yishuv knew it could not infiltrate Europe alone, so the Agency sent representatives to contact the American Office of Strategic Services, various British service branches, and the equivalent Czech, Polish, and Yugoslavian services. The British military provided the best option. Fortunately, the Yishuv had established some rapport with the British military. In the early 1930s, His Majesty's intelligence services opened communication with the Haganah. The onset of World War II strengthened these ties. In 1940, Jewish Agents worked in Rumania on behalf of the British government. During the spring of 1941, the Axis powers launched an offensive in the Balkans and Middle East, and British services employed Yishuv forces to help hold the Allied front in the Middle East. After Rommel's defeat a year later, the front shifted, and the British suddenly aborted further plans for Yishuv involvement. In light of their recent commitment to reaching European Jews, leaders of the Agency's Political Department began actively pursuing alternate avenues to cooperate with British intelligence.<sup>23</sup>

In January 1943, Reuven Zaslani, the acting liaison between the Agency's Political Department and British secret services, and Dr. Bernard (Dov) Joseph, of the Agency's Political Department, traveled to visit British officials in Cairo. There they informed General Richard Loudon McCreery, the chief of staff at the Middle East General Headquarters (ME GHQ), that the Jewish Agency could provide several individuals knowledgeable about the physical and cultural environments of many European countries. Zaslani offered approximately five

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hundred men. He predicted that once placed in target countries, Jews would assemble around the Yishuv's Jewish force. Zaslani voiced concern about the safety of Jews in southeastern Europe saying he feared they would soon face German annihilation. Zaslani proposed "that steps should be taken to organize the Jewish population of the Balkans and prepare them for resistance without delay. The Jews in the Balkans alone, without moral encouragement and expert direction from the outside, will not be able to achieve the necessary organisation, and it is suggested that a number of picked men from Palestine . . . should be introduced there for the purpose of setting up that organisation."<sup>24</sup> He indicated that these men would be under the direction of the British Headquarters and their operation be directed in keeping with the overall strategy of the war.<sup>25</sup> Zaslani proposed that officials from the Special Operations Executive (SOE)<sup>26</sup> travel to Jerusalem and interview potential agents. The British indicated reasons to favor the use of a Jewish unit. First, they remarked on Jewish steadfast resolve to seek revenge on the Germans. The also admitted the high value of local knowledge about the Balkans.<sup>27</sup>

The British offered many more arguments *against* employing a Jewish unit. The foremost centered on Palestine's internal security. Training Jews in guerilla warfare seemed highly undesirable to the British, considering such a unit might form a nucleus of resistance in post-war Palestine. Military officials also noted that if the British sent Jews into occupied countries, the Yishuv might later employ that action in post-war Jewish propaganda to validate their claim for a

nation. Aside from the threat posed to Britain's already flagging empire, Captain Domville warned that integrating Jewish and British troops could threaten Allied war missions since Jews were not popular with many local Balkan populations. A latent anti-Semitism surfaced among British military leaders. During these deliberations, one official offered the comment that "the Jews have been found to turn traitor and have on other occasions lost their nerve at the critical moment."<sup>28</sup> Even though the British liked and trusted Zaslani, they concluded that he acted first and foremost a politician and alleged that **he made the proposal not solely to help the Allied war effort, but rather to promote the political motives of the Jewish Agency.** So as to avoid further political tension between the British and the Agency, the British officials cautiously framed their rejection. They declined the offer under the pretense that the use of Jewish units would cause German reprisals against Jews—a risk that should not be taken due to the already high levels of Jewish suffering.<sup>29</sup>

While in Cairo, Joseph also presented the project to other military officials. Many of the concerns expressed in response to the Zaslani meeting were echoed as news of the proposal rippled through the military ranks. After his meeting with Joseph, **British official John Bennett voiced suspicion about the Agency's intentions: "I have little doubt that this is only an ostensible purpose, and that—with more than usually bare-faced effrontery—the Agency want[s] to get the British Army to train these Palmach units in tactics which will subsequently be turned to good account against us!"<sup>30</sup>** Bennett appropriately realized the plan's

association with Zionist motives. During this interview that took place between Joseph, Bennett, and Sir Arthur Rucker, the Permanent Undersecretary at the Minister Resident's Office, Joseph explained the desire to organize a body of saboteurs to retaliate against those destroying their race, then promptly addressed the British ban on flying the Jewish flag in Palestine.<sup>31</sup> In 1919, shortly after the Mandate, the British administration banned the flying of national flags, Jewish or Arab.<sup>32</sup> This followed an earlier order that prohibited the playing of all national anthems other than "God Save the King." Under intense public pressure from the Yishuv, the Zionist commission defended the right to fly a national flag, but the British repeatedly rejected the appeal. The flag dispute served as a source of tension between the British administration and the Yishuv for nearly three decades.<sup>33</sup> The British refused to lift the flag ban and Joseph aggravated officials by addressing it yet again in 1943. He only hurt his campaign because his discussion of the flag issue reinforced British suspicions about the Yishuv's willingness to clash with the British over the possibility of a Jewish national home.

In early February 1943, the British turned down the proposal for a Jewish Unit, noting all of their stated concerns. The SOE explained that it had no use for hundreds of Jewish volunteers and at most only wanted a few individuals. It did not see a need to create special bodies for that purpose and would recruit those individuals using its own means. With the large-scale plan rejected, the Jewish Agency could only hope that the British would employ a few individual Jews in

the Balkans. SOE representatives arrived in Palestine in February 1943 to interview thirty-three potential parachutists, mostly drawn from the Palmach ranks.<sup>34</sup>

When Zaslani and Joseph visited Cairo, the Agency also sent emissaries to confer with members from Mossad Aliyha Bet<sup>35</sup> in Istanbul and to make contact with another British Service called the A Force. Representatives from these two bodies approached the A Force to discuss a joint operation in Rumania. The A Force operated as a military body under MI 9<sup>36</sup> that focused on deception and rescuing prisoners of war (POWs). Agency representatives proposed that the British infiltrate Jewish Agents who would then help transfer Jewish refugees and British POWs to Turkey. Cooperation with the A Force proved much easier than with the SOE. A Force was younger military body, bound less by tradition, and conducted less complicated missions. The Agency found the A Force attractive because it conducted missions in countries where the SOE did not, such as Bulgaria, Rumania, and Hungary.<sup>37</sup> Additionally, the A Force's leading officer in the Eastern Mediterranean, Colonel Anthony Simonds, openly supported Zionism. During the 1930s, Simonds served in Palestine under Order Wingate<sup>38</sup> and made several friends within the Zionist movement. Simonds kept in touch with these contacts, many of who eventually became senior Zionist leaders. Simonds made an arrangement with the Jewish Agency: if they could provide contacts, safe houses, and operators in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and

other Balkan countries, Jewish agents could evacuate one Jew for every Ally they also rescued.<sup>39</sup>

The fact that two British military branches, the SOE and the A Force, approved plans for a small number of Jews to parachute into Europe with British forces did not dissuade the Jewish Agency from continuing to pursue a larger scale plan. In July 1943, Shertok again approached British officials at ME GHQ to push for employment of a large number of Jewish commando units. Shertok provided ME GHQ with a list of reasons, in order of priority, as to why Jews joined the British Army during World War II. The first reason: to defeat Hitler and seek revenge for Nazi attacks on Jews. The second purpose was to defend Palestine. Last was a desire to assist the British Empire.<sup>40</sup> This approach weakened the Agency's pitch. Six months earlier, Zaslani tried to sell the plan by highlighting Jewish service to the British. Now Shertok deviated from Zaslani's earlier rhetoric and unabashedly voiced that Jewish issues took precedence over British matters—a viewpoint the British were unwilling to endorse.

Shertok's proposal also lacked logical coherence. He first said that the Agency wanted its troops to operate in Europe and added that it would willingly involve troops *at any level* in the European theatre so that Jewish agents could bring a "message of hope" to the surviving remnant. But soon Shertok revealed that his promise of Jewish involvement "at any level" carried certain stipulations. He admitted the Agency also wished that Jewish forces could remain together so as not to feel "lost" among British troops. Furthermore, Shertok articulated

Jewish Agency concerns about casualty numbers, saying they wanted to avoid sending too many men into combat. Shertok reasoned that too many Palestinian Jews had already entered the army and that heavier losses to the Yishuv population could not be endured.<sup>41</sup> Shertok's conflicting statement reveal that, though the Agency did want to demonstrate assistance to European Jews, it also sought to preserve Yishuv interests and would not plunge all its resources into rescue efforts. The Yishuv instead chose to focus on building a new home for European Jews; with this primary goal, it could not afford to have large numbers of potential citizens for that nation dying on the European battlefield.

Shertok did not impress British officials with his latest proposal. General McLandish, confused and frustrated by the contradictory requests, wrote, "I found myself being drowned in oratory as to the immensity of the voluntary Jewish effort and I did not pursue the matter, to save time."<sup>42</sup> But before concluding the hour and a half interview, Shertok broached the issue of the Zionist flag,<sup>43</sup> as Joseph did with Rucker. Shertok pleaded with McLandish, claiming that Yishuv Jews longed for "the moral support of being able to fly 'their own flag' with, but lower, than [the] Union Jack."<sup>44</sup> Unaffected by the sentimental appeal, the general asked Shertok to not raise the question again, as the decision was "quite firm."<sup>45</sup> By forbidding Jews to fly their flag, the British limited the Jewish expression of national identity.

Jewish Agency representatives like Shertok would continue to propose larger missions well into the next year with no significant results. However, the



SOE continued its efforts to select and train a small number of individuals for parachuting missions. After interviewing thirty-three candidates in Palestine, the SOE eventually selected fourteen and, in March 1943, sent them to Cairo for training. British preparation in Cairo included education about wireless operation, espionage, and parachuting.<sup>46</sup> Problems soon arose. The Palestinians volunteered to fulfill Jewish objectives, an idea that was most likely affirmed by Palmach officials. Once the trainees arrived in Cairo, the British military informed them that the completion of British assignments was in fact their primary responsibility.

Tensions mounted over divergent objectives and soon trainees began to disobey orders. Two Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir<sup>47</sup> men refused their assignment to parachute into Germany. Because they believed that Jews no longer lived in Germany, they saw no reason to enter that country. Differences also rose over Jewish trainees enlisting in the British military. The British viewed enlistment as imperative to the agents' survival, because it guaranteed rights in case of capture.

Nevertheless, in May 1943, the volunteers refused to enlist, claiming that the Agency had not instructed them to do so. They also denied army pay, stating that they wished to remain entirely independent of the British. Many of these individuals belonged to leftist Zionist parties, whose support perpetuated this defiance. As a result, the British threatened to end the training and send them back to Palestine. Zaslani, desperate to salvage the operation, furiously

demanding that Zionist institutions quiet their resistance, lest they be responsible for the mission's failure.<sup>48</sup>

Jewish trainees remained highly suspicious of their British instructors. They complained about "superficial" training and claimed the instructors knew nothing about the target countries. Frustration increased as volunteers waited for details about their missions. The military leaders exacerbated this frustration when they denied the trainees direct contact with the Jewish Agency. Many participants started to question their commitment to the operation. Zaslani urged them to stay saying, "we should continue the project even in the new circumstances and endeavor, of course, to achieve the fulfillment of promises."<sup>49</sup>

After completing instruction in May 1943, and trainees traveled back to Palestine. Following their initial training, many candidates continued training for parachuting and wireless operation at SOE schools and in Haganah camps. During the fall of 1943, several took a Haganah wireless operation course in Ramat Hakovesh.<sup>50</sup> Many parachutists also spent time at the Kibbutz Hazorea with the Balkan Section of Palmach while waiting to be called into service. Those returning from Cairo joined other volunteers to form a group of approximately twenty individuals assembled at Kibbutz Hazorea. Here, under Yehuda Ben-Horin, the volunteers underwent an intensive course of ideological indoctrination, featuring lectures by several Zionist leaders. They also continued Palmach military training and were occasionally called up by the British for courses in radio operation and parachute jumping. In Cairo, a few individuals

dropped out of the program due to either limited language ability or personal reasons. By fall 1943, many changes had occurred to the list of SOE candidates. Several civilians had left the program and some men who were already serving in the British military transferred from their regular units into parachutist training. Jewish volunteers and British military leaders clashed again over formal army enlistment. This time the British wanted volunteers enlisted not only to protect them in case of capture, but also to help maintain discipline and control. Zaslani assuaged volunteers' concerns by telling them that they could receive training for Jewish matters after British preparation.<sup>51</sup>

Volunteers operating under the A Force disagreed less with their British superiors because the A Force showed more support for Jewish interests.

Throughout the summer of 1943, the A Force trained dozens of volunteers, and actually allowed the Palmach to conduct the bulk of volunteer training. Palmach training had two tiers: ideological and military. This multifaceted approach taught skills for aiding resistance and rescue, as well as bolstering Zionist movements in southeastern Europe. Most of the volunteers' initial instruction came from ideological seminars, like the one held at Kibbutz Hazorea.<sup>52</sup> They attended classes that taught Jewish values and explained causes of anti-Semitism and Jewish persecution in Europe. According to the instructors, anti-Semitism and persecution justified the need for the Zionist movement. Peter Hay, biographer of one of the parachutists, commented on the instruction writing that "the Jewish Agency and the Haganah considered it of the highest propaganda

value that anybody representing Eretz Israel to the Jewish Diaspora should carry a Jewish message of hope in this darkest hour.”<sup>53</sup> Palmach field-training included

strenuous basic training, which lasted thirty-seven days and twenty nights.

Additionally, the Palmach taught skills for individual action, which included infiltration, guarding areas, searching for people, and guerilla action tactics.

Because the program demanded so much energy, it successfully forced out those ill-suited for this type of work.<sup>54</sup>

Regardless of the strenuous training, many stayed and anxiously awaited deployment. (See Figure 1.) The trainees waited while the British sought to reconcile logistical problems concerning target countries. First, the British needed a secure dispatch location for parachutists in Europe. They did not find a location until September 1943, when the Allied occupation of southern Italy opened up a new operation center in Bari, Italy, on the Adriatic Basin.

Furthermore, the exact nature and location of the drops remained uncertain. The SOE could claim only limited control. It considered access to Albania, Greece, and Yugoslavia possible, though tenuous at best. Political complications, which historian Yoav Gelber has described as “the outcome of rivalries between various underground organizations: royalist, republican, communist and anticommunist,”<sup>55</sup> severely hindered operations in Greece and Yugoslavia.

Meanwhile the SOE deemed Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, and Slovakia virtually inaccessible. The situation grew increasingly complicated for the British after the



Figure 1. Parachutists Haviva Reik, Baruch Kamin, Uriel Kanner, Dov Berger, Tsadok Doron, and Sara Braverman during their training period in Egypt. (Source: United States Holocaust Museum Website, <[http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia\\_doc/query/42?uf=uia\\_ppPIvy](http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/query/42?uf=uia_ppPIvy)>.)

Italian surrender. Various underground organizations rushed to fill the void created by withdrawing Italian troops. The Middle East Command realized the military value of resistance movements and focused much energy on providing Balkan guerrillas with supplies and carrying out commando operations on Balkan coasts.<sup>56</sup> With all the changes, the negotiations with the Jewish Agency comprised only a tiny element of Great Britain's complex Balkan strategy and therefore received little attention.

By late 1943 and early 1944, the A Force started assigning individuals to specific missions and locations. The Palmach and kibbutzim in Palestine objected to these volunteers' enlistment in the army. The Yishuv worried that after enlisting, the participants would be forced to serve in the military until the end of the war without completing their Jewish missions. The A Force resolved the disagreement easier than the SOE. The A Force decided that in the case that a mission was completed or canceled, the individual could return to either his previous military unit or to civilian life. During January 1944, these assigned candidates completed a month-long parachutist's course at Ramat David.<sup>57</sup> Before the group traveled to Cairo, Zvi Yehieli, who coordinated its departure on behalf of the Haganah, arranged informal meetings for participants with many important Yishuv leaders. Parachutists looked to leaders such as David Ben-Gurion, Golda Meir, Eliahu Golomb, and Berl Katznelson to direct the purpose of their mission and provide a final blessing before leaving Israel. Golomb hailed the value of resistance and instructed, "Teach Jews to fight." Ben-Gurion

emphasized the idea of a Jewish Homeland and encouraged the group to "make Jews understand that Palestine, the Land of Israel, is their country and haven."

Finally, Katznelson reminded these individuals of the gravity of their mission: "If no Jews survive, the Land of Israel and the Zionist enterprise will perish too."<sup>58</sup>

This advice helped solidify the group's sense of purpose: it would inspire certain parachutists until the end of their mission. In February 1944, these parachutists joined with several others from the SOE. From there, both A Force and SOE parachutists traveled to the base in Bari, Italy, in final preparation for the drop.<sup>59</sup>

The early months of 1944 brought excitement. It looked as though some Jewish agents would soon enter military action against Axis powers. The Jewish Agency officials nevertheless worried that they must send more representatives to Europe than this handful of agents. The Agency found the A Force most helpful, but it could only direct missions related to rescuing prisoners of war. To pursue the goal of widespread Jewish resistance, the Agency, once again, approached the SOE in Cairo. On January 25, 1944, Zaslani submitted a memorandum entitled "Proposals to Organise the Jewish Communities in the Balkans for Resistance Against the Massacre by the Germans." Zaslani's approach changed from a year prior; he no longer listed the ways in which Jews would help the British army but instead pleaded for permission to help the Jews of Europe:

Latest reports from POLAND and other parts of German occupied EUROPE prove that the disaster that has befallen European Jewry exceeds



almost anything ever recorded in the history of persecution. Entire communities have been ruthlessly and methodically murdered. Convoys of thousands of families have been transported to "communal graves" and machine gunned, with only a few individuals remaining to tell the tale. In all, over five million Jews have been put to death in cold blood under the extermination policy openly proclaimed by HITLER and GOEBELS and executed by the German military machine.<sup>60</sup>

By February 1944, a year since the SOE began interviewing candidates, the vast majority of trainees had not been used and those assigned to missions still awaited deployment. Fearing further German invasion of the Balkans, Zaslani thought only organized resistance would save the between one and two million Jews left in southeastern Europe. He strongly urged the British to send the hundreds of available Palestinian Jews, many of whom were already trained, to provide the "moral encouragement and expert direction from the outside" that could set up resistance and hopefully save some lives.<sup>61</sup>

A week later, Shertok met in Cairo with Brigadier Ian Clayton and Chief Civil Assistant to the Minister Resident, Sir William Croft, to provide further details about the latest Agency proposal. Shertok recommended sending Jewish agents to four countries: Bulgaria, Hungary, Rumania, and Slovakia. Two men would be dispatched to each location, one as chief organizer and the other as a wireless operator. After contacting the potential resistance cells, the pair would summon groups of at least fifty more Palestinian Jews to each country. The groups would bring equipment and provide leadership for the resistance fighters. Once again, Shertok's words assume a different tone than Zaslani's. While the Zaslani spoke of rescue, Shertok sought retribution. He maintained,



"Nowhere outside Nazi-dominated Europe have young Jews smarted more bitterly under the humiliation of their brethren being slaughtered like sheep than they have done in Palestine. Nowhere has their desire for revenge been more intense."<sup>62</sup>

Overall, the British poorly received the proposition. Clayton viewed the plan as nothing more than a front for illegal Jewish immigration to Palestine. British officials soon started referring to this as Shertok's "disingenuous offer."<sup>63</sup>

Croft told Shertok that the military might accept the first portion of his plan—to dispatch a pair of agents—but that further commitments would not be made until they could see how well the initial agents fared. Once the proposal reached the High Commissioner in Palestine and ME GHQ, many officials favored rejection. Lieutenant-Colonel H.G. Curran stated that the Army already supported Balkan resistance groups to its full capacity. Furthermore, he did not approve of the Jews asking for special consideration, reminding Croft that "the military policy of GHQ ME is to organize and support resistance groups in which all parties, colours and creeds can join. . . . This view point fits in no doubt with the political unsuitability of Mr. Shertok's proposals."<sup>64</sup> Sir Harold MacMichael joined those British officials skeptical of Jewish motives. He favored rejecting the plan and, in early March 1944, he explained, "I am glad to note that care is being taken to ensure that the Jewish Agency are not given a free hand to use relief work as cover for political activities."<sup>65</sup>

Few British officials seemed sympathetic toward the Jewish petitions for rescue and revenge; rather, many viewed the current war strategy and the future of Palestinian security as more pressing British concerns. MacMichael warned against any Jewish military participation due to the threat it might pose to post-war Palestine. He maintained that "from our point of view any avoidable extension of further opportunities to Palestine Jews for training in and organisation of guerilla warfare is most strongly to be deprecated from the aspect of the future internal security of this country."<sup>66</sup> The British remained careful in framing rejection to avoid a negative political image. Bennett cautioned that if they turned down the proposal, they must do so for military reasons, to avoid giving the Jewish Agency a powerful "propaganda weapon."<sup>67</sup> Curran reasoned that SOE already supported resistance groups in the Balkans to the fullest extent possible. Bennett supplemented that excuse by explaining the SOE's limited supply of aircrafts. He added that even if more planes became available, they would be used for existing SOE activities and not the proposed Jewish mission.

Jewish Agency representatives remained determined even in the face of vehement rejection. By April 1944, it realized that the ME GHQ and the High Commission would not accept the plans for large-scale Jewish missions. Instead, Zaslani approached other forces subordinate to ME GHQ about the proposals—a move that Curran considered both "undesirable and improper."<sup>68</sup> Zaslani and Shertok continued to promote their plan to various military offices throughout the spring and summer of 1944, though they did so with no positive results. Due

to both Nazi and Red Army invasions, the situations greatly changed in Balkan countries, which altered British priorities and affected the feasibility and necessity of Jewish parachuting missions.

The plans for infiltrating Jewish emissaries into occupied Europe would never match the ambitious goals of the Jewish Agency. This failure helps feed the critical assessment of the Jewish Agency's weak response to the Holocaust.

Analyzing the ongoing British-Yishuv discussions reveals how it was not the Yishuv's insincere attempts, but rather the unresolved British-Yishuv tensions that limited the mission to such a small-scale effort. The mission suffered repeated delays as the Yishuv and the British military disagreed about the focus of these operations. The Yishuv intended this mission to be about rescue through resistance and spreading the Zionist message, whereas the British intended the Jewish volunteers to serve as wireless operators, rescue Allied prisoners of war, and aid British forces with their knowledge of the Balkan region. The looming post-war battle for Israeli statehood factored heavily into the negotiations. The British worried that the skills Palmach members acquired during training in guerilla warfare would one day be used against the British in a battle for an independent Jewish state. The Yishuv wanted to use the Palmach's service in such a way that it would no longer be defending British Palestine, but instead directing a Yishuv action to assist European Jewry.

The Jewish Agency failed to present a united front in their proposal for European infiltration. Agency officials Moshe Shertok and Dov Joseph continued to push Zionist issues when promoting the mission, while others, such as Reuven Zaslani, underplayed the Zionist agenda and emphasized the need to aid suffering Jews in Europe. Most officials in the British military, with the exception of Anthony Simonds, did not show sympathy for the Zionist cause. Reminders of that agenda only aggravated them and made them disinclined to support the Jewish proposals. Despite the accusations of critics, the Yishuv *did* want to help the Jews of Europe. But from the Zionist perspective, helping meant inspiring Jews through the Zionist ideology, which included organized revolt against the Nazis. The Yishuv leadership also hoped that its involvement in the war effort would strengthen the claim for a Jewish national home. Aware of these political motives, the British sought to limit Jewish involvement to only a small number of participants. Instead, the fate of the mission relied on those few individuals waiting in Cairo and Bari, eager for a chance to save their people.

## CHAPTER 2

### A DANGEROUS DESCENT

I go with the hope that I will succeed in doing a little for my people. . . .

Enzo Sereni, April 29, 1944

In the early months of 1943, a young Jewish woman named Hannah Szenes worked faithfully at Kibbutz Sdot Yam in Eretz Israel. (See Figure 2.) She safely lived thousands of miles away from the Nazi death machine operating in Europe, but her Hungarian homeland was not far from her mind. On January 8, 1943, Szenes recorded in her personal diary, "I've had a shattering week. I was suddenly struck by the idea of going to Hungary. I feel I must be there during these days. . . ." <sup>1</sup> She wrote this only two days before the Jewish Agency approved the creation and deployment of special fighting units to Europe. Szenes was only one of many Jewish European immigrants residing in Palestine who felt distraught and helpless in the face of Hitler's onslaught. Excitement overcame her when a Palmach member arrived at Sdot Yam in February to explain plans to form a unit to fulfill her exact wish—to return to Europe. <sup>2</sup>

Many shared Szenes's wish. As news of the proposed mission spread through Palestine, several Palestinian Jews expressed interest. Nearly 250 candidates volunteered. From those volunteers, 110 were trained, but only thirty-two actually made jumps. Five infiltrated target countries through other means. The candidates for the mission came mainly from the ranks of the Palmach,



Figure 2. Hannah Senesh at Kibbutz Sdot Yam. (Source: United States Holocaust Museum Website, <[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media\\_ph.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1885](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_ph.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1885)>.)

youth pioneer movements, and preexisting British-commanded Jewish forces. All chosen candidates had emigrated from Europe, since this endeavor required that agents be familiar with the languages, terrain, and customs of southeastern Europe.<sup>3</sup> By May 27, 1943, Szenes, originally from Hungary, suspected that she might be selected for this mission and wrote, "My entire being is preoccupied with one thing: departure."<sup>4</sup> Szenes and the others desired to return to Europe for compelling reasons. Many of the candidates' close relatives still lived in Balkan countries such as Hungary, Rumania, and Slovakia. This young group—comprised mainly of individuals in their early to mid twenties—volunteered for the mission eager and idealistic. Author Marie Syrkin confirmed that each parachutist she interviewed believed that "he had felt himself personally called to answer the cry of the Jews of Europe."<sup>5</sup> Most candidates lived and worked on kibbutzim<sup>6</sup> and faithful supported the Zionist movement. Regardless of any British stipulations, these volunteers believed they knew the "true" purpose of their mission: to promote the Zionist cause by inciting resistance and rescuing fellow Jews. Szenes wrote that she wished to inhale enough fresh air from Eretz Israel in order "to breathe it even in the Diaspora's stifling atmosphere, and to spread it all around . . . for those who do not know what real freedom is."<sup>7</sup> The continuous delays plaguing the mission during 1943 suppressed the hope of Szenes and the other eager volunteers. Though sufficiently trained, most of them would not see military action that year.

There were two exceptions to this idling. In May 1943, the SOE dropped Peretz Rosenberg into Montenegro, Yugoslavia, which was under Italian administration.<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg participated as part of the first British mission to Yossip Tito's headquarters in Yugoslavia. Rosenberg's assignment as a radio operator made him the only contact British forces had with the outside world. He worked there until October 1943 when the British summoned him to return to Italy.<sup>9</sup>

A two-man mission to Rumania conducted under the A Force accounts for the other exception. During the Allied bombing of the Ploesti oil fields in Rumania, many American aviators fell prisoner to Rumanian and German forces, and the first use for a pair of Palestinian paratroopers seemed necessary.<sup>10</sup> In September 1943, Luva (Yehuda) Gukowsky and Arie Fichman departed from Cairo as part of operation "Mantilla." Disaster soon quelled the excitement surrounding this first jump. On the night of October 1, 1943, perhaps due to poor visibility, the pilot flew off course. Consequently, he dropped the two men far from their intended target where members of the Jewish underground awaited the landing. Instead, Fishman landed in a police station courtyard, and Rumanian police captured him immediately. They sent Fishman to a prisoner-of-war camp. Gukowsky, perhaps more fortunate, landed on a rooftop and broke his leg. Rumanian forces seized him the following morning and admitted him to a hospital as a prisoner.<sup>11</sup>



The first botched episode in this valiant mission postponed further attempts. After hearing the fate of the Palestinian Jews in Rumania, Yoel Palgi, already a member of the British Army, asked to be transferred to the intelligence sector. The military informed him that sending Palestinian paratroopers was currently not possible.<sup>12</sup> The Rumanian debacle seemed to cause certain British officials to reconsider the safety and security of the operation. The SOE remained inclined, however, to dispatch another radio operator, Rehavam Amir, in January 1944 to the work with Tito's headquarters. While Amir's time on the island of Vis only lasted until April, he did assist hundreds of the island's Jewish refugees during his tour of duty.<sup>13</sup>

These attempts that peppered 1943 and 1944 involved only four of the volunteers, and hardly achieved the widespread infiltration that the Yishuv imagined. Almost a year after training, British intelligence finally started assigning several Jewish volunteers to destinations. The parachutists did not carry out their missions as one solitary assault, but rather they infiltrated Europe through as a series of attempts in Yugoslavia, Rumania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Italy, Austria, and France. (See Figure 3.) As the Rumanian failure proved, finding amicable contacts on the ground after blind drops into target countries added significant risk for agents. Palgi recalled that he rather favored blind jumps, believing that they increased the chance of reaching target cities. But the British officials reminded Palgi and other Jewish agents of the foiled drop

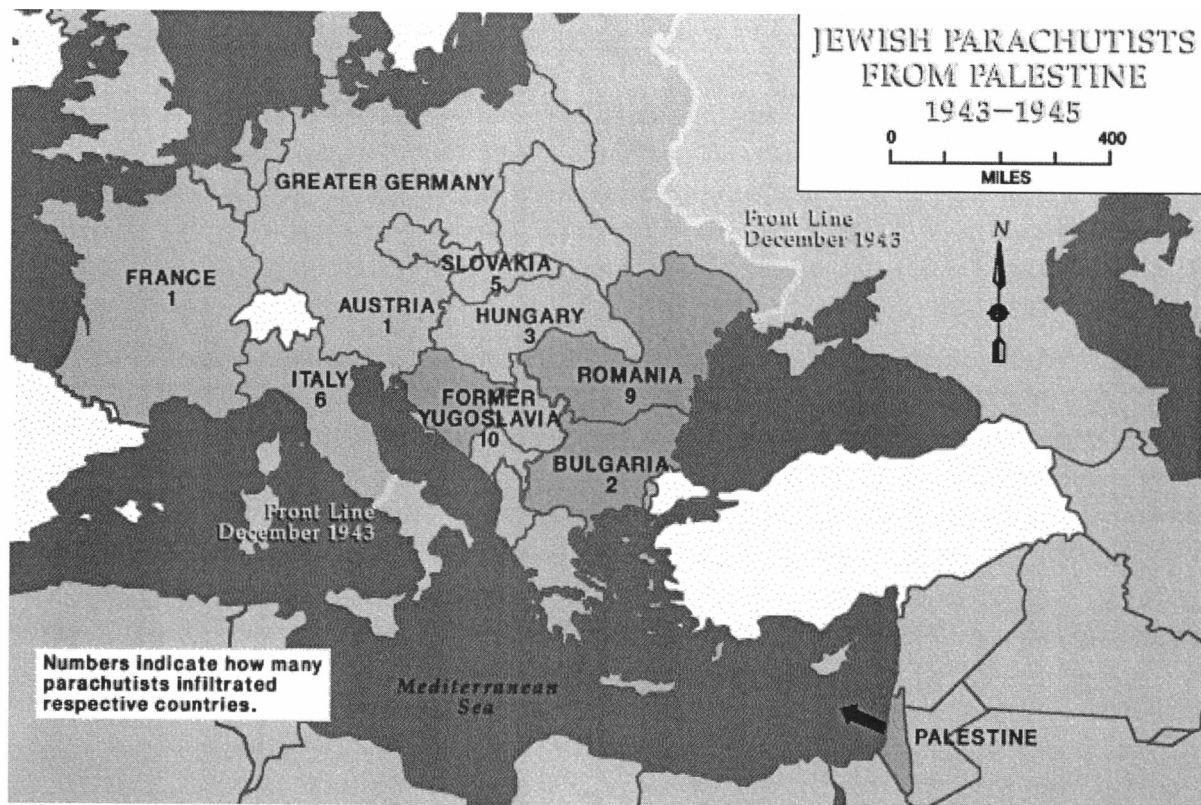


Figure 3. Map indicating the number of parachutists sent to certain locations.  
 (Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website,  
 <[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media\\_nm.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1576](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_nm.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1576)>.)

into Rumania that took place on the eve of the Jewish New Year. They emphasized the difficulty for pilots to drop agents on target without the help of flares or other ground markers.

The arrangement of marked landings required making contact with someone on the ground, whether it be Jewish or non-Jewish underground movements. In the Balkan countries, only Yugoslavia contained a partisan network that controlled significant amounts of territory.<sup>14</sup> The British established successful contact with Tito's partisan network in Yugoslavia, and the A Force decided to utilize these connections. In December 1943, the A Force assigned five parachutists to jump into Yugoslavia. From there, local partisans would receive the paratroopers and help them travel to their respective countries. (See Figure 4.) They assigned Dov Berger, Abba Berditchev, and Yeshayahu Trachtenberg to infiltrate Rumania, and Hannah Szenes and Yoel Palgi to Hungary. Hungary deserved special attention because it contained close to one million Jews, as well as Polish, Czech, and French refugees and prisoners of war. Despite the fortuitous relationship with Tito's headquarters, this new approach added further complexity and risk to the parachutists' task. Contact with partisans on the ground would have to be delicately executed, and the parachutists would have to cover hundreds of kilometers before reaching their destinations.<sup>15</sup>



Figure 4. Parachutists with women from the Yugoslav underground. (Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website, [http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia\\_doc/query/18?uf=uia\\_ppPIvy](http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/query/18?uf=uia_ppPIvy).)

Weeks passed and the parachutists battled their anxiety about the pending jumps. When Palgi selected a parachute based on the color and number he liked best, he could not escape the thought, "What is if the chute doesn't open?"<sup>16</sup> Even though he had practiced jumping several times at parachute school, he wrote that "fear proceeded each jump."<sup>17</sup> He remarked that men who had jumped a hundred times still quivered as another jump grew near. Reuven Dafni substantiated that claim. He described the moments before jumps as "dreadful" and "difficult" and remembered how his "heart would pound with trepidation."<sup>18</sup> According to Palgi, the British and Jews alike were awestruck by Szenes. At only twenty-two, this one of only three female parachutists seemed fearless. The day that Palgi selected his parachute, the quartermaster marveled at Szenes's bravery, calling her the first person that seemed unafraid. Dafni used Hannah Szenes's courage for inspiration, recalling her comforting words to relax.<sup>19</sup> One night in Bari, a British officer claimed that he knew an Italian parachutist who refused to jump five times. That same officer scoffed and said that Jewish volunteers only cared about the money and food provided during training. Palgi felt appalled—he knew his purpose on this mission, and it had nothing to do with money or food. He sought to help his people and his country.<sup>20</sup>

Palgi's experience while awaiting his mission demonstrates how fear and frustration could cloud the mind of a parachutist. Luckily, Enzo Sereni accompanied the group to serve as a sort of inspirational leader. Sereni had

accomplished much in his thirty-eight years. This member of the Italian aristocracy earned a Ph.D. in philosophy, helped found Kibbutz Givat Brenner—the third largest kibbutz in Palestine—and participated in many other Zionist endeavors. His involvement with the parachuting mission did not come through volunteering, as he was a bit older than the typical parachutist. Attempting to lessen the frustration felt by Jewish agents during training, the Jewish Agency created Commission Het to facilitate better communication between the Jewish Agency, British Commanders, and the agents themselves. The Agency assigned Sereni to accompany the parachutists and serve as a liaison between them and the British authorities.<sup>21</sup> Sereni's vitality and confidence helped keep the parachutists focused and enthusiastic during their wait in Cairo and Bari.

The night before a drop, old tensions between the British and the Jews resurfaced. The British officials asked the individuals if they wished to be registered as emissaries or spies. Registration as a spy carried a handsome salary, but every volunteer rejected the lucrative offer, firmly asserting that they "served the Jews and not the British."<sup>22</sup> These individuals saw themselves not as paid agents, but rather as "volunteers on a life-saving mission."<sup>23</sup> For that reason they forfeited all rights, privileges, and money that the British military could offer. The group instead demanded that each member be granted officer rank; that made their standing equal to that of their British counterparts and ensured their status in the event of capture.

At last the time came to depart. The farewell parties held for the parachutists included both joyous and somber moments. Ruth Kluger (Eliav), the Mossad agent in Cairo, remembered the evenings' few ominous mishaps. One night Enzo Sereni dropped and broke a framed photograph from a shelf. On the evening prior, Hannah Szenes spilled an entire bottle of red wine on a white tablecloth, leaving a stain suggestive of a puddle of blood.<sup>24</sup> On March 13, 1944, Abba Berdichev, Hannah Szenes, Yohah Rosenfeld, and Reuven Dafni left Bari to parachute into Slovenia, Yugoslavia. Sereni provided the comrades with parting words of encouragement: "Remember, only he who wants to die, dies!"<sup>25</sup> Winter clothes weighed down their bodies—heavy thoughts weighed down their minds. (See Figure 5.) Parcels and parachute harnesses limited movement and the engine noise barred conversation. But not even the monstrous roar of the aircraft engines could stifle the anxiety, fear, and anticipation emanating throughout the cabin. Only Szenes's enthusiasm, Dafni recounts, could counter these negative feelings: "Her excitement was contagious; we were all infected by it."<sup>26</sup> The time to jump arrived. Szenes offered a smile and "thumbs up" and they jumped into the black night sky.

The original assignments from months earlier had slightly changed. Now Szenes and Rosenfeld would try to infiltrate Hungary, Berdichev would travel to Rumania, and Dafni would remain in Yugoslavia. The British commanded Dafni to work with Major John Eden, nephew of the British foreign minister, and establish a base to assist other Palestinian agents and Hungarian refugees. Dafni



Figure 5. Parachutists on board an airplane before jumping into Yugoslavia.  
(Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Website,  
<[http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia\\_doc/query/16?uf=uia\\_ppIvy](http://www.ushmm.org/uia-cgi/uia_doc/query/16?uf=uia_ppIvy)>.)



described a clear, moonlit night, but also remembered how the pilot dropped them at least eight miles from their target. The three men managed to regroup, but Szenes drifted due to her light weight and was not found for another hour. While Berdichev, Rosenfield, and Dafni searched for their missing comrade, two men approached.<sup>27</sup> The red star on one man's hat indicated his membership in Tito's partisan network. The parachutists welcomed the men with the standard greeting, "*Smrt fascizmu! . . . Sloboda narodnu!*" meaning "Death to fascism! Freedom for the people!"<sup>28</sup> The volunteers had found friends. But not even their initial good fortune could ward off the devastating news: on March 19, 1944, the Nazis occupied Hungary.<sup>29</sup> Apparently, the delays in deployment did have an effect. These new circumstances drastically threatened any chance of success in Hungary.

April and May brought another wave of drops. British authorities decided to send an additional pair to Hungary, four to Rumania, and two more to Bulgaria. Dangerous complications continued to afflict the parachutists. In May, two men parachuted into Rumania and were immediately captured. The operation felt another harsh blow when Sereni, assigned only as a British-Yishuv liaison, insisted on parachuting behind enemy lines into his homeland of Italy. His colleagues pleaded with him not to go and the Agency's political department had originally answered with an unconditional "no" to Sereni's request. Always relentless, Sereni appealed to Shertok. Sereni deemed it necessary to infiltrate northern Italy, which remained Nazi territory after September 1943, to organize

remaining Jewish populations before they perished at Nazi hands. Shertok finally consented. On May 15, 1944, the plane left Bari. Sereni, now thirty-nine, could fulfill his desire to jump. The drop did not run smoothly. Perhaps due to pilot error, Sereni missed his target and landed about twenty-five miles from Florence—directly into Nazi territory.<sup>30</sup> Though Sereni jumped first, his partner—Roselli Lorenzo del Turco—weighed more and descended quicker than Sereni. Upon landing, Lorenzo lost consciousness for a period of time. When he woke up, he could not find his partner.<sup>31</sup>

That same month, Palgi and Peretz Goldstein parachuted into Yugoslavia, bound for Hungary. (See Figure 6.) Palgi and Goldstein, friends since their childhood in Transylvania, quickly joined partisan soldiers to search for the group dropped in March. Like other parachutists, these men cautiously concealed their Jewish identity. The partisans and local villagers often expressed anti-Jewish sentiment and if they discovered that Palestinian Jews were involved in a British mission, it might have substantiated the Nazi claim that “the Jews rule Britain and the world.”<sup>32</sup> Language posed the major problem. Only Dafni spoke fluent English, and British soldiers would not have been as well versed in Balkan languages as were these individuals. The solution: speak Hebrew and call it Welsh, as both of those languages were unfamiliar tongues to the partisans.<sup>33</sup>

The parachutists kept their Jewish identity well hidden, but shame often resulted as the personal cost of this secrecy. While walking with a young



Figure 6. Palgi and Goldstein before departure in 1944. Left, Yoel Palgi; right, Peretz Goldstein. (Source: Yoel Palgi, *Into the Inferno: The Memoir of a Jewish Paratrooper Behind Nazi Lines*, 32.)

Viennese girl who had joined the partisans, Rosenfeld, Palgi, and Goldstein experienced anti-Semitism first hand. The four strolled on a forest path discussing the war when the girl casually remarked, "I don't like Jews." The girl continued down the path ignorantly walking arm in arm with Rosenfeld. The three parted from her later, ashamed of how well they maintained their charade.<sup>34</sup> The hatred that caused even more pain came from their British "comrades." Shortly after arriving in Yugoslavia, Palgi and a British officer referred to in Palgi's memoirs as "John" engaged in a heated argument about infiltrating the Hungarian border. According to Palgi, John expressed doubt that any of the Jewish agents could cross the border, saying, "I know your lot, when the time comes for action, you drop out!" This comment echoes the same sentiment expressed by a British military official during the early stages of planning the mission. After hearing the comment, Palgi described how he exploded in rage, blaming John and the British Empire for delaying Yishuv efforts to rescue the Jews. Palgi wrote his response as, "You bastard! You know very well that we've come to save our brothers from the furnaces and gas chambers. . . . It's your fault that our departure was delayed until Hungary was conquered by the Germans, and now you've got to sling mud at us!"<sup>35</sup> The experience of working together in war had not been enough to calm hostilities between the Palestinian Jews and the British.

Palgi could look past these conflicts because the biggest challenge still lay ahead: completing the mission in Hungary. Within a few weeks, Goldstein and

Palgi reconnected with Dafni's group, finding the members drastically divided on the issue of how to proceed. Szenes seemed consumed with the idea of crossing the closed border, whereas Dafni and Rosenfeld wanted to continue aiding partisan sabotage missions in Yugoslavia. Though Dafni condemned Szenes's vision as a suicide mission, she remained undeterred by his line of reasoning. Palgi recalled how on an evening in May, as partisans sang freedom songs by firelight, Szenes expressed her thoughts to him: "I have to go. And if I die, it won't have been in vain. Perhaps the Jews will hear a rumor that an agent from Palestine tried to reach them and died in the attempt, and hearts in the forests and ghettos will quicken with the thought: We have to hang on, they haven't abandoned us, they haven't forgotten us, maybe rescue is near. Faith can work miracles. . . . I don't want to die. . . but I have to repurchase my right to life."<sup>36</sup> Thus the two parachutists decided that they would try to cross into Hungary.

With partisan support, Szenes crossed the Hungarian border on June 9, 1944, just as the Nazis completed their first round of deportations to Auschwitz. Goldstein and Palgi followed ten days later. Though pleased with this accomplishment, they smuggled themselves directly into the heart of danger. The Hungarian secret service apprehended Szenes almost immediately after she crossed the border and took her to a military prison in Budapest. After rounds of torture, she admitted her real name. The Jewish Agency had promised that by the time she reached Hungary, her mother, Katherine Szenes, would no longer

be living in Budapest. The next day Hannah Szenes sat across from her mother in an interrogation room, both women were shocked to see the other. At first, Katherine did not speak to Hannah—certain that the woman with the tangled hair, blackened eyes, and a missing front tooth was not her daughter. Her Hannah, the fervent pacifist, should have been on a kibbutz near Haifa, not sitting before her as a captured volunteer for the British Army.<sup>37</sup> “Had I not known she was coming,” Katherine Szenes recounts, “. . . I would not have recognized the Hannah of five years ago.”<sup>38</sup> The police had brought Katherine Szenes to the prison to entice Hannah to talk, but the attempt failed. Szenes knew about her daughter’s strong will, and decided that if she kept quiet, she must have a good reason for doing so. Mother and daughter spent only a short time together before the guards ended their visit. Katherine Szenes made a brief visit to her home before Hungarian police arrived to arrest her. She would remain incarcerated in the same prison as her daughter until September 1944.<sup>39</sup>

Goldstein and Palgi, upon reaching Hungary, soon realized the true bleakness of the Jewish situation. To their horror, the Nazis had already purged several Hungarian communities of their Jewish populations. Recounting their first stop in a Hungarian city, Palgi wrote, “There were no more Jews here. We were too late.”<sup>40</sup> The two proceeded to the capitol city of Budapest hoping to find at least some remainder of the Hungarian-Jewish population. Once in Budapest, Palgi spotted something that struck him with both shock and relief: a girl wearing a yellow Star of David. This sign meant that Jews still lived in

Hungary. Before leaving Palestine, Mossad Aliyah Bet provided Palgi with three underground contacts in Hungary. By this time, he had received word that only one of them could be used. Palgi dialed the number, spoke the password: "This is the labor union speaking," and then asked for Moshe Schweiger.<sup>41</sup> The woman who answered responded that she did not know anyone by that name and hung up the phone. Confused and desperate, Palgi made a risky decision to visit the house of Dr. Rudolf Kasztner, a leader of the Hungarian branch of the Palestine Aid and Rescue Committee (Vaadat Ezra Vö-Hazalah). Palgi knew Kasztner as a family friend and fellow Zionist from his days in Transylvania.<sup>42</sup>

The Hungarian mission suffered from unfortunate timing on so many accounts. During 1943-1944, Kasztner secretly negotiated with Nazi official Adolf Eichmann about the rescue of the Hungarian Jewry.<sup>43</sup> While one of Kasztner's associates, Joel Brand, proposed the plan to British and Jewish authorities in Turkey, Eichmann grew impatient with Kasztner and threatened to end the offer. Kasztner feared that if the Germans believed the Palestinians to be British spies, it could doom the agreement. Palgi already suspected that men were following him and Kasztner encouraged Palgi to visit the Gestapo as an emissary from Palestine intending to conduct negotiations on the "blood for goods" arrangement. Kasztner believed that involving the parachutists in these negotiations offered a way to both ensure the emissary's safety and buy time until Brand could return from Turkey. Palgi met with the Gestapo, but to no real

effect. The Gestapo and Hungarians did not always communicate with each other and the Hungarian police arrested Palgi on June 27, 1944.<sup>44</sup>

Goldstein fared no better. After suspecting they were being followed, Goldstein and Palgi had separated. As part of the Kasztner-Brand negotiation, several Hungarian Jews had congregated at a protected camp on Columbus Street to await departure to Spain. Goldstein ended up hiding on Columbus Street with his own parents while they waited for a train ride to safety. The Jewish Agency obviously failed to fulfill its promise to remove Goldstein's parents from Hungary. Goldstein almost boarded this train with other passengers, but did not when the word spread that Hungarian authorities were searching for him. Kasztner arrived at the camp to tell Goldstein that he could either continue to hide, escape, or surrender to the Hungarians. Sources indicate that Kasztner pressured Goldstein to surrender. Whether it was to help his parents, Palgi, or the Committee, Goldstein's exact motives for surrender are not known. The Hungarian police arrested him and imprisoned him at the same location as Palgi.<sup>45</sup>

While these parachutists were being beaten and tortured in Hungarian's prison, another group of volunteers had begun training for a mission in Slovakia. The Slovakian National Uprising<sup>46</sup> started in late August 1944 and held particular interest for the Jewish authorities. Not only did Slovakia still contain a significant population of young Jewish males, but it also was a location where insurrectionists allowed Jews to join in their fighting. Such had not been the case



in Poland. Parachutists in Bari who heard about the uprising asked for immediate transfer to Slovakia. The misfortune of the Hungarian group had endangered plans to enter Slovakia through Hungary. Instead, they would make a blind jump. On the night of September 14-15, 1944, Zvi Ben Ya'akov, Rafael Reiss, and Chaim Hermesh jumped into Slovakia as part of "Operation Amsterdam." (See Figure 7.) They entered the center of the uprising, Banská-Bystrica, which was a liberated Slovakian enclave that included approximately five thousand Jewish refugees. The British did not allow a fourth member of the group, Haviva Reik, to participate in a blind jump because she was a woman. Furious and determined to reach Banská-Bystrica, her former hometown, Reik found a seat on an American plane and reached the destination four days before the men, who had been dropped eighty kilometers north of their target. By the end of September, Abba Berdichev, who had participated in the earlier Yugoslavian mission, arrived with radio transmitters.<sup>47</sup>

Accomplishing rescue operations became difficult as the parachutists fought for their own survival. When the Germans overpowered the uprising in mid-October, Berdichev fled with a British unit for the Hungarian border. Local Zionist activists encouraged the remaining parachutists to do the same, but Reik and the others chose not to abandon the enclave. Instead, they retreated into the mountains with Jewish partisans and refugees. The parachutists suggested creating an independent Jewish camp comprised of refugees of all ages. Some of the younger individuals expressed concern over bringing along the elderly and



Figure 7. Members of "Operation Amsterdam" at Tri Duby air base near Banska-Bystrica, Slovakia, September 1994. From Left to right: Zvi Ben-Yaakov, Haviva Reik, Rafi Reiss, Abba Berdichev, and Chaim Hermesh. (Source: United States Holocaust Museum Website, <[http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media\\_ph.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1889](http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/media_ph.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005440&MediaId=1889)>.)

weak. A furious Reik reminded them that the parachutists had risked their own safety to aid others. The mountain encampment did not last long. After only six days, Ukrainian Waffenn-SS soldiers stormed the camp and captured the parachutists and their rescued countrymen. Only Hermesh managed to escape and join a Soviet partisan group that he fought with until the Red Army liberated his area.<sup>48</sup> The Germans also captured Berdichev's group that same week. Another attempt thus ended with tragedy.

Blood soaked the parachutists' mission starting in November 1944. After standing trial, Hannah Szenes received word from a Hungarian prosecutor that she was sentenced to death. She refused to admit to being a British spy and pardon was subsequently denied. On the cold, foggy morning of November 7, 1944, Szenes was escorted into the prison courtyard. She stood straight with eyes unbound and accepted her fate.<sup>49</sup> On November 13, Peretz Goldstein was transported to the concentration camp of Sachsenhausen in Oranienburg, Germany, where he was last seen on December 8. Enzo Sereni was murdered at Dachau five days later. Meanwhile, in the Kreminica woods of Slovakia, Haviva Reik and Rafi Reiss chose not to reveal their identities as British soldiers. Therefore, at dawn on November 20, Reik and Reiss were shot beside 250 other Jewish prisoners, and their bodies were thrown into a mass grave. Zvi Ben-Ya'akov made a different choice and denied all connection to the Jewish group during his imprisonment. Though placed in prison with other Allied POWs, this deception bought him little time. He and the other officers were transported on

December 29 to Mauthausen and shot immediately after arrival. And finally, Abba Berdichev, who had escaped the Ukrainian raid to participate in yet another mission in Rumania, was also captured and executed at Mauthausen on January 26, 1945.<sup>50</sup>

Out of the thirty-two parachutists, twelve were captured and seven executed. A handful of the participants, including Amir, Berdichev, Dafni, Hermesh, and Dan Laner, acted in more than one mission. As parachutists began returning from Europe, it became evident some would not be coming home. Neither the British nor the Yishuv knew the exact fates of missing parachutists in early 1945, but they did not need specific details to know that plans in Slovakia and Hungary had gone awry. The organizers seriously reconsidered their approach and determined that, due to shifting political situations and the Red Army's advance, penetrating certain Balkan countries was no longer necessary. Instead, the focus shifted to central Europe and the thousands of Jews located there. To attempt one last fusion of British and Jewish war agendas, the Jewish Agency proposed that Reuven Dafni, recently returned from Yugoslavia, Dan Laner and Chaim Hermesh help surviving Jews escape from Austria and Hungary.<sup>51</sup> The SOE rejected this plan, and by March 1945, Theodore Kollek, who had replaced Zaslani, said that "the chapter of penetration is more or less over."<sup>52</sup> Chaim Waldner carried out the last operation involving a Jewish parachutist when he jumped near Klagenfurt, Austria, during the final days of the war. He arrived to find that the Jewish Brigade Group was already

highly involved in this area. Gelber has assessed Waldner's attempt by writing that "there was no real significance, from the Jewish point of view, in the presence of a single emissary among the concentrations of Jewish survivors in the British zone of Austria."<sup>53</sup> The parachutist mission had now ended.

Military missions are often judged as successes or failures by the changes they bring about in wartime maps. In his book, *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945*, historian Bernard Wasserstein claimed that because only a few Jewish agents participated "the number . . . was too minute to have any real military effect. . . ."<sup>54</sup> This statement seems true when looking to the British historiography, which handles the Jewish agents' involvement in the British military with negligence and misrepresentation. Most sources on British special operations, intelligence, and guerrilla warfare during World War II do not even address the Yishuv contribution, and those that do often distort the stories. M.R.D. Foot and J.M. Langley wrote a book entitled, *MI9: Escape and Evasion, 1939-1945*, which is considered an essential work on the activity of MI9 during the war, yet it includes many false statements about the Jewish parachutists. The authors write that during the liberation of Budapest, the Red Army arrested and tortured Palgi, then sent him to a Russian penal camp for several months. In reality, Palgi felt relieved during the Soviet liberation because it meant he could return home. Foot and Langley also misrepresent the actions of the Slovakian contingent. They write that Berdichev and Weiss entered the country on foot from Hungary and that Reik actually survived the mission. Finally, Surika

(Sarah) Braverman, who described herself as "the parachutist who did not parachute," is said in this work to have actually jumped.<sup>55</sup>

These misrepresentations, based on incomplete documentation from the British War Office and Simonds's personal recollections, reveal the lack of importance the British perspective assigned to this venture. This mission was not unique in the context of British military operations. British intelligence employed special-interest groups, including native troops and anti-fascist refugees, which is how they categorized the parachutists, throughout the entire war. British military historian Eric Morris has argued that volunteer parachutists like those from Palestine were dispensable pawns in the war effort and represent an insignificant blip in British military history. Portraying a rather bleak outlook for such agents, he wrote, "In most cases these unfortunates were raised under furious forms of patronage to meet the needs of a single operation, and their fate sealed the moment they were dumped on some shore. Most were not around long enough to leave a record of their existence and they vanished without a trace."<sup>56</sup>

Parachuting behind enemy lines was dangerous work; British intelligence lost approximately one-third of its parachuting volunteers. But that does not mean the Yishuv parachutists "vanished without a trace," as Morris suggests. The average life expectancy of a SOE agent in action was no more than two weeks. All ten SOE agents from the Yishuv survived their operations. The seven parachutist fatalities came from the A Force, which infiltrated enemy territory

with twice as many Jewish agents as the SOE.<sup>57</sup> One of the Jewish parachutists' commanding officers in Bari, R.S. Taylor, predicted the hardship they faced: "When the whole story can be told it will undoubtedly be an epic of endurance in the face of extreme difficulties."<sup>58</sup> Other members of the British military speculated that Jewish agents would fold under pressure, but the men in Rumania demonstrated success in spite of adversity. From his hospital bed, suffering from a seriously fractured and infected leg, Gukowsky contacted the Jewish underground in Bucharest, which eventually connected him with Allied officials in Istanbul and Cairo. He helped secure supplies from the local underground, and soon his international contacts yielded a message to all Allied prisoners stating that they were to obey Gukowsky regarding escape plans. After the Rumanian armistice in August 1944,<sup>59</sup> Gukowsky and other Jewish paratroopers, with the aid of the Jewish underground, safeguarded nearly a thousand American airmen and hundreds of British and French prisoners of war.<sup>60</sup> The group serving in Slovakia also helped rescue between fifty and sixty Allied soldiers. These details do suggest a positive effect on the Allied war effort. When British officials debated the missions' merits in 1943, Simonds, one of the Jewish agents' commanders, argued that "the rescue of a single shot-down pilot, who could fly a bomber again, would justify the mission."<sup>61</sup> By Simonds's evaluation, the parachutists succeeded. Simonds's appraisal, however, does not represent all British assessments. Simonds was a known philosemite and early proponent of using Jewish paratroopers for Allied purposes. The British overall

considered the attempts in Bulgaria, Hungary, and Italy to be messy failures and hardly acknowledge the contributions of Yishuv volunteers in wireless operation and rescuing wartime prisoners.<sup>62</sup>

Do the Jewish participants rate their achievements and failures on the same scale? Judith Tydor Baumel, historian and expert on the parachutists' mission, speculated that "the quantitative achievements of the parachutists in the war effort compared unfavorably with those . . . of the Yishuv volunteers . . . who sought to share the burden of the war against Nazism,"<sup>63</sup> but I would suggest that fighting Nazis was not their main objective. The parachutists' motives stemmed from religious brotherhood and Zionist ideology. Seeking revenge on Nazis accounted for part of that motivation, but agreeing to the British agenda was the fare they paid to get to Europe, and did not register as their top priority.

These individuals often asserted that they served the Jews and not the British, but the mission is often criticized for not fulfilling its intentions to save European Jewry. The question must be asked, how did European Jews respond to the arrival of parachutist parachutists from Palestine. Were Jews living under German occupation actually helped? Some Jewish resistance leaders questioned the parachutists' usefulness in resistance activity. Members of the He-Halutz resistance in Hungary opposed the parachutists' arrival and considered it too risky.<sup>64</sup> The arrival of parachutists disgusted Ergon Roth, the secretary of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir in Slovakia. He was offended by their arrival and did not believe that their Zionist ideals prepared them for the realities of war. "What did



you come here for anyway? Did you all think that here we play children's games? You wanted to be heroes? I know what you're going to say: you want to help, to represent the Yishuv of Eretz Israel. You're going to tell me about conscience and solidarity. Bullshit! Old wife's tales! . . . Who needs you?"<sup>65</sup>

Former Hungarian resistance fighter Rafi Benshalom, who encountered Palgi and Goldstein in Budapest, was also skeptical upon their arrival. He clearly believed the mission in Hungary failed, yet he quickly acknowledged the message sent by the Jewish agents' attempts: "Nonetheless, in those tragic days, when we were standing orphaned, alone, we found this mission to be of enormous symbolic significance and it will never be forgotten. . . ."<sup>66</sup>

The parachutists helped where they could. During the uprising in Slovakia, five-thousand Jewish refugees starved and froze in overcrowded conditions. Haviva Reik responded by establishing a kosher communal kitchen and distributing blankets and other provisions. She and the other parachutists also aided the Jewish underground by forging Aryan papers and organizing escape routes to Palestine. Reik frequently stirred her fellow Jews with heart-lifting tales of kibbutz life and beautiful Eretz Israel. Partisans would eagerly listen to her foretelling of the rebirth of a nation on ancestral ground. Refugees viewed Reik as a messenger from God, and one Orthodox rabbi referred to her as a saint.<sup>67</sup> In his last letter to Eretz Israel, Ergon Roth illustrated how Reik's presence inspired Slovakian partisans: "Who knows if we will ever reach the shores of the homeland . . . but if deliverance from here is not possible, know that

we will always remember those who helped us. We will bury these horrible days but our joyous knowledge is that you helped us to become new people, and more than tha[t], new Jews."<sup>68</sup>

The Rumanian group demonstrated similar achievements by helping to facilitate the underground railway and organizing Jewish resistance to fight the Nazis until the Red Army arrived. The mere presence of the Palestinians helped strengthen Jewish courage. When the Jewish Rescue Committee in Istanbul negotiated permission for three hundred Jews to leave Constantza for Turkey, many hesitated. Concerned about cramped travel conditions and a potentially dangerous journey, they sought advice from a Palestinian parachutist in Bucharest. To the question "Shall we go?" Gukowsky responded, "Every Jew given a chance must leave Rumania."<sup>69</sup> It did not matter that they had never met this man. He bore "the authority of an unborn people to the dying remnant" and in February 1944, the refugees boarded the *Maritza* and fled Rumania.<sup>70</sup>

Even then, the balance sheet of Jews rescued is limited. Slovakia and Rumania can be considered partial successes. In Yugoslavia, parachutists successfully participated in British assignments, but had little time left to pursue Jewish interests. In Bulgaria parachutists worked with the He-Halutz resistance movement and the Zionist Organization, but most of the helped they offered came after the war ended. The parachutists' greatest legacy came from the symbolic significance of their actions. In the instances where the mission functionally failed, these brave individuals still inspired hope and strength. The

missions in Hungary and Italy, which the British considered utter disasters, bred both legends and inspiration. From her Hungarian prison cell, Hannah Szenes made contact with fellow prisoners. By holding up letters in a cell window, she communicated the daily news, gave lessons in Hebrew, and spread the message of Zionism. Susan Beer, a fellow prisoner who encountered Szenes in June 1944, recalled that Szenes even made the other prisoners gifts, especially for their birthdays. Beer admired Szenes's selfless nature, her smile, and her bravery. "In that prison it was good to hear something like this, something beyond our misery."<sup>71</sup> As Enzo Sereni was transported through a series of camps, he became known as a somewhat mythic figure. Ruth Body, biographer of Sereni, describes how prisoners at the Meuhldorf camp responded to the presence of a Jew from Palestine: "There were many Zionists among the prisoners, . . . and the news struck them as if an angel had come from a long forgotten world. It sounded unbelievable."<sup>72</sup> Sereni represented the land they longed for, but had never seen and probably never would. He embodied the message that Israel had not forsaken its people. Noted for his confidence and courage, he renewed the occupied populace's sense of identity. As another of Sereni's biographers wrote: "That he is a parachutist from Israel implies something about all Jews, says something *about them*."<sup>73</sup>

On many counts, the mission may be considered an overall strategic failure that could claim only marginal success in a few isolated instances. The

Jews acted as couriers and facilitated some Allied rescues, but they failed to generate the widespread Jewish resistance they hoped for. Some dismiss the actions of Yishuv parachutists as "too little, too late." But victory in war is not always accounted for in military battles or strategic completion. No quantity of tactical fiascos could diminish these individuals' drive to provide encouragement to the lowly. Though the parachutists often could not offer much aid, their efforts to provide even a kosher meal or lessons in Hebrew brought a bit of hope to persecuted Jews. In desperate and troubled times, the victory of personal wills in spite of adversity often resonates with observers, and on that front, the Jewish parachutists were winning.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE HEROES RETURN HOME

Israel is not forsaken while she has sons like these.

Enzo Sereni, 1944

The war had ended, as had the parachutists' mission. But neither the Jewish Agency nor the British military knew the whereabouts of all thirty-two parachutists. Members of the mission knew which group members they left Europe without, but the parachutists' friends, family, and the rest of the Yishuv waited for news. In early 1945, nine remained missing. Seven had perished, and the locations of Hermesh and Palgi remained unknown. For half of that year, rumors circulated about the fate of certain missing parachutists, fostering both misplaced hope and despair. Rumors swirled that Hermesh had died and that the other three in his group survived. News occasionally reached the Yishuv reporting on Goldstein's and Sereni's survival. The months of waiting tortured friends and family who longed to know their loved ones' fates. Ada Sereni, Enzo's wife, searched painstakingly through war records for months before finally discovering the truth about his death in Dachau.<sup>1</sup> By summer's end in 1945, British intelligence at last confirmed most of the fatalities and sent letters of condolence to the families. They did not, however, send notice to the families of Goldstein and Ben-Yaakov until several months later, as it took longer to verify their deaths.<sup>2</sup>

The surviving parachutists felt nervous about returning home. A number of questions burdened them: Did we do enough? How will we tell our story? Why did we survive? Sorrow and guilt affected many of the returning parachutists, including Palgi and Hermesh—the only surviving members of their contingent. Hermesh could not rejoice at the end of the war, but rather sat silently alone in an officer's club on May 8, 1945, VE Day, staring at the three empty chairs that should have held Reis, Reik, and Ben-Yaakov. In Europe, Hermesh and Palgi had struggled for their own survival, barely escaping death. Those who had engaged in relatively simple missions felt ashamed for not experiencing pain and torture as their comrades had. In a letter from March 1945, Berger expressed his guilt: "Oh my God! Why was I so lucky? I will never forgive myself for having been so lucky. If at least I had lost my hand or a leg, even a finger, had I spent a year in jail, had I been tortured for at least one night—then it would have been easier to cope with all this news. . . .Why did I of all people have to be so lucky?"<sup>3</sup>

Upon returning home, surviving parachutists realized that the Yishuv might not appreciate their accounts. During Palgi's first days as a discharged soldier in Eretz Israel, he found few willing to listen to his story. Palgi tried to tell about the devastation of European Jewry, but as he reflected in his memoirs: "They wanted another story about the few who had fought like lions to sanctify the name of the Jewish people."<sup>4</sup> Palgi's experience illustrates the uneasy relationship between the Yishuv and its European counterparts. The Zionist

Yishuv found it difficult to accept the Jewish tragedy in Europe. Yishuv citizens could not understand how six million people could be "led" to death with such minimal resistance. Palgi recalled often hearing the question: "Why did they go like sheep to the slaughter?"<sup>5</sup> The Yishuv attributed it to the weakness of a Diaspora Jew. The Zionist movement maintained that the Diaspora could not sustain Jewish life and that Zionism clearly differentiated between Diasporic Jewry and the "new Jews" of the Yishuv. Many concluded that European Jews passively succumbed to their fate," when Zionist Jews would have rebelled against their oppressors.<sup>6</sup>

Members of the Yishuv judged survivors with equal harshness. After the war, suspicion gradually arose that survivors only lived because they did not sacrifice themselves in a fight against the Nazis. After visiting German "displaced person" (DP) camps, Ben-Gurion described survivors as "hard, mean, and selfish" and said that their experiences leached them of any admirable human qualities.<sup>7</sup> Zionists believed that the ideal Jew worked toward the common good. To them, these survivors represented the antithesis of that ideal. Zionist leaders questioned how such a population would affect the Zionist project and Eretz Israel. Ben-Gurion speculated on various outcomes, asking: "Those Jews [that survived], are they a hindrance, an obstacle to Zionism, or a benefit?"<sup>8</sup> Zionist emissaries in Austria and Germany concluded, "Five thousand of these [persons liberated from the camps] could turn Eretz Israel into a madhouse."<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, refugees arrived. After the war's end, approximately 250,000 of Europe's Jews remained interned in Allied DP camps.<sup>10</sup> Homeless, with only anti-Semitism and the prospect of settling in the graveyards of their families awaiting them in Eastern Europe, fifty-seven percent of the DP population immigrated to Israel. Between 1946 and 1948, 70,446 survivors arrived in Palestine at a rate of about 2,000 each month, most by illegal immigration. From May 1948 to 1951, 687,000 people immigrated to Palestine, 350,000 of whom had survived the Holocaust.<sup>11</sup> By 1951, one in four Israeli citizens were Holocaust survivors. Gradually, opinions changed as Yishuv representatives began noticing qualities that they deemed admirable in these Jewish populations. Ben-Gurion soon retracted his earlier judgments, describing members of the camps as "precious Zionists with deep Zionist instincts."<sup>12</sup> An emissary in France originally asserted that the Jewish survivors "thought the whole world owed them,"<sup>13</sup> but later concluded, "This is human material of the most desirable kind."<sup>14</sup>

The Yishuv decided it could strip immigrants of their Diaspora identity and start crafting them into the "new Jews" of the Zionist Yishuv. From the moment survivors arrived, the Yishuv adapted them to this new identity. When reporting on survivor arrivals, writers for the *Palestine Post*<sup>15</sup> underplayed the hardship and tragedies that these survivors endured. Instead, reporters described the new arrivals in ways corresponding with Yishuv values, which included strength, youthfulness, resistance, commitment to Zionism and



experience in agriculture. Often, reporters even provided the *exact number* of newcomers trained in agriculture.<sup>16</sup>

One article from September 3, 1945, reported on the arrival of 700 survivors, the majority of whom had been at the concentration camp Bergen-Belsen. The news correspondent Ernst Aschner described these newcomers as "all veteran Zionists" who looked "fit and bronzed after recuperating in Switzerland from their ordeals in Theresienstadt, Bergen-Belsen and other Nazi camps."<sup>17</sup> Historians Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicosia, who wrote *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*, referred to Bergen-Belsen as *the worst* Nazi concentration camp, which was home to 60,000 "walking skeletons" by the time of its liberation on April 15, 1945.<sup>18</sup> It is unlikely that these 700 survivors could "recuperate" to such excellent physical condition, when thousands died after the camp's liberation. Through exaggerated depictions of "fit and brawny Zionist veterans," Aschner endorsed the belief that a Zionist Jew was a strong Jew who could survive against incredible odds.<sup>19</sup> A more accurate portrayal of the survivors would not have suited the Yishuv's predilection for physical, mental, and emotional strength.

Another article, printed on April 26, 1946, detailed the arrival of some 880 Jewish refugees, comprised mostly of children and teenagers. These five hundred homeless, orphaned youth traveled several days on a crowded ship to a land quite different from anywhere in Europe. But the author did not address any of their potential anxiety or fear. On the contrary, the correspondent

romantically described children waving "dozens of blue and white flags with black ribbons in memory of the Jewish ghetto fighters."<sup>20</sup> The reporters paid no attention to the severe physical, emotional, and psychological abuse that these immigrants suffered, but rather worked to assure the rest of the Yishuv: *Do not worry, they will fit in here. They are like us.*

In the years immediately following the war, the Holocaust was a taboo topic for national discussion. Educators avoided it at the primary and secondary levels, as did faculty at Hebrew University—Israel's only university at the time. The performance or literary arts did not address Holocaust-related topics, and Palmach literature rarely mentioned the event. The Knesset—the Israeli legislature—did not declare the Holocaust Memorial day, "Yom Hashoa," until 1951, and six years passed before Israeli law mandated observance.<sup>21</sup>

Why was the largest tragic event in modern Jewish history overlooked by the new Jewish state? Historian Dina Porat blamed the inattention to the Holocaust on the struggle for Israeli statehood. But her assumption that this struggle "displaced all other experiences"<sup>22</sup> and prevented any commemoration of the Holocaust did not account for the national attention the parachutists' mission drew soon after the war's end. The Yishuv began to commemorate and memorialize certain parachutists almost immediately after receiving the news of their deaths, while paying little attention to the stories of hundreds of thousands of survivors who had recently immigrated to Palestine. An article ran in the *Palestine Post* on December 20, 1945, claiming: "For the first time, details were

given of missions which the parachutists carried out and which were hitherto kept secret." It also listed the names, ages, and kibbutzim of those who died during their missions. That same month, representatives from the Jewish Agency attended the memorial service in Rome commemorating the one-year anniversary of Enzo Sereni's death. Four months later, Dr. Chaim Weizmann, president of the Jewish Agency, laid the cornerstone for the Sereni House at Givat Brenner, the kibbutz that Sereni had helped found. When Weizmann spoke at this ceremony, he noted Sereni's twenty years of Zionist activities and remarked: "Empty phrases are alien to me, but I do not exaggerate if I say that his name will live for ever [*sic*], as will his work."<sup>23</sup>

A month earlier, a memorial for Haviva Reik had taken place at her Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir collective settlement, Narbata. Soldiers and members of kibbutzim from across Palestine attended the ceremony. Dr. Nadia Stein of the Women's International Zionist Organization spoke at the memorial service. The Czechoslovak Consul General, Jan Novak, sent a special message from Reik's country of origin to the service in Palestine. That spring, the Haviva Reik Memorial Committee started collecting funds in the Yishuv for the construction of the Haviva House and Haviva Hill. The Memorial Committee intended the former to become a cultural center and museum for guerilla warfare in Czechoslovakia and the latter to become a Youth Academy. Weizmann and Novak topped the list of contributors along with other leading Yishuv members.<sup>24</sup>

What made the fallen parachutists—who had also died in the camps of Mauthausen, Sachsenhausen, and Dachau—worthy of remembrance, when the Yishuv disparaged and ignored other Jewish victims? Choosing how to remember the Holocaust and the parachutists' mission happened simultaneously with the Yishuv's post-war battle for statehood. Consequently, the three factors—the Holocaust, Zionism, and the parachutists' endeavor—became inextricably linked. The international community started to consider the possibility of a Jewish state to provide a home for the quarter-million displaced persons stranded in Europe. Zionist emissaries repeatedly asked the international community for an Israeli state on behalf of the displaced persons' plight. When Israel declared its independence on May 14, 1948, it cited the European Holocaust as proof of the need for a Jewish state. In its own Declaration of Independence, Israel used the Holocaust to justify the nation's existence: "The catastrophe which recently befell the Jewish people—the massacre of millions of Jews in Europe—was another clear demonstration of the urgency of solving the problem of its homelessness by re-establishing in Israel the Jewish State. . . ."25

Despite the fact that the new nation used the tragedy to validate statehood, Israel conversely tried to ignore the Holocaust. The Holocaust garnered sympathy for the Zionist cause internationally, but domestically caused confusion and concern. First, as previously mentioned, national leaders held the image of the "new Jew" as vital to the psyche of the new state. Too much focus

on the Holocaust threatened that image. Next, many survivors sought a new beginning in Israel and desired to keep their tragic tales private. Furthermore, a combination of embarrassment, shame, and guilt burdened Israel for its meager efforts to counteract the genocide. Finally, the Zionist Jews of Eretz Israel found it difficult to identify and respect the struggle of Diaspora Jews. They did not believe that Jews in Europe did enough to resist the Nazis. Israel needed a way to pay homage to the Holocaust without compromising its own national values and traditions. The parachutists' mission satisfied that need. It provided a way to reconcile the nation's limited involvement and respect the anonymity of survivors, while offering a Holocaust narrative that Zionists could proudly honor.

The parachutists ranked among some of the most important heroes of this budding nation. They presented concrete evidence that Eretz Israel reached out to the Jews of Europe. Limited resources and political power, in addition to British policies such as the 1939 White Paper, hindered the Yishuv's efforts to help suffering Jews in Europe. After nearly two years of lobbying and planning with the British military, Jewish Palestinian parachutists arrived in Europe. Sadly, the resulting small contingent did not arouse resistance as hoped. But their efforts mattered more to Israel than the failed goals. "Once they left on the mission," wrote Baumel, "the members of the group were no longer anonymous soldiers but representatives of the Yishuv behind enemy lines; no longer simple

volunteers but envoys of the Yishuv's elite who came to save their brethren."<sup>26</sup>

The parachutists' attempts alone made them eligible for hero status in Israel.

When reviewing Palgi's memoir in *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, Bennett Simon, doctor of psychiatric medicine in the United States, analyzed Israel's need for such heroes. He explained the several types of trauma a hero undergoes during his or her experience. This trauma starts with witnessing evil and deciding to fight it, lest one be tormented by the guilt of inaction. The trauma is experienced during the actual plight, such as Palgi's internment in prison, or losing Goldstein, his life-long friend. Palgi and other surviving parachutists experienced a third type of trauma upon returning home: the trauma of public response combined with tormenting private reflections. The public that adulates the hero experiences a different trauma, one that develops from distantly watching and waiting as a hero combats evil. Simon maintained that "the societal hunger for this kind of heroism is in part a defense against the traumatic repetition of the passivity and helplessness of watching, and the hero then provides vicarious relief to those unbearable emotions."<sup>27</sup> The parachutists' mission provided Israel with "vicarious relief" for helplessly witnessing the Holocaust. It allowed Israel to open its arms to the flood of immigrants, look them in the eye and say: *We tried to help you.*

Israel could pick from this mission national heroes who fit into the larger schema of existing national myths highlighting martyrdom and resistance. Consider two tales already embedded within the Israeli collective consciousness:

the Fall of Masada and the Battle of Tel Hai. The Myth of Masada derived from an event that took place during the first Roman-Jewish war, also known as the Jewish Revolt. During the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 BC, Jews fled Jerusalem to the fortress of Masada, atop a mountain overlooking the Dead Sea. When Roman seizure of the fortress looked imminent, the 960 men, women, and children committed suicide to avoid facing capture. The individuals of Masada survived in an Israeli national narrative even though they broke a Jewish law forbidding suicide, because they died as martyrs with weapons in hand. Some scholars had suggested that Israel upheld the Masada narrative as a counter-Holocaust model.<sup>28</sup>

The Battle of Tel Hai took place in 1920 when a group of Arabs attacked the collective settlement at Tel Hai in Eretz Israel. During the attack, eight of the settlement's defenders died, including the important pioneering figure Joseph Trumpeldor. The remaining defenders burned the courtyard and abandoned the settlement. A statue of a roaring lion now marks the grave of Trumpeldor and Tel Hai's other seven defenders. Engraved on the statue are Trumpeldor's reported last words, "It is good to die for our country." Each year on Tel Hai Day, Israeli youth visit this site to memorialize national sacrifice. This event marked the first instance when a Jewish settlement resisted Arab attack and became a symbol that fused collective settlements with the concept of defense.<sup>29</sup>

The parachutists' mission provided another story to add to this collection, as it represented both resistance and martyrdom. The most famous

parachutists—Reik, Szenes, and Sereni—share a number of qualities. All three were noted for their strong, stubborn personalities. These three also died during their mission. Though none succeeded in initiating Jewish resistance, they symbolized resistance with their personal character and actions. A stubborn Sereni jumped against all advice to the contrary and received approval to do so only after appealing the Jewish Agency's unconditional "no."<sup>30</sup> Palmach commanders singled Reik out for this mission because of her "difficult" personality.<sup>31</sup> After the British barred Reik from participating in a blind jump, she found another way to access Banksa-Bystrica. She chose not to abandon Jewish refugees, even as enemy forces drew near. Once captured, Reik refused to reveal the nature of her mission or her status as a British officer. This behavior contrasts with that of another within her group who fled the encampment and denied all connection with the Jewish mission. Szenes argued with fellow parachutists on more than one occasion about the course of their mission. She smuggled herself into Nazi-occupied Hungary while Jewish agents from her group stayed in the safer location of Yugoslavia. During her imprisonment, Szenes withstood torture and interrogation without revealing the details about her mission or her involvement with the British army. The series of decisions that led these individuals to their deaths could be labeled as either foolhardy or courageous. Israel chose the latter.

The parachutists' story fit well with the overall Israeli national mythos and corresponded with Israel's choices in memorializing the Holocaust. In the



1950s, the Holocaust was still a fresh wound for Israel; it was easier for the state to memorialize heroes rather than victims. In 1953, the Knesset established Yad Vashem as an institute to study and memorialize the Jewish experience during the Holocaust, but instead of naming it the "Holocaust Remembrance Authority," they adopted the title "The Holocaust Martyrs' and Heroes' Remembrance Authority." This name suggested that a person who did not act as a martyr or a hero during the Holocaust was not worthy of remembrance. In the 1950s, the Knesset also set a date on which Israel would officially remember the Holocaust. The Knesset selected the 27<sup>th</sup> day of the month of Nissan,<sup>32</sup> a date close to the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.<sup>33</sup> This choice of dates associated the remembrance day more with resistance than it did with other Holocaust experiences. Consequently, in Israel's early days of existence, its citizens referred to Yom Hashoa as the commemoration of "the Holocaust and the ghetto uprising," or "The Martyr's and Heroes Remembrance Day." As historian Yael Zarubavel pointed out, describing this date as "the Holocaust and Heroism Remembrance Day" implied that acts of armed resistance—such as the incident in Warsaw—were classified as "heroic," whereas every *other* Holocaust experience became "unheroic."<sup>34</sup>

When selecting national and Holocaust heroes, the state of Israel wanted not only fighters and martyrs, but also Zionists. According to Zerubavel, in Israel's first years of statehood, Israelis referred to ghetto and partisan fighters as "Hebrew" or "Zionists" and referred to other Holocaust victims only as "Jews."<sup>35</sup>

This arbitrary classification is inaccurate because not all ghetto fighters were Zionists, nor were all victims anti-Zionists. The parachutists, however, made prime national heroes because each of the participants could be clearly classified as a Zionist Jew. Each participant had left the Diaspora to make *aliyah*<sup>36</sup> to Eretz Israel, lived and worked on kibbutzim, and spoke Hebrew.

The personal histories of Reik, Sereni, and Szenes easily lent themselves to the Zionist narrative. In his life, Sereni served as a leading advocate for modern Zionism in Italy, helped found the kibbutz Givat Brenner, and recruited Jewish European youth for *aliyah*. Before immigrating to Palestine, Reik joined the Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir, a European Marxist Zionist youth movement that prepared members for kibbutz life in Eretz Israel. Reik remained loyal to this movement until the end of her life. When told that she could not jump with the male members of her group, Reik said to female comrade Surika Braverman, "How could I let the others go without me when there isn't a representative of Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir among them!"<sup>37</sup> During her mission she promoted Eretz Israel, hoping to inspire Jewish refugees with her tales. Szenes left behind her own thoughts on the subject in her personal diary. On October 27, 1938, before she immigrated to Palestine, Szenes proudly declared, "I've become a Zionist." She continued, "One needs something to believe in, something for which one can have whole-hearted enthusiasm. One needs to feel that one's life has meaning, that one is needed in this world. Zionism fulfills all this for me. . . . I'm convinced Zionism is Jewry's solution to its problems and that the outstanding

work being done in Palestine is not in vain."<sup>38</sup> She immigrated to Palestine the following year.

The parachutists possessed the appropriate qualities to symbolize Zionism and Jewish Holocaust resistance and martyrdom. But simply "fitting the bill" did not guarantee that they would survive in the Israeli collective memory. In his study on the social context of commemoration, sociologist Barry Schwartz confronted this problem by reminding readers that the process of commemoration sets figures and events apart in the collective memory and endows them with an "extraordinary significance."<sup>39</sup> He wrote that through commemoration societies could "lift from an ordinary historical sequence those extraordinary events which embody [its] deepest and most fundamental values."<sup>40</sup> The Israeli government selected the parachutists as its "extraordinary event" to symbolize national values. The state began the commemoration process almost immediately after the mission's end. For example, in 1945 and 1946, national dignitaries attended and spoke at memorials and dedication services to honor the fallen parachutists.

After Szenes's death, her kibbutz movement, HaKibbutz HaMe'uchad,<sup>41</sup> originally served a key role in promoting her commemoration. The movement HaKibbutz HaArtzi<sup>42</sup> could claim the membership of Haviva Reik and Mordechai Anielewiz, a participant in the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. HaKibbutz HaMe'uchad desired Holocaust heroes of martyrdom and resistance it could call its own. HaKibbutz HaMe'uchad also sought to counter its own Hungarian

underground that, during the war, promoted Jewish rescue through escape, rather than resistance, which was the Zionist Yishuv's preferred method. Through the symbol of Szenes, HaKibbutz HaMe'uchad sought to strengthen its Zionist image.<sup>43</sup> But the kibbutz movement was not the only body eager to employ the young parachutist's image. Mapai,<sup>44</sup> the Israeli Labor Party, also realized the political potential of the Szenes story. In *Myth and Reality*, historian Mircea Eliade presented his "theory of origins" that identified the most significant part of any society's past as its beginning.<sup>45</sup> According to Eliade, a nation's founding should be perceived as a "strong time," accompanied by the "magic, attraction, and prestige" of origin stories.<sup>46</sup> Mapai knew that Israel needed strong and alluring figures to mark the nation's founding. It recognized the Yishuv's fascination with the parachutists' story, especially the heroism of Hannah Szenes, and decided to utilize this romantic tale of valor and martyrdom.

Israel augmented its state sponsored commemorative process by organizing and promoting Hannah Szenes's Israeli funeral ceremonies. Though HaKibbutz HaMeuchad originally petitioned for Szenes's body to be returned to Israel from Hungary, the Israeli Ministry of Defense—a stronghold of Mapai—became the directing force behind this event.<sup>47</sup> Negotiations with the Hungarian government secured the return of Szenes's body to Haifa, Israel, in March of 1950. An air-raid siren sounded while a crowd of friends, family, and Israeli dignitaries watched the coffin be carried ashore. Observers included Szenes's

mother and brother, Katherine and Giori Szenes; members of her kibbutz, Sdot Yam; the Israeli Minister of Education; representatives from the Defense Ministry; former leaders of Aliyah Bet; and senior officers of the Israeli armed services and police force. A gun on the ship fired a farewell shot, the ported ships lowered their flags, and the coffin was loaded into an army command car. A motorcade then proceeded through Haifa as citizens exited their homes and workplaces to watch the convoy pass.<sup>48</sup> After the events in Haifa, Szenes's body temporarily lay in state at Sdot Yam while some of the mission's surviving parachutists performed a ceremonial jump. After landing, they laid wreaths upon Szenes's casket. Later, in Tel-Aviv, the city officials encouraged citizens to honor Szenes by lining the streets as the cavalcade drove by.<sup>49</sup>

What followed was a grand-scale military funeral that drew national attention. The press office of the Israeli government requested that all Israeli newspapers provide extensive coverage of the three-day ceremony. The final service was held at the National Complex where the Israeli flag flew at half-mast. Thousands paid their respects to the fallen hero, among them family, friends, and observers who knew Szenes only through legend. The Knesset adjourned to allow members to attend the service. Notable attendants included Foreign Minister Moshe Shertok, Minister of Justice Pinchas Rosen, Mayor of Jerusalem Daniel Auster, and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion, who laid the final wreath on Szenes's casket.<sup>50</sup> Shertok, an original promoter of the mission, spoke first. He said: "The people living in Zion are filled with pride for its daughter who

sanctified its name by her life and death."<sup>51</sup> Mourners filed by the casket silently to pay their last respects. Infantry, airmen, sailors, and former parachutists took turns as Guards of Honor for Szenes's casket.<sup>52</sup> Szenes no longer symbolized only one of the millions of Jews slain during the Holocaust; she now represented one of Israel's original soldiers, slain abroad in the name of her country.

After the service, the military buried Szenes's body on Mount Herzl, which was also the resting place of its namesake, Theodor Herzl.<sup>53</sup> It was no coincidence that Szenes joined the father of modern Zionism at this location. Even though Herzl had died seventeen years before Szenes's birth, the state re-interred both figures as a way to help establish Israel's national heroes. The funeral for Herzl marked the country's first official state funeral. Seven months later, the Szenes funeral took place as the first official national-level military funeral. These burials on Mount Herzl designated the cemetery as a sacred space to honor national figures. Herzl and Szenes were the first of many important national figures to be buried at this site. Eventually, the bodies of Reik and Reiss would be buried near Szenes.<sup>54</sup> Israeli historian Baumel has explained how "the political architects of Zionist sacred space turned a static pantheon into a dynamic ever expanding plot, thus combining historical, political and military narratives of a re-born state."<sup>55</sup>

This new national focal point helped unify the Israeli population. In his acclaimed study of nationalism, Benedict Anderson maintained that even in a small nation—like Israel—inhabitants will never know most of their fellow

citizens. This was especially true in Israel's early years. By 1950, post-war immigrants composed nearly half of Israel's population. Unlike the assimilated Yishuv, most of these individuals were not familiar with Zionist narratives and heroes. Anderson suggested that a populace's disconnect is remedied by an imagined communion, which derives in part from a common national culture. He claimed that military memorials, especially tombs, make particularly effective emblems by which to promote nationalist a ethos.<sup>56</sup> For Israel, the Mount Herzl cemetery provided a way to educate new immigrants unfamiliar with Zionist history and myths and further encourage a common national identity.

Studies on the personification and corporeal representation of national myths find that national symbols typically have a feminine identity. Examples include Joan of Arc and the Marianne in France<sup>57</sup> or Lady Liberty in the United States. A nation generally uses a masculine figure, often a "founding father," such as Napoleon Bonaparte or George Washington, to counterbalance the feminine figure.<sup>58</sup> Baumel has proposed that by holding the funerals for Herzl and Szenes so close together and then burying them side by side, the Israeli state took the first steps toward creating a "Zionist founding family."<sup>59</sup> Herzl and Szenes brought a balance of gender and generations to this family. Herzl "fathered" a generation of powerful, militant "new Jews." However, Herzl described the "new Jew" as masculine. Tamar Mayer, professor of geography at Middlebury College, has examined the roll of gender in the construction of Jewish national identity. In her research, Mayer explained that "the ideal *New*

*Jew*—the youth movement graduate turned pioneer settler (*chalutz*), colonizer and defender—became the emblem of Zionism. Although women were *chalutzot*, too, and their contributions were crucial to the success of the Zionist project, they did not come to symbolize Zionism's achievements."<sup>60</sup> That may have held true until Szenes became the national heroine. The youthful Szenes represented those born after Herzl's generation. As a Zionist heroine who participated in and became the figurehead for a mostly male military operation, Szenes epitomized the Yishuv's ideal of gender equality.<sup>61</sup>

In Western Europe during the early twentieth century, the movement of women into traditionally "masculine" roles spurred much criticism and ridicule.<sup>62</sup> But in Eretz Israel, the Zionist-socialist ideology encouraged women and men to work together in the military and on collective settlements. During World War II, over 3,000 Yishuv women volunteered for the British Auxiliary Territorial Service, and nearly six hundred joined the Royal Air Force, but the British rarely allowed these female soldiers to enter battle.<sup>63</sup> The parachutists' mission marked a notable exception. Of the mission's thirty-some participants, three were women. The Palmach, at least officially, made no distinction between men and women during training for the operation. Reik, Szenes, and Braverman participated in the same level of training as the men selected for parachuting attempts. The only gender difference acknowledged within the Israeli historiography regarding this mission related to the British rule that prohibited women from participating in blind jumps. That rule led Reik to travel to



Slovakia on an American, rather than British plane. The majority of the historical literature never indicated that the male parachutists, the British military officers, European Jews, or non-Jewish partisan groups treated the three women any differently. Often, only references to complete equality were made.<sup>64</sup> The inclusion of these women in the mission allowed the Yishuv to reinforce the tradition of gender equality in military endeavors. That message held its importance in the following decades as Israel became the only country in the world to institute a compulsory military draft for women.<sup>65</sup>

Despite the gender equality emphasized in the mission's historical literature, gender differences *did* affect the way male parachutists perceived their female comrades. Commander Anthony Simonds freely admitted that he found Braverman physically attractive. Not only Simonds admired Braverman's looks. She was known to many of her British superiors as "the blond bombshell."<sup>66</sup> Fellow male parachutists also recognized differences in gender identity. When describing Haviva Reik, Chaim Hermesh said: "Haviva was unique, and she was without a doubt a *woman*."<sup>67</sup> Braverman further elaborated on what Hermesh hinted at—that gender influenced male-female relations in the group. "Of course we felt ourselves women," remarked Braverman in a 1993 interview. "We used to do all the usual things, talking long into the night about our plans and dreams, my need for adventure, Haviva's desire for children, our relationship with the men on the Mission. We may have all been comrades, but there was no doubt that the men treated us as women, at least when we were off duty."<sup>68</sup>

Histories of the mission disregarded details about the female parachutists' personal relationships. Baumel has attributed this to the pioneering society's socialist ethos, which she explained "was accompanied by a dogmatic, almost defiant refusal to acknowledge gender differences, and particularly expressions of female sexuality. . . ."69 In her examination of the mission from a gender perspective, she revealed details about Reik's and Szenes's romantic relationships that other parachutist histories did not. Few sources ever mention Reik's marital status. Before she immigrated to Palestine, Reik married a man from the Slovakian Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir movement. She and her husband, Avraham Martinovich, moved to Palestine and settled at the Kibbutz Ma'anit. They separated a short time later. After Martinovich left the kibbutz, Reik engaged in several serious romantic relationships while still legally married. Braverman recounted that Reik's relationship with the son of a wealthy landowner caused tension at the kibbutz. "Haviva was ostracized by her kibbutz," Braverman remembered, "and she was told that she would have to choose between them and her 'capitalist' boyfriend. . . ."70 Reik's name was written as Martha Martinovich on all British military documents. It was also the name used in the kibbutz newsletter announcing her death. However, use of this name, as well as any reference to her husband, is "strikingly absent" from the historical record.<sup>71</sup> Romantic opportunities presented themselves to Szenes as well. On more than one occasion, a young man expressed his love for her. For instance, Joseph Weiss, her longtime friend from Hungary, wrote Szenes several

letters in which he declared his romantic interest in her. The state-sponsored image of Szenes suggested that Zionist pursuits consumed all her thoughts and energy, but in fact her uncensored diary contained as many, if not more, references to her "boy situation" than to her love for Eretz Israel.<sup>72</sup> The Israeli public remained ignorant of this aspect of Szenes's personal life for several decades. Her uncensored diary did not receive publication until 1994; Joseph Wiess's love letters were published in 1996.<sup>73</sup>

In her examination of the philosophical differences of gender identity, Françoise Collin has stated that, in women, femininity and individuality are often confused, whereas with men, masculine and individual identities are distinctly separate.<sup>74</sup> Baumel has maintained that since the trio's feminine identity could not be completely separated from their role as parachutists—despite all attempts to neuter their identities—they were then assigned non-threatening gender roles, devoid of the "implicit threat of female sexuality."<sup>75</sup> Throughout most of western history, women were denied civic involvement and could only fulfill the roles of wife, mother, daughter, sister, etc.<sup>76</sup> Therefore, two of the parachutists' images were cast in these traditional familial roles. Szenes became the devoted daughter not only to her mother, Katherine Szenes, but also to the nation of Israel. At Szenes's funeral Shertok referred to her as Zion's daughter "who sanctified its name by her life and death."<sup>77</sup> Because Szenes was young and unmarried, she also "became the local vestal virgin, her purity surpassed only by her heroism."<sup>78</sup> Haunted by the past of a soured marriage and

several romantic love affairs, thirty-year-old Reik could not be cast in a role similar to that of Szenes's child-virgin image. Reik was instead stripped of her sexuality and became the mother figure of the mission.<sup>79</sup> This identity corresponded with the image of Reik near Banska-Bystrica, caring for the sick and elderly refugees, whom she refused to abandon.

Braverman found herself labeled with a much less flattering feminine role. In a interview, Braverman told how she never overcame her fear of jumping during training: "It was my turn to jump from the plane, but when the English sergeant shouted 'go' I automatically moved backward and remained on the floor as those behind me jumped, one after another."<sup>80</sup> She refused to jump even while sandwiched between two other parachutists. Instead, she entered Yugoslavia through a conventional plane landing and joined a band of Tito's partisans bound for Rumania. Because the Red Army liberated Rumania before her arrival, Braverman continued to operate in Yugoslavia and eventually returned to Italy, where she aided Jewish refugees.<sup>81</sup> Her refusal to jump earned her an image that represented female weakness and timidity and reinforced stereotypical feminine characteristics.

In reality, none of those characteristics accurately summarized Braverman. After the mission, she returned to Palestine and later held high-ranking positions in the military security committees of her kibbutz movement—a significant accomplishment for a woman in the Palmach. But outside of her kibbutz movement, Braverman is remembered only for her fear.<sup>82</sup> Actually jumping

from a plane was the least important part of the operation, and Braverman achieved as much on the ground as many other parachutists. Nevertheless, a "new Zionist Jew" was supposed to embody "physical endurance, bravery and heroism,"<sup>83</sup> and the Zionists associated the "feminine" characteristics of weakness and passivity with the Diaspora Jew.<sup>84</sup> Since Braverman did not fit the Zionist model, she was known in the national collective memory only as "the parachutists who didn't jump."<sup>85</sup>

Like Braverman, other parachutists slipped from the national collective memory. By the 1950s, Israel clearly honored one parachutist far more than all other participants. That parachutist was Hannah Szenes. Once the mission ended, national focus turned mostly to the deceased parachutists—especially Szenes, Reik, and Sereni—but after the state-sponsored funeral, subsequent commemorative processes at the regional and local level quickly made Szenes the figurehead for the mission. Following her reburial in Israel, several cities and towns began naming locations after her. In the next two decades, Israel dedicated over thirty avenues, streets, and parks in Szenes's memory.<sup>86</sup> These cities took a national heroine and made her part of the local landscape.

All of the parachutists possessed the prerequisite valor to be considered heroes of the Zionist cause. Why, then, in the collective Israeli memory is Szenes most memorialized? A number of circumstances account for her comparative fame. Szenes, having developed her father's talent for writing, left behind a literary source from which to build a national myth. Before leaving Palestine for

training, she packed a suitcase for her mother filled with poetry, diaries, plays, and songs she had written. Moshe Braslavsky introduced these works to the Israeli public only one year after Szenes's death in his work, *Hannah Szenes: Her Life, Mission, and Death*. Szenes's writings comprised the core of this book, which reappeared in fifteen new editions between 1945 and 1995. Additionally, two of Szenes's poems were set to music in the post-war period. The first, "Walking to Caesarea," better known as "Eli Eli," became deeply integrated into the culture of the post-war Israeli youth movements. The poem expresses a desire for life in Israel to last eternally:

God—may there be no end  
to sea, to sand,  
water's splash,  
lightning's flash,  
the prayer of man

Hannah Szenes, "Walking to Caesarea" <sup>87</sup>

Szenes's other famous poem set to music, "Blessed is the Match," became associated with Israel's Holocaust commemoration. "Blessed Is the Match" was unique among Szenes's poetry. She wrote most of her poems during her childhood and adolescence in Hungary or during her time in Eretz Israel. She composed "Blessed is the Match," however, while on her mission in Yugoslavia. The night before she left her group to enter Hungary, Szenes and Reuven Dafni argued in the woods. Dafni did not agree with Szenes's decision to risk penetrating the closed Hungarian border. At the end of their disagreement, Szenes handed Dafni a piece of paper that he crumpled up and threw in the

bushes.<sup>88</sup> He later retrieved the paper on which Szenes had written the following poem:

Blessed is the match consumed  
In the kindling flame.  
Blessed is the flame that burns  
In the secret fastness of the heart.  
Blessed is the heart with strength to stop  
Its beating for honor's sake.  
Blessed is the match consumed  
In the kindling flame.

Hannah Szenes, "Blessed is the Match" <sup>89</sup>

The imagery of the flame is a direct symbol for the suffering of the Jews then occurring in Europe. The heart that stops its beating for honor's sake is a reference to the martyrdom that was so esteemed by the Zionists of the day. A reader could therefore easily imagine the match in the last line to be either a Holocaust victim or a Zionist martyr from the Yishuv. Interpreted in this way, the poem supplied a useful symbol for the state of Israel because it connected the experience of Holocaust suffering with the Zionist cause. By reciting and singing these lyrics, Israelis found a way to honor the Holocaust through the words of their own Zionist heroine.

Szenes's mother, Katherine Szenes, also helped promote and preserve her daughter's image in post-war Israel. Because Katherine Szenes spent time with her daughter in prison, she brought a unique perspective to the tale of Hannah Szenes's martyrdom. Katherine Szenes also acted as a living link to the Holocaust experiences because she survived and escaped the death march of

Budapest Jews and hid until Hungary's liberation.<sup>90</sup> During the 1950s, Katherine Szenes attracted public attention and often appeared as the "official spokesperson" for Hannah Szenes. In 1951, the movement HaKibbutz Ha'Meuchad underwent a schism over some members' affinity for the Communist party. One kibbutz in particular, Yad Hannah,<sup>91</sup> erupted into fighting in March 1953 between Communist and HaKibbutz HeMeuchad adherents. On the third anniversary of Yad Hannah's founding, the kibbutz asked Katherine Szenes to address its divided membership. She expressed disdain for the fighting taking place in her daughter's name and begged the factions to reunite. She later joined a hunger strike with the Communist separatists, maintaining that "it best expressed Hannah's ideals and goals."<sup>92</sup>

This was not the only instance when Katherine Szenes participated on behalf of her daughter in an event that drew national attention. In the summer of 1952, Malkiel Gruenwald published a pamphlet that accused Dr. Rudolf Kasztner of Nazi collaboration that led to the destruction of the Hungarian Jewry. During World War II, Kasztner chaired the Jewish Rescue Committee in Budapest. Joel Brand, an associate on Kasztner's committee, met with Adolf Eichmann to negotiate the "blood for goods" deal. If Brand could provide the Germans with massive quantities in war supplies, the SS promised to spare 800,000 Hungarian Jews. Brand traveled to Turkey to explain the offer to British and Jewish authorities, but by this time the Nazis had started deporting Hungarian Jews at the rate of 12,000 each day. In Brand's absence, Kasztner



desperately tried to stall Eichmann and attempted to avoid activities that might threaten the offer. Consequently, Kasztner offered only limited assistance to Palgi, Goldstein, and Szenes in Hungary. He feared that offering more help to the parachutists would compromise the negotiations with Eichmann. The "blood for goods" deal never materialized, and through bargaining with Eichmann, Kasztner succeeded in saving only 1,685 Hungarian Jews—approximately 0.2 percent of the population he hoped to rescue. Greunwald, a former Hungarian Jew himself, based his claim only on Kasztner's involvement in Nazi negotiations. Greunwald's pamphlet read: "For three years I have been waiting for the moment to unmask the careerist who grew fat on Hitler's lootings and murders. Because of his criminal machinations and collaborations with the Nazis I consider him implicated in the murder of our beloved brothers. . . ." <sup>93</sup> At the time the pamphlet was published, Kasztner worked in Israel as the public relations director for the Israeli Ministry of Commerce and Industry. In response to the public attack, Dov Joseph, Minister of Commerce and Industry, instituted criminal proceedings against Geunwald, accusing him of libel against a member of the government. <sup>94</sup>

The trial began January 1, 1954, and lasted until the end of August. The proceedings were officially about Gruenwald, but soon Kasztner's involvement with Hungarian Jewry and the Nazis became the subject of heated debate. The trial lasted for eighty sessions, and included two thousand pages of testimony—more than any other trial in Palestinian or Israeli legal history. Kasztner endured

several accusations, one of which related to the Hungarian parachutists. Ten years after her daughter reached Budapest, Katherine Szenes took the stand to testify against Kasztner. For two hours she explained her unsuccessful attempt to contact Kasztner in the fall of 1944 during her daughter's imprisonment and trial. In his concluding remarks, Shmuel Tamir, Greunwald's defense attorney, alluded to Katherine's testimony by asking, "Where was Kasztner when this valiant mother looked for him?"<sup>95</sup>

The trial did more than tarnish Kasztner's reputation. Kasztner belonged to Mapai—the dominant party in Israeli politics since the state's inception. Mapai had also been the ruling party of the Jewish Agency through the Second World War. By questioning Kasztner's motives, Greunwald and his defense attorney cast doubt on the motives of the Yishuv's wartime leadership. Attacks that surfaced during the trial implied that the Yishuv acted only in self-interest during the Holocaust and that it sent the parachutists on a suicide mission to cover up for its own inaction. Tamir used Kasztner's failure to help the parachutists as proof that the mission did not matter to Mapai except as a ploy to gain political capital.<sup>96</sup> Tamir's claims marked the first time anyone in Israel publicly presented an alternate interpretation of the parachutists' mission.

But the trial verdict hurt Mapai more than the mission's image. Judge Benyamin Halevi revealed his three-hundred-page judgment in June of 1955—one month before the Knesset elections. Halevi declared Greunwald innocent of the charge of libel. The judge also concluded that Kasztner failed to warn

Hungarian Jews about the Nazis' "Final Solution" so that he could maintain Eichmann's favor, thus allowing Kasztner to include his family and friends on the safety trains. The Israeli cabinet immediately appealed the decision. Four days later, the Cherut party—a party of the coalition government that strongly opposed Mapai—issued a motion of "non-confidence" for the decision to appeal. The government rejected the motion, and the General Zionist party abstained from voting, which symbolized a withdrawal from the coalition. Moshe Shertok immediately resigned from his position as prime minister, since the coalition government had fractured under his leadership.<sup>97</sup> The parachutists' mission, however, emerged from the trial relatively unscathed. Although Tamir questioned the Jewish Agency's motivations behind sending the volunteers, the nationalist environment of the time meant that the public would not entertain such a debate about the parachutists until twenty years later. Instead, the Israeli public vilified Kasztner for not helping Goldstein, Palgi, and Szenes, even though he believed his involvement would seal the fate of thousands of Hungarian Jews.<sup>98</sup>

During the same summer as the Kasztner Trial, tragedy struck the parachutists again—ten years after the final jump into Europe. In July 1954, a ceremony took place at Kibbutz Ma'agan to commemorate the decade anniversary of the parachuting mission. The Israeli government selected this location on the shores of the Galilee because the Kibbutz Ma'agan had a close affiliation with Mapai and because three parachutists—Peretz Goldstein, Yoel

Palgi, and Yona Rosen—had belonged to that kibbutz. The government used this memorial as a chance to strengthen its image regarding Holocaust rescue after the Kasztner Trial caused so much damage. The organizers of the service arranged for a small plane to fly over the gathering and drop a message from the Israeli president behind the dedicated memorial. Instead, the plane crashed into the crowd, nearly hitting Prime Minister Shertok and killing seventeen observers, including four former parachutists. Dov Berger—who had expressed so much guilt for surviving his mission—now joined the list of fallen parachutists. The other parachutists killed were Shalom Finci, Luva Gukowsky, and Arie Fichman. Finci operated in Yugoslavia, and Gukowsky and Fichman were the first pair to parachute into Rumania.<sup>99</sup> With this event, the parachutists' mission lost four more members, but news articles reporting on the tragedy still referred to Hannah Szenes, deceased ten years prior, as the principal figure of the historic operation. Articles also reported that Katherine Szenes attended the ceremony and had only "shaken the Prime Minister's hand moments before the tragedy."<sup>100</sup>

In the decade following her death, Hannah Szenes received so much attention on the Israeli national stage that her image was firmly planted within the Israeli collective imagination. From the 1960s to the 1980s, the image of Szenes, and consequently the parachutists' mission overall, began to play a role in Israel's cultural and educational spheres. Tali Tadmor Shimony, scholar of modern Jewish history who has studied the Israeli school systems, has explained how the public schools emphasized messages of heroism and its role in Zionist

history because they considered it imperative to the development of Israeli students. Scholars have argued that curricula and textbooks help manufacture national traditions.<sup>101</sup> In the 1960s, Israel's history textbooks promoted heroic self-sacrifice for one's country. Shimony has pointed out that in an eighth grade history textbook from 1961, forty-two percent of the material devoted to Israel's founding related to heroic actions.<sup>102</sup> Textbooks used Szenes and the other parachutists to endorse similar actions during the Holocaust. Nearly *every* textbook that addressed the Holocaust devoted a section to Szenes.<sup>103</sup>

Through promoting national legends, myths, and heroes, a state creates a common national culture. The state of Israel could achieve this through formal education, and when the literary and performance arts adopted the parachutists' story, it provided another means to educate Israelis about the "cult of heroes." Aside from multiple published editions of Szenes's diary and poetry, several other books—some written for children and adolescents—told fiction and non-fiction accounts of Szenes's story in Hebrew and English. To honor the tenth anniversary of Israel's founding, the national theater, Habimah, held a competition for the best script featuring Szenes's life. The Habimah chose Aharon Meged's play, *Hannah Senesh*, which focused mostly on events from the last year of her life. Other playwrights such as Avigdor HaMeriri and David Schechter also produced plays about Szenes. During these two decades, film companies approached the Szenes family several times with proposals to put the young parachutist on the silver screen. Worried that it might negatively affect

the image of Hannah Szenes, the family declined these offers until the 1980s, at which point Menachem Golan produced the film, *Hannah's War*. The Israeli public had many opportunities to view the film. It first ran in theatres, then on official state television and educational channels, and finally on cable television.<sup>104</sup> Though individual teachers and artists may have chosen their subject matter, the state of Israel still played a significant role in the dissemination of "Szenes culture." The Israeli public educational system, itself a governmental body, reflected the ideological commitments of Israel's political leaders and incorporated them into the curricula. The Israeli Board of Education endorsed textbooks featuring Szenes as a Holocaust hero. In the entertainment world, the national theater sponsored the competition for a play about Szenes, and the official state television channel provided abundant airtime for Golan's film. After politicizing the parachutists' image in the 1950s, the government found a less conspicuous but still widely effective means by which to embed the parachutists' story deep within the Israeli collective consciousness.

This period of cultural commemoration intersected another phase in Israeli historiography that called for a critical re-examination of Zionism and its influence on Yishuv policy during the Holocaust. In the 1980s, the Revisionists<sup>105</sup> and Ultra-Orthodox Anti-Zionists,<sup>106</sup> both long-time opponents of the Zionist Yishuv's leadership, revived earlier crusades against Mapai and the Zionist movement to charge them with responsibility for the Holocaust. One major criticism came from the book, released in 1977, entitled *Post-Uganda Zionism in*

*the Face of the Holocaust Crisis*. Shabtai B. Bet Zevi, the author and a Revisionist sympathizer, assessed the parachutists' attempt as nothing more than a suicide mission sanctioned by the Jewish Agency to preserve Zionist dignity during the Holocaust.<sup>107</sup> It fit into the larger context of arguments from similar critics, such as Rabbi Moshe Scheinfeld, formerly of the Agudat Israel Youth.<sup>108</sup> Scheinfeld wrote *Incinerated Victims of the Ovens Accuse*, which called the Zionists "criminals of the Holocaust" who perpetuated the destruction.<sup>109</sup>

The civic and scholarly debate that resulted from these and comparable works prompted critical review of the parachutists' mission. Because state officials involved themselves heavily in post-war parachutist commemoration, many in Israel closely associated the parachutist's mission with Mapai and other Zionist leaders. The Israeli public began to scrutinize the mission along with the leaders that organized it. In the late 1970s, historians and military officials started to admit that the operation did little to achieve its original goals. In 1980, the Israeli Broadcasting Association aired a documentary entitled *Pillar of Fire: Chapters in the History of Zionism*. The seven-episode documentary, created by Yigal Lossin, reinforced earlier negative assessments of the parachutists' mission. The section on the parachutists ended by stating: "They did not succeed in rescuing even one Jew."<sup>110</sup> The series, *We Were There*, aired a few years later on Israel Educational Television, adopted a similar judgment.<sup>111</sup>

This negative appraisal of the parachutists' accomplishments did little to sway the Israeli collective memory, which continued to revere the participants

for their valiant efforts. For example, the *Carta Atlas of the History of the Haganah*, published in 1991, maintained that the parachutists accomplished "a great deal" in terms of rescuing Jews in Europe.<sup>112</sup> And though the Israeli public had allowed criticism of the overall mission, it did not tolerate attacks on one individual participant. When writing his televised play, *The Kasztner Trial*, Motti Lerner included a scene in which Hannah Szenes broke during interrogation, revealing Yoel Palgi's and Peretz Goldstein's whereabouts to the Hungarian police. When the previews aired in 1994, this fictional scene caused public outcry in Israel. Hannah Szenes's brother, Giori Szenes, and a mass gathering of Israeli citizens petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court to forbid the screening of the episode. The court supported Lerner's artistic freedom, but because of the reaction, the Israeli Broadcasting Authority cut the scene from the production. For weeks, articles and letters to the editor filled Israel's newspapers, rebuking Lerner's attempt to slander "the untouchable virgin of Israel."<sup>113</sup> In an effort to reaffirm Szenes's image in Israeli minds, the official state channel and Israeli cable TV re-played Golan's film for several months.<sup>114</sup> Fifty years of commemorative ceremonies, dedications, books, plays, televised docu-dramas, songs, and poetry had secured the parachutists' and Szenes's image within the Israeli collective consciousness. The national narrative maintained its original potency after an open war waged on Zionism in the 1980s. The public outcry surrounding Lerner's portrayal of Szenes stands as a testament to the fact that



five decades after her death, the citizens of Israel would not allow any defamation of their national heroine.

By the 1990s, Israelis still held Szenes's image as synonymous with Jewish heroism during the Holocaust. In June 1998, a poll was taken of 594 students at the University of Haifa in Israel. The students polled were either in their third year of undergraduate study, or in their first year of graduate work. The students answered the two following questions: 1.) "Did any Jew ever succeed in escaping from Auschwitz?" and 2.) "Who are four Holocaust heroes that you are familiar with?"<sup>115</sup> Ninety-eight percent of respondents answered that no Jew ever successfully escaped from Auschwitz. Of the two percent who claimed a Jewish prisoner escaped, none could provide a specific name. The top four Holocaust heroes named were Anne Frank, Mordechai Anielewicz (leader of the Warsaw ghetto uprising), Oskar Schindler, and Hannah Szenes. Anne Frank and Oskar Schindler obtained their places in the Israeli collective psyche through western influences: Frank's published diary and Steven Spielberg's 1993 film. Anielewicz's and Szenes's fame in Israel is due mostly to the promotion of their story by state sponsored sources. The overemphasis on resistance figures like the ghetto fighters and the parachutists created an environment in which the Israeli public was not educated about other potential Holocaust heroes. One such "unknown Holocaust hero" includes Rudolf Vrba, one of only five Jews to successfully escape from Auschwitz. The polled students easily recalled Szenes, but not Vrba, who, for decades, was largely ignored by Israeli historiography. In

her study of remembered and forgotten Holocaust heroes in Israel, Ruth Linn, professor of psychology and education at the University of Haifa, expressed shock that she never learned about Vrba through her formal Israeli education. She found this particularly disturbing since she attended Reali High School in Haifa, one of the most prestigious private schools in Israel. Linn, like some other Israelis, only became acquainted with Vrba's story of escape from Auschwitz through the 1985 documentary series *Shoah* created by French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann. When reading Vrba's autobiography in English—because no Hebrew version existed—Linn was struck by his story.<sup>116</sup>

During the same months when Szenes struggled to enter the closed Hungarian border, Vrba successfully escaped from the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz. Vrba, originally from Czechoslovakia, arrived at Auschwitz on June 30, 1942. After two years in the camp, Vrba's motivation to escape stemmed not only from his desire for freedom, but also from a desire to inform the Hungarian Jewish leadership about Auschwitz. He hoped that if he could reach Jewish leaders in time, he could rouse resistance of "an army one million strong, an army that would fight rather than die."<sup>117</sup> On April 10, 1944, Vrba and Fred Wetzler escaped from Auschwitz. After reaching Slovakia on April 21, the two men made contact with Slovakia's remaining Jewish community and reported to the clerical staff of the Jewish Council all they knew about Auschwitz-Birkenau. Slovakia's Jewish leadership carefully examined the Vrba-Wetzler report, which

totaled forty pages, and promised to disseminate it throughout Hungary and the western world.<sup>118</sup>

Nearly every Israeli school child knows Szenes's story and can recite the words to "Blessed is the Match," but the Israeli university and graduate students polled could not name Vrba or any other Jew who escaped from Auschwitz. Linn explained that the surveyed students, half of whom were prospective teachers, were not familiar with any Jewish Auschwitz escapees because it was not part of their education—formal or otherwise. She provided several examples illustrating how Israeli historiography and education disregarded Vrba from Holocaust history. She mentioned that one of the highest regarded Israeli Holocaust textbooks, entitled *The Holocaust and Its Significance* by Yisrael Gutman and Chaim Schatzker, failed to acknowledge the Auschwitz escapees or any of the reports they produced. Prominent Israeli Holocaust historians, such as Yehuda Bauer, Asher Cohen, and Livia Rothkirchen, who wrote about the events in Slovakia and Hungary, did not include Vrba's or Wetzler's names in their works. Instead, they referred to the escapees as "two Slovak Jews" or "two young men."<sup>119</sup> Even when Israeli Holocaust historians have acknowledged Vrba's escape, they still did not refer readers to his memoirs, widely published in Canada, Great Britain, France, Germany, Holland, and the United States. According to Linn, teachers of Holocaust courses at Israeli universities likewise have failed to incorporate Vrba's memoirs into course reading lists. This contrasts with Szenes who has been given prominence in Israeli scholarship and

education. When referring to Szenes, scholars—including authors of school textbooks—often have included her name as well as a description of her efforts during the Holocaust. They have also frequently referred readers to Szenes's diary and poetry.<sup>120</sup>

Considering the efficacy of both Szenes's and Vrba's efforts, the indifference to Vrba's story is surprising. The Vrba-Wetzler report was the first account from Auschwitz prisoners to reach the outside world and be believed. The Swiss Press published portions of the report toward the end of June 1944, which resulted in international public protest about the Holocaust by figures such as United States Secretary of State Cordell Hull, British Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden, the International Red Cross, the King of Sweden, and Pope Pius XII. Yehuda Bauer claimed that the escapees' efforts "*had an immediate impact*" as the Hungarian regent, Admiral Miklos Horthy, ordered to halt the deportation of the Hungarian Jews on July 7, 1944.<sup>121</sup> The order became effective two days later, saving the 100,000 Jews that remained in Hungary from deportation.

Nevertheless, Jewish scholars dismiss Vrba's idea of resistance through knowledge as simplistic and unrealistic. Yet, Szenes's pursuit of resistance is glorified as heroic and brave. As Linn has argued, "Vrba and Wetzler's fundamental contribution to saving the Budapest Jews is not made clear, whereas Szenes's failure to save even one single Jew is not discussed."<sup>122</sup>

Vrba provides an important contrast to Szenes. These two figures possessed similar personal characteristics and equivalent intents, yet only one

has survived in the Israeli collective memory. Szenes and Vrba were each Jews born in East-Central Europe. They shared the belief that their people should "not be led to death like sheep to the slaughter" and thus sought to organize Jewish resistance in Hungary during the spring and summer of 1944.<sup>123</sup>

Although neither achieved this primary goal, Vrba's actions saved many more lives than did Szenes's, whose efforts ended up costing her own life. But for fifty years, Israel's historiography and collective memory recalled the story of Szenes, while Vrba's account remained virtually lost. One striking difference between these two figures explains why Israel would choose Szenes over Vrba to commemorate the Holocaust. Vrba operated under self-initiative while Szenes acted with the support of the Zionist Yishuv. Szenes, who had made *aliyah* to Palestine in 1939, represented a "new Jew" of Eretz Israel. She spoke Hebrew, lived on a kibbutz, and faithfully accepted the Zionist philosophy. At the time of his transfer to Auschwitz, Vrba was still a part of the non-Zionist European Diaspora. Vrba did not represent the Zionist values of Eretz Israel, nor could the Zionist movement claim any influence in his actions. Consequently, one of only five Jews to escape from the infamous Nazi death camp, Auschwitz-Birkenau, did not achieve hero status in a nation that in part justified its own existence with the suffering of European Jews during the Holocaust. The absence of a Zionist factor in Vrba's story led the new state of Israel to value Szenes's "obedient patriotism" over Vrba's otherwise "unprecedented heroic act in Jewish history."<sup>124</sup>

A tire exploded, the undercarriage collapsed, and Yoel Palgi had to break his way through the plane's emergency exit to avoid the pending explosion. A surviving parachutist returned from his mission. Palgi managed to escape before his plane caught fire. The flame-engulfed plane symbolized so much—the mission's many mishaps, its resulting tragedies, the survivors' difficult personal re-entry into Palestine. Haunted by memories of lost comrades and the European Jews he could not save, Palgi grew frustrated with several Yishuv members he encountered. They received him with warmth and admiration, but he did not tell the story they wanted to hear. He told no tales of "the few who had fought like lions to sanctify the name of the Jewish people."<sup>125</sup> Palgi reflected years later: "It was soon evident to me that we were ashamed of those who had been tortured, shot, thrown to the flames. A consensus was being formed that viewed the victims of the Holocaust as the dregs of the people."<sup>126</sup> Palgi realized that the Yishuv, blinded by its desire for statehood, could not understand or accept the Jewish victims' fate, which did not correspond with fundamental Zionist beliefs about strength and resistance.

After returning to Cairo, Palgi hardly believed British General Anthony Simonds who offered a pat on the shoulder and said: "You've done great work for your people."<sup>127</sup> Palgi did not anticipate the national hype that would soon surround the parachutists' efforts. To unite the assimilated and refugee populations, the Israeli state used the parachutists to represent the Yishuv *and*

the Holocaust, while emphasizing Zionist-endorsed themes of martyrdom and resistance. By adding these individuals to the national pantheon of heroes, the state helped promote a common national memory and culture that could educate future generations about Zionist ideas.

The parachutists' kibbutzim promoted their image first, but soon the state assumed the role as main "memory maker" of the parachutists' legend. In later years, Katherine Szenes, Israeli scholars, and other cultural manufacturers such as authors, playwrights, and filmmakers continued the effort. Benedict Anderson, expert on nationalism, has claimed that states, especially those established after World War II, implanted national ideology through the educational system, mass media, and administrative regulations.<sup>128</sup> Israel clearly employed that approach with the parachutists' mission, which quickly found a place in Israeli politics, scholarship, literature, poetry, drama, film, educational curriculums, and the country's geography. The parachutists' tale was so highly revered that even the highly politicized attacks rendered against Zionism during the Kasztner trial and the 1970s and 80s barely scathed the mission's image.

Palgi, a surviving parachutist himself, understood why Israel held tight to the parachutists' myth. In his memoirs he wrote: "Those who had not been tried in the flesh in the valley of slaughter gave themselves excitedly to tales of heroism that were to influence the education of generations to come. They clung to the glorious heroic deeds of a few, but failed to understand the mute heroism of masses of Jews who were caught in a situation with no solution and were

annihilated without a fight, nevertheless retaining their humanity through all the tortures of hell until their last breath."<sup>129</sup> At the close of the twentieth century, Palgi's words still rang true. Israeli students remembered the heroic Szenes, one of Israel's own, and knew nothing of Rudolph Vrba or other Jewish Auschwitz escapees. The state of Israel promoted the drama of the parachutists' story and crafted it into an inspirational patriotic myth to help mold its national identity for the state's first fifty years. Examining how Israel emphasized the "heroes" over the "victims"—even when the latter grossly outnumbered the former—reveals the values and priorities of this new nation. This narrative informed not only post-war refugees about Zionist values, but continues to influence current generations as one of Israel's pre-eminent national legends. The parachutists' mission has shown a certain steadfastness and will not fade from the collective memory anytime soon. As time passes, however, one might hope Israel will further recognize the valor that Palgi did—the subtle heroism of those who died in the chaos of Europe that was the Holocaust.



## CONCLUSION

Historians have called the parachutists' mission an attempt from the Jewish Agency that came "too little, too late."<sup>1</sup> However, an examination of the planning stage of the parachutists' mission presents an alternate view by demonstrating how the political squabbles inside the Yishuv—as well as the strained British-Yishuv relationship—severely hindered the Agency's attempts to reach and rescue the suffering European Jewry. The conflicts that slowed the plan's implementation had very little to do with the Holocaust or even with practical military considerations; it was the future of Palestine that concerned the Yishuv and British policy makers. Who would control post-war Palestine? Even as the Second World War ended, the British and the Yishuv were still operating under the shadow of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, a vestige from the end of the First World War. This promise of independence generated hope among Jews in Palestine and regret and fear among British politicians. The British worried that the Yishuv would soon direct violent attacks against the Mandatory government. The British did not wish to contend with an independence movement in the Middle East after the many struggles and upheavals it had addressed in Europe over the past decade.

Yishuv leaders also kept a close check on their own power. Mapai leadership of the Jewish Agency hesitated to send Jewish emissaries to Europe. A move from the opposing Revisionists, however, spurred the Agency into action on the parachuting endeavor. There was also a fear among Yishuv leaders

that if Palmach troops were not used in the war effort, the British would eliminate that force—in effect taking away Eretz Israel's only official military. The Yishuv, of course, also wanted to strengthen its claim for statehood by participating somehow in the Allied fight against Hitler.

The mission suffered repeated delays as the Yishuv and the British military disagreed about the operation's objectives. The Yishuv intended the mission to focus on Jewish rescue and resistance by spreading the Zionist message. British wanted the Jewish volunteers to serve in a far more limited capacity. The British needed wireless operators and agents with a strong knowledge of the Balkan region to assist in rescue operations of Allied prisoners of war. They worried that the skills Palmach members acquired during training in guerilla warfare would one day be used against the British in a battle for an independent Jewish state. The English concern about the operation, however, was not limited to the practical consideration of the future of Palestine. Some British officials demonstrated outright anti-Semitism when they listed reasons not to train Jews.

British officials sympathetic to the Zionist cause showed more support for Jewish involvement in the operation. In many instances, Zionist undertones accompanied Agency proposals for Jewish missions. Other proposals focused less on the Zionist agenda and emphasized a desire to help European Jews. But many British officials suspected ulterior motives even in these proposals. From January 1943 to the spring of 1944, negotiations continued before the bulk of

parachutists saw deployment. All the while, the massacre of the Jews in Europe continued and the Red Army advanced, almost eliminating the need for the operation before it ever began. The political battles clouded and delayed an effort that, ostensibly, should have been about rescuing the Jewish people.

Unlike most other participants in World War II, the Jewish Agency did not have an official homeland to protect. The Agency sent these emissaries not to defend a country or a way of life, but rather to promote one. Parachutists left for Palestine prepared to rescue their European brethren with Zionist ideology. Across Europe, organizations and individuals sought to save Jews through helping them hide and escape. The Zionist concept of Jewish rescue took a different approach. Jews of the Diaspora often spoke the phrase "next year in Jerusalem" during each year's Passover celebration.<sup>2</sup> Parachutists hoped to harness the desire behind this centuries-old tradition and inspire the drive to fight against the Nazis in the hope of living to see a Jewish homeland. Parachutists relied on this message in the midst of their own tragedies. From the dark and despair of prisons, refugee settlements, and concentration camps, the parachutists invoked their ideology as a source of hope, telling other Jews about the joys of Eretz Israel and providing lessons about Zionism and the Hebrew language.

Though the political complications in the planning stage of the mission did not quash the zeal of the participants, the reality of what happened to them must have given even the most steadfast of the parachutists reason to question

their commitment. Obstacles plagued the operation from its onset. Repeated delays, unfortunate timing, blunders in the air, and betrayal on the ground seriously impeded the agents' success in their target countries. Several parachutists experienced capture, imprisonment, and even death before completing their mission. Certainly, the outcome did not meet the desired results of those who originally conceived of the plan. While there was limited success in assisting with British military objectives, the wish for a grand-scale effort to rescue European Jews was not fulfilled. Too often, these incursions resulted in capture and death of the would-be saviors, although this was a risk the volunteers were willing to take. When Enzo Sereni jumped, he carried with him a treasured note from his son that read: "It is not important if one dies. The important thing is to die like a hero."<sup>3</sup> This message foreshadowed how the parachutists mission would be remembered in the new state of Israel, where the mission left lasting effects.

During and after the war, the Yishuv wondered who would populate the Jewish state, if one could be attained. The Yishuv had a well-established network of Jewish settlements, and the uprooted Jewish remnant in Europe would likely be searching for a home. From May 1948 to the end of 1951, immigrants to Israel included more than 350,000 survivors.<sup>4</sup> Often these immigrants were not familiar with Zionist history and its heroic figures, and likewise the state of Israel was disinclined to recognize in full the survivors' struggles. The Yishuv desired a way to pay homage to this devastating chapter

in Jewish history while maintaining Zionist integrity. Volunteers of the mission represented the "new Jews" of Eretz Israel, but they also originated from the European Diaspora. The parachutists, as heroes of Zionism and the Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, linked those histories, thereby "bridging the gap between the Holocaust and the rebirth of a sovereign Jewish nation."<sup>5</sup>

The state of Israel began to use the parachutists' narrative as a tool to inspire and educate Israel's post-war immigrants and younger generations about Zionist and Holocaust history. The parachutists' story holds strong within the Israeli collective memory and has, so far, withstood critical attacks on Zionism, the Jewish Agency's wartime leadership, and the mission itself. However effectively the narrative has achieved the state's goals, the process of commemoration has caused problems for Israeli historiography. Aspects of the participants' personal lives and motivations have been altered or ignored because of their incongruence with Zionist ideals. This singular focus on Zionist values created an environment where Israeli historiography virtually ignored other potential Holocaust heroes such as Rudolph Vrba because his story lacked the qualities necessary for an Israeli nationalist narrative. These problems have not yet been fully resolved; perhaps soon the state of Israel and Israeli historiography will evaluate the parachutists and other Holocaust outside of the Zionist framework.

Perhaps the importance of the parachutists' narrative has not declined because the need for it still remains. The Zionist movement achieved the

creation of a Jewish nations-state, but the Zionist myths are still needed by this relatively new democracy. The state selected the parachutist story because it fit into the educational approach that emphasized self-sacrifice for national honor. As long as Israel feels threatened by hostile forces—politically or otherwise—it will continue to use such heroic figures to help educate and inspire the nation's future defenders.

\* \* \*

Jewish legend tells of a unique bird in the Garden of Eden. When offered the forbidden fruit by Adam and Eve, this bird refused to eat, making it the only animal in the garden to do so. As a reward for its obedience to God, this mythical bird—the *chol*—received a kind of immortality. Every thousand years, the *chol* sits in its nest, which is then consumed by flames. This phoenix-like bird does not completely disappear. Instead, it leaves an egg from which a full-grown *chol* hatches anew.<sup>6</sup>

The phoenix motif has assumed many meanings, including the Egyptian symbol of the sunrise and the Christian symbol of Christ's resurrection. Likewise, there are several interpretations of the word *chol*. Literally translated, the word means "sand" or "palm tree." The rabbinic literature chose to link the word to the image of a phoenix-like bird, which it understands to be a literal creature from the days of the Garden of Eden.<sup>7</sup>

So too are there different interpretations of the parachutists' mission: an act of valiant heroism, an ill-fated failure, or a Zionist ploy to feign Holocaust assistance. The importance lies in the disparity between literal and symbolic interpretation. Israel, much like the rabbis of ages past, chose to endow the parachutists' attempts with a meaning different from its so-called "real" history to create a narrative to educate the Israeli public about the new nation's values. Israel honored the parachutists as symbols that took flight to obediently answer the call of Eretz Israel and soon after perished.

The flames that engulf the *chol* represent the burnt sacrifices performed by the Jews of biblical times—a promise to God to endure suffering to win over God's favor and return to a perfect state, a rebirth, so to speak. These types of sacrifices, of course, were called a "holocaust." In the midst of a modern day Holocaust, the parachutists willingly sacrificed themselves—this time for the rebirth of their nation. To some, mortal death seemed insignificant. Perhaps inspired by his own son's words, Enzo Sereni told Hannah Szenes and others on the eve of their jump, "Remember, only those die who want to."<sup>8</sup> These parachutists hoped to see a re-born Israel rise up from the ashes of the Diaspora. Like the *chol* of legend, however, the parachutists represented the sacrifice necessary before this rebirth. Though Sereni and Szenes never lived to see the state of Israel, the parachutists' mission left an "egg" that hatched inside the Israeli collective memory—a story of immortal heroism that continues to inspire later generations.

## NOTES

### NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup> Yoel Palgi, *Into the Inferno: The Memoir of a Jewish Paratrooper Behind Nazi Lines*, with an introduction by David Engel, trans. Reeva Rubin (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 20-2.

<sup>2</sup> The term *aliyah* describes immigration to Israel.

<sup>3</sup> Howard M. Sachar, *A History of Israel: From the Rise of Zionism to Our Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1979. Reprint, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993), 26, 72-3, 154, 189.

<sup>4</sup> Walter Laqueur, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972), 296-7.

<sup>5</sup> Yehuda Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance: A History of Jewish Palestine, 1939-1945*, trans. Alton M. Winters (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1970), 273.

<sup>6</sup> Shabtai Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust* (New York: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1996), xix.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from a letter written by Enzo Sereni that is quoted in Clara Urquhart and Peter Ludwig Brent, *Enzo Sereni: A Hero of Our Times* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1967), 173-4.

<sup>1</sup> Judith Tydor Baumel, "The Heroism of Hannah Senesz: An Exercise in Creating Collective National Memory in the State of Israel," *Journal of Contemporary History* 31 (July 1996): 540.

<sup>2</sup> David J. Goldberg, *The Divided Self: Israel and the Jewish Psyche Today* (London: I.B. Tauris), 128-9; Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust*, 89;

<sup>3</sup> The Jewish Agency the body recognized by the League of Nations to advise the Mandatory government on interests of the Jewish population in Palestine. The Agency maintained an executive branch in Jerusalem and another



in London. The Agency's political department in Jerusalem was responsible primarily for negotiating with the Mandatory government.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 273; Marie Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match: The Story of Jewish Resistance* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1947), 16; Teveth, *Ben-Gurion and the Holocaust*, 89; Yoav Gelber, "The Mission of the Jewish Parachutists from Palestine in Europe in World War II," *Studies in Zionism* 7 (1986): 5.

<sup>5</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 273; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 16-7.

<sup>6</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 136.

<sup>7</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 273.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 273-4.

<sup>9</sup> Tom Segev, *One Palestine, Complete: Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, trans. Haim Watzman (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), 440.

<sup>10</sup> The threat of German invasion to Palestine subsided when the Allies defeated General Irwin Rommel's at El Alamein in Egypt.

<sup>11</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 51-3, Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 234.

<sup>12</sup> On November 2, 1917, British Foreign secretary Lord Balfour sent a letter to Lord Rothschild who was president of the English Zionist Federation. The Balfour Declaration is the statement made in this letter that expresses sympathy for the Jewish Zionist cause and pledges the support of His Majesty's Government in establishing Palestine as a national home for the Jewish people. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Balfour Declaration."

<sup>13</sup> Bernard Wasserstein *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 272.

<sup>14</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 52; Judith Tydor Baumel, "'Parachuting to Their People'—The Operation of the Parachutist-Emissaries During World War II in Historical Perspective," *Yad Vashem Studies* 25 (1996): 142; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 16.

<sup>15</sup> Revisionist Zionism was an ideology within the Zionist movement that was developed by Ze'ev Jabotinsky, who sought a revision of the "practical Zionism" advocated by David Ben Gurion and Chaim Weizmann. Those like Gurion and Weizmann focused on independent settlement of Eretz Israel, which revisionists instead focused on "political Zionism", which Jabotinsky believed was the desired of Theodore Herzl. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Revisionist Zionism."

<sup>16</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 52.

<sup>17</sup> Intelligence Summary No.1/43, January 8, 1943, The National Archives (hereafter TNA), FO 921/58.

<sup>18</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 52-3.

<sup>19</sup> In 1935 the Revisionists seceded from the World Zionist Organization, which was closely aligned with the Jewish Agency, to found the New Zionist Organization.

<sup>20</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 188.

<sup>21</sup> Intelligence Summary No.1/43, January 8, 1943, TNA, FO 921/58.

<sup>22</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 53.

<sup>23</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 139-40; Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 278; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 288.

<sup>24</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 289.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> The Special Operations Executive (SOE) was a British secret service organized to support subversive warfare in enemy-occupied territory during the Second World War. See "SOE," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 1018-22.

<sup>27</sup> M.O.3 Notes on Interview Between CGS and Zaslani, January 20, 1943, TNA, WO 201/2323.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Bennett's Minutes, January 29, 1943, TNA, FO 921/58.

<sup>31</sup> Rucker's Minutes from Interview with Joseph, January 26, 1943, TNA, FO 921/58.

<sup>32</sup> The British never granted Palestine its own flag, because Herbert Samuel, the first High Commissioner of Palestine, could not find create a design that represented all of the Palestine's inhabitants. Samuel realized the flag could not use a cross, Star of David, or crescent or even a combination of all three without upsetting any Jewish, Christian or Muslim groups. Until the end of the Mandate, the administration flew the British Union Jack over Palestine. See Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 161.

<sup>33</sup> Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 99, 161.

<sup>34</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 55; General Steele's Minutes, February 6, 1943, TNA, WO 201/2323.

<sup>35</sup> *Aliyah Bet* is the Hebrew term for illegal immigration. Aliya Bet was organized in 1939 by Mossad Aliya Bet to bring immigrants to mandatory Palestine after immigration was restricted by the British White Paper of 1939. See Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 112.

<sup>36</sup> The British military intelligence directorate created MI9 in December of 1939 as the semi-secret British escape service. MI9's duties included aiding the escape of Allied prisoners of war. See "MI9" in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 746-7.

<sup>37</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 278; Gelber, "Mission," 53, 59.

<sup>38</sup> British Captain Orde Wingate arrived in Palestine in 1936 as an intelligence officer of the Fifth Division and soon became a passionately devoted to the Zionist cause and a close friend to Chaim Weizmann. See Sachar, *A History of Israel*,

<sup>39</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 275; Gelber, "Mission," 53-4.

<sup>40</sup> McCandlish to General Wilson, July 29, 1943, TNA, FO 921/65.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> The design for the Zionist flag developed over several stages. Though the actually version was not finalized until after World War II, the flag in the 1940s included two blue strips and a Blue Star of David on a white background. See Segev, *One Palestine, Complete*, 99, 161.

<sup>44</sup> McCandlish to General Wilson, July 29, 1943, TNA, FO 921/65.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Hay, *Ordinary Heroes: The Life and Death of Chana Szenes, Israel's National Heroine* (New York: Pargon House, 1989), 139; Judith Tydor Baumel, "Parachutists' Mission," in *The Holocaust Encyclopedia*, ed. Walter Laqueur (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 469; Judith Tydor Baumel, "The 'Parachutists' Mission' from a Gender Perspective," in *Resisting the Holocaust*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (Oxford: Berg, 1998), 97.

<sup>47</sup> Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir is the name for a Zionist-socialist youth movement that trained Jewish youth for kibbutz life in Eretz Israel. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Ha-Shomer ha-Za'ir."

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 275-6; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 142; Gelber, "Mission," 56.

<sup>49</sup> Zaslani, as quote in Gelber, "Mission," 57.

<sup>50</sup> Ramat Hakovesh is a kibbutz in central Israel, north east of Kefar Sava.

<sup>51</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 276-8; Gelber, "Mission," 57.

<sup>52</sup> Kibbutz Hazorea is located on the western outskirts of Jezreel Valley, Israel.

<sup>53</sup> Peter Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 138.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>55</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 58.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ramat David is a kibbutz in northern Israel, near Nahalal.

<sup>58</sup> Ben-Gurion, Golomb, and Katznelson as quoted in Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 142-5; Gelber, "Mission," 61.

<sup>60</sup> Zaslani to Brigadier I. Clayton, January 25, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Shertok to Minister Resident, Cairo, February 7, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

<sup>63</sup> Sir William Croft to H.G. Curran, February 28, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Sir Harold MacMichael to Sir William Croft, March 8, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Bennett to Curran and to Croft, March 24, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

<sup>68</sup> Curran to Clayton, April 4, 1944, TNA, FO 921/152.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from a letter written by Enzo Sereni that is quoted in Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni*, 172.

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Senesh, *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary: The First Complete Edition*, with a foreword by Marge Piercy, with a preface by Eitan Senesh, trans. Marta Cohen (Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 155.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 97; Yoav Gelber, "Parachutists, Jewish," in *The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Gutnam Israel (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 1103.

<sup>4</sup> Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 158.

<sup>5</sup> Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 33. Syrkin, and American writer, translator, educator and Zionist activist, interviewed surviving parachutists in the late 1940s as part of her study on Jewish resistance movements entitled *Blessed is the Match*.

<sup>6</sup> Kibbutzim is the plural term for kibbutz, which is the name for a collective settlement in Eretz Israel.

<sup>7</sup> Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 158.

<sup>8</sup> Yugoslavia experienced Axis invasion in April 1941, which divided the country in several ways. Territory was annexed to Bulgaria, Albania, Hungary, Italy and the German Reich. Other parts fell under the Italian and German administration, and German military occupation. The Germans established the "Independent State of Croatia" (Nezavisna Država Hrvatska, or NDH) in the central part of Yugoslavia. This paper will refer to all these territories as "Yugoslavia" when referring to the area contained within the Yugoslav national border prior to 1941. See "Yugoslavia," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 1293-9.

<sup>9</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 279.

<sup>10</sup> Germany maintained a military presence in Rumania throughout the war, but allowed Rumania its sovereignty because Hitler respected the military dictatorship run by General Ion Antonescu since January 27, 1941. Rumania remained aligned with German until August 24, 1944 when King Michael ordered Antonescu's arrest and all Rumanian troops surrendered to the approaching Red Army. "Romania," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 954-9.

<sup>11</sup> Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 67-8.

<sup>12</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 278; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 141; Foot and Langley, *MI9*, 228; Gelber, "Mission," 59; Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 3.

<sup>13</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 279.

<sup>14</sup> When the Axis powers invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, Yossip Tito, president and political secretary for Yugoslavia's Communist party (KPJ) organized tens of thousands of individuals to engage in sabotage and guerilla warfare against the invading forces. These bands called partisans gained respect among Muslims Catholic Croats and Orthodox Serbs as they defending Yugoslav territory against the foreign occupation. See "Tito and the Partisans," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 1110-3.

<sup>15</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 144; Baumel, "Parachutists' Mission," 469; Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 158-9; Gelber, "Parachutists, Jewish," 1103-4; Gelber, "The Mission," 61; Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 9-10; Ruth Bondy, *The Emissary: A Life of Enzo Sereni*, with an afterword by Golda Meir, trans. Shlomo Katz (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1973), 220.

<sup>16</sup> Palgi, "How She Fell," in *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary, the First Complete Edition*, Hannah Senesh (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 231.

<sup>17</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Reuven Dafne, "The Last Border," in *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary, the First Complete Edition*, Hannah Senesh (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 223.

<sup>19</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 18; Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 223.

<sup>20</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 18.

<sup>21</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 144.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>23</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 271.

<sup>24</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 145.

<sup>25</sup> Sereni, as quoted in Dafne, "The Last Border," 225.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 226.

<sup>27</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 11; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 35-6.

<sup>28</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 24; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 35-6.

<sup>29</sup> Before the German invasion, Hungary engaged in war against the Allies but Hitler seemed unconvinced of their allegiance to the Axis powers. He ordered an invasion of Hungary in March 1944 and forced Hungarian Regent Admiral Horthy to appoint a pro-German government headed by General Döme Sztójay to ensure compliance with Reich policies. See "Hungary" in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 548-53.

<sup>30</sup> Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni*, 74-6; Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 175-6.

<sup>31</sup> Bondy, "The Emissary," 223-4, 230-1.

<sup>32</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 62; General Steele's Minutes, February 6, 1943, TNA, WO 201/2323; Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 163; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 37.

<sup>33</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 36-7; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 37-9.

<sup>34</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 50-1.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>37</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 523; Catherine Senesh, "Meeting in Budapest," in *Hannah Senesh: Her Life and Diary, the First Complete Edition*, Hannah Senesh (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2004), 258-9; Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 183.

<sup>38</sup> Senesh, "Meeting in Budapest," 258.

<sup>39</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 523.

<sup>40</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 80.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>42</sup> Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 182; Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 82-5.



<sup>43</sup> After the Nazi occupation of Hungary, Nazi official Adolf Eichmann summoned Joel Brand, member of the Hungarian Jewish Rescue Committee with a trade offer. Eichmann was willing the nearly one million Jews leave Hungary in exchange for trucks, soap and other goods. Members of the Rescue Committee were skeptical, and knew that Allied forces would likely reject the offer. In May, Brand traveled to Turkey to discuss the "blood for goods" offer with British and Jewish officials. No agreement was reached, and in the meantime several hundred thousand Jews were sent to Auschwitz and murdered. See "Brand, Joel," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 155.

<sup>44</sup> Alex Weissberg, *Desperate Mission: Joel Brand's Story as told by Alex Weissberg*, trans. Constantine FitzGibbon and Andrew Foster-Melliard (New York: Criterion Books, 1958), 239-45; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 148-50, Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 100-13; Rafi Benshalom, *We Struggled for Life: The Hungarian Zionist Youth Resistance During the Nazi Era*, trans. Ora Cummings and Riva Rubin (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2001), 99-101.

<sup>45</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 149-50; Weissberg, *Desperate Mission*, 244-5.

<sup>46</sup> Slovakia emerged as a somewhat independent client state of Nazi Germany in 1938 under the leadership of Slovak nationalists Josef Tiso. Popular discontent with Germany increased throughout the war, and the Slovakian National uprising began on August 29, 1944 when Slovak units fought advancing German forces. German forces suppressed the uprising by October, though some partisan groups remained fighting until the liberation by the Red Army in March 1945. "Tito and the Partisans," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 1110-3.

<sup>47</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 100-1; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 150-3; Parmet, "Woman of Valor," 27; Shoah Resource Center, "Reik, Haviva," [http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205814.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205814.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2006).

<sup>48</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 280; Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 100-1; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 150-3; Parmet, "Woman of Valor," 27; Shoah Resource Center, "Reik, Haviva," [http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205814.pdf](http://www1.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%205814.pdf) (accessed November 1, 2006).

<sup>49</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 99; Syrkin, "Parachutists from Palestine," 36; Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 294.

<sup>50</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 101; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 155-6.

<sup>51</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 280; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 157; Gelber, "Mission," 74-5.

<sup>52</sup> Gelber, "Mission," 75.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>54</sup> Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe*, 294.

<sup>55</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 165; Foot and Langley, *MI9*, 180-3, 229.

<sup>56</sup> Eric Morris, *Guerrillas In Uniform: Churchill's Private Armies in the Middle East and the War Against Japan, 1940-1945* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), 83.

<sup>57</sup> Bauer, *From Diplomacy to Resistance*, 278; Janusz Piekalkiewicz, *Secret Agents, Spies and Saboteurs: Famous Undercover Missions of World War II*, trans. Francisca Garvie and Nadia Fowler (New York: William Morrow, 1972), 61.

<sup>58</sup> Foot and Langley, *MI9*, 183.

<sup>59</sup> The Rumanian-Soviet Armistice, signed September 12, 1944, acknowledges that on August 24, 1944 Rumania joined the Allies to fight Germany and Hungary. See "Romania," in *The Oxford Companion to World War II*, 954-9.

<sup>60</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 166; Gelber, "Parachutists, Jewish," 1104; Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 68-71.

<sup>61</sup> Anthony Simonds, as quoted in Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 140; Foot and Langley, *MI9*, 79; Parmet, "Woman of Valor," 28.

<sup>62</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 166.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> The He-Halutz, meaning "the pioneer" was an association of Jewish youth that prepared its members to settle in Israel.

<sup>65</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 153.

<sup>66</sup> Benshalom, *We Struggled for Life*, 102.

<sup>67</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 101; Parmet, "Woman of Valor," 28.

<sup>68</sup> Parmet, "Woman of Valor," 28-9.

<sup>69</sup> Gukowsky, as quoted in Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 71-2.

<sup>70</sup> Syrkin, *Blessed is the Match*, 71-2.

<sup>71</sup> Susan Beer, interview by Bonnie Gurewitsch, 25 May 1982, in "Women of Valor," Judy Cohen, <http://www3.sympatico.ca/mighty1/> (accessed October 5, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> Bondy, *The Emissary*, 239.

<sup>73</sup> Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni*, 175.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

The epigraph to this chapter is drawn from a letter written by Enzo Sereni that is quoted in Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni*, 171.

<sup>1</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 159-61.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 159.

<sup>4</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 259.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Goldberg, *The Divided Self*, 134-5.

<sup>7</sup> Dina Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State of Israel toward the Holocaust and Its Survivors: A Debate over Identity and Values," in *New Perspectives on Israeli History: The Early Years of the State*, ed. Laurence J. Silberstein (New York: New York University Press, 1991), 162.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Niewyk and Francis Nicosia, *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 38.

<sup>11</sup> Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State," 166.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 164.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>15</sup> The *Palestine Post* (called the *Jerusalem Post* after 1950) was an Independent English-language newspaper published in Jerusalem. During the Mandate the paper defended Jewish interests and Zionists aspirations which led to frequent conflicts with British government. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Jerusalem Post."

<sup>16</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem), 16 July 1945.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 3 September 1945.

<sup>18</sup> Niewyk and Nicosia, *The Columbia Guide to the Holocaust*, 36.

<sup>19</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem), 3 September 1945.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 26 April 1946.

<sup>21</sup> Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State," 167;

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>23</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 3 April 1946.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.,10, 20 March 1946.

<sup>25</sup> "Proclamation of Independence,"  
[http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat\\_eng.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/docs/eng/megilat_eng.htm) (accessed November 8, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 174.

<sup>27</sup> Bennett Simon, "Psychoanalytic Reflections on Heroism in a Time of Fallen Heroes," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 192, (March 2004): 172.

<sup>28</sup> Yael Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995),75.

<sup>29</sup> *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Tel Hai."

<sup>30</sup> Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni*, 74

<sup>31</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 98.

<sup>32</sup> In the Jewish calendar, the month of Nissan corresponds with spring and is the month during which Passover occurs.

<sup>33</sup> The Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, lasting from April 19-May 15,1943, took place as 1500 poorly armed members of the ghetto's Jewish underground movement revolted against the Germans who were moving in to deport the ghetto's remaining Jewish population. The German's eventually suppressed the uprising, burned the buildings, and deported the surviving Jews. Only a few of the resisters managed to escape.

<sup>34</sup> Zerubavel, *Recovered Roots*, 75-6.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.,76.

<sup>37</sup> Reik's words as recalled by Surika Braverman in Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 100-1.

<sup>38</sup> Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 67

<sup>39</sup>Barry Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration: A Study in Collective Memory" *Social Forces* 61 (December 1982): 377.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> The federation HaKibbutz HaMe'uchad (the United Kibbutz) was founded in 1927 by members of one of Israel's first large-scale collective settlements, Ein Charod. The movement opposed the exclusive nature of smaller collectives, kvutzah, and saw kibbutzim as the way to absorb larger number of immigrants into the Yishuv. See Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 149

<sup>42</sup> In 1927, four collective settlements founded the utopian movement known as HaKibbutz HaArtzi (the National Kibbutz) federation. In the years that followed, HaKibbutz HaArtzi settlements developed a reputation as the "most ideologically committed and intellectually active in Palestine." See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "HaKibbutz HaArtzi."

<sup>43</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 529.

<sup>44</sup> Mapai is the acronym for Mifleget Poale Eretz Israel which is the Palestinian Labor Party. Also known as "the ruling party." It was the most influential party in the Yishuv. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Mapai."

<sup>45</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Myths and Realities*, trans. Willard R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1963; reprint, New York: Harper Touchbook, 1968), 36-8.

<sup>46</sup> Schwartz, "The Social Context of Commemoration," 374.

<sup>47</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 529-30.

<sup>48</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 23, 28, 29 March 1950.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., Judith Tydor Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons: Reflections on the Funerals of Theodor Herzl and Hannah Szenes," in *Women's Studies International Forum* 25 (November-December 2002): 685.

<sup>50</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 531; Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons," 685; *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 29 March 1950.

<sup>51</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 29 March 1950.

<sup>52</sup> Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons," 685; Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 531; *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 29 March 1950.

<sup>53</sup> Theodor Herzl, author of *The Jewish State*, is known in Israel as "the father of modern Zionism."

<sup>54</sup> Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons," 682-3.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 683.

<sup>56</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. and extended ed. (London: Verso, 1991), 6, 9-10.

<sup>56</sup> Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons," 685.

<sup>57</sup> The Marianne is the female personification of Liberty and Reason in France.

<sup>58</sup> Baumel, "Founding Myths and Heroic Icons," 679.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.

<sup>60</sup> Tamar Mayer, "From Zero to Hero: Masculinity in Jewish Nationalism" in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (New York: Routledge, 1999), 289-90.

<sup>62</sup> Françoise Thébaud, "The Great War and the Triumph of Sexual Division," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *A History of Women In the West* vol. V, *Toward a Cultural Identity in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 34-5.

<sup>63</sup> Judith Tydor Baumel, "'Teacher, Tiller, Soldier, Spy'?" Women's Representation in Israeli Military Memorials," *The Journal of Israeli History* 21 (March/October 2002) 98.

<sup>64</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 102-3.

<sup>65</sup> Baumel, "'Teacher, Tiller, Soldier, Spy'?" 97.

<sup>66</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 99.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.,109.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 107

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.,109.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.,110.

<sup>72</sup> Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 3-166.

<sup>73</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 104.

<sup>74</sup> Françoise Colin, "Philosophical Differences" trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *A History of Women in the West*, vol. IV, *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 262-4.

<sup>75</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 106-7.

<sup>76</sup> Geneviève Fraisse, "A Philosophical History of Sexual Difference," trans. Arthur Goldhammer, in *A History of Women in the West*, vol. IV, *Emerging Feminism from Revolution to World War*, ed. Georges Duby and Michelle Perrot (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994), 50-52.

<sup>77</sup> *Palestine Post* (Jerusalem) 29 March 1950.

<sup>78</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 104.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 104-5.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 99, 105-6.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> Mayer, "From Zero to Hero," 290.



<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 285.

<sup>85</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 99.

<sup>86</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 531.

<sup>87</sup> Senesh, *Hannah Senesh*, 304.

<sup>88</sup> Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 169-71.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 306.

<sup>90</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 155.

<sup>91</sup> Hungarian Holocaust survivors founded Kibbutz Yad Hannah in 1950 to commemorate the young parachutist. See Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 531-2.

<sup>92</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 532.

<sup>93</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 374.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 532.

<sup>96</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 175; Ibid., 533; Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 374-6.

<sup>97</sup> Sachar, *A History of Israel*, 371-6.

<sup>98</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 535; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 175.

<sup>99</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 535; Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 159; Judith Baumel-Schwartz, "Re: Parachuting Mission," 31 October 2007, personal email (31 October 2007).

<sup>100</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 535.

<sup>101</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 120-5; Tali Tadmore Shimony, "The Pantheon of National Hero Prototypes in Educational Texts Understanding Curriculum as a Narrative of National Heroism," *Jewish History* 17 (October 2003): 311.

<sup>102</sup> Shimony, "Pantheon," 310-11, 315.

<sup>103</sup> Baumel, "Heroism of Hannah Senesz," 535.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 535-6 ; Baumel "Parachuting to Their People," 175.

<sup>105</sup> The Revisionist Party severed ties with the World Zionist Organization in 1935 to found the "New Zionist Organization." Revisionists attributed the schism to policies of Zionist leaders like Ben-Gurion and Weizmann. Naturally the Revisionists then strongly opposed Mapai—political party of Ben-Gurion and Weizmann. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Revisionist Zionism."

<sup>106</sup> Circles of Ultra-Orthodox Jews oppose the overall idea framework of Zionism state because is a man-made secular state and not brought about by Messiah's return. See Dina Porat, "'Amalek's Accomplices' Blaming Zionism for the Holocaust: Anti-Zionist Ultra-Orthodoxy in Israel during the 1980s," *Contemporary History*, 27 (October 1992): 695-729.

<sup>107</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 176.

<sup>108</sup> Agudat Israel Youth was an international youth movement seeking to preserve Orthodoxy and opposed to the establishment of a secular Jewish state. See *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Agudat Israel."

<sup>109</sup> Dina Porat, "'Amalek's Accomplices' Blaming Zionism for the Holocaust," 698.

<sup>110</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 177. Only the original Hebrew version of *Pillar of Fire: Chapters in the History of Zionism* contains a section on the parachutists' mission. The English language version *Pillar of Fire: A Television History of Israel's Rebirth* has edited out the scene.

<sup>111</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 178.

<sup>112</sup> Baumel, "Gender Perspective," 108.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ruth Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering: The Nameless, the Celebrated, and the Would-Be Holocaust Heroes," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5 (2003): 575.

<sup>116</sup> *Ha'aretz News* (Tel Aviv) 28, January 2005; Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering," 575-6.

<sup>117</sup> Ruth Linn, *Escaping Auschwitz: A Culture of Forgetting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 90.

<sup>118</sup> *Ha'aretz News* (Tel Aviv) 28, January 2005; Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering," 565-9;

<sup>119</sup> Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering," 576.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Bauer as quoted in Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering," 572.

<sup>122</sup> Linn, "Genocide and the Politics of Remembering," 578.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 579.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 575.

<sup>125</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 258.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 257.

<sup>128</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 113-4.

<sup>129</sup> Palgi, *Into the Inferno*, 259.

NOTES FROM CONCLUSION

<sup>1</sup> Baumel, "Parachuting to Their People," 169.

<sup>2</sup> "Destination: Jerusalem, 1896-1917," *Pillar of Fire: A Television History of Israel's Rebirth*, DVD, written by Yigal Losin (Jerusalem: Israeli Broadcasting Authority, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> As quoted in Urquhart and Brent, *Enzo Sereni: A Hero of Our Times*, 175.

<sup>4</sup> Dina Porat, "Attitudes of the Young State," 168.

<sup>5</sup> Baumel, "Heroism," 521.

<sup>6</sup> M.R. Niehoff, "The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature," *Harvard Theological Review* 89 (July 1996): <http://find.galegroup.com/>; *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Phoenix."

<sup>7</sup> Niehoff, "The Phoenix in Rabbinic Literature;" *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. "Phoenix."

<sup>8</sup> Enzo Sereni, as quoted in Hay, *Ordinary Heroes*, 161.

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