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## JWV International Assembly 2002 and Solidarity Mission to Israel

By PNC Ronald Zeigler

On Saturday, February 23, 2002, 31 representatives of the Jewish War Veterans of the U.S.A. departed on El Al Airlines, Flight 18, to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport, Israel. The American delegation of Jewish War Veterans included PNC and International Liaison Robert M. Zweiman, PNC Samuel Greenberg (FEMA Co-Chairman), PNC Ronald Ziegler (National Membership Chairman), PDC (California) Steve Rosmarin, Travel Chairman for JWV, and our immediate guide and Executive Director, Col. (Ret.) Herb



Rosenbleeth. National Commander Bernard Becker was unable to attend while recuperating from his recent surgery, but his Chief Aide, Joe Cole, carried his regards.

Every member of the JWV delegation contributed to the success of this assembly, which was housed initially at the Dan Panorama, Jerusalem. Our Israeli hosts were our longtime friends of TZEvet, the Israel Defense Forces Veterans Association, with over 25,000 retired Israel Defense Force (IDF) career army officers and warrant officers of 25 years or more of service. Included in TZEvet membership are about 800 women and 1200 widows of members. Some members still serve in the reserves. TZEvet is headed by Chairman and Major General (Ret.) Moshe Nativ, a frequent visitor to JWV Conventions. Major General (Ret.) Baruch Levi was Chairman of the Assembly for TZEvet- he also has visited our Conventions. Irmi Ohlmert, the brother of Jerusalem's Mayor, is the Director of TZEvet.

Delegations from the United Kingdom and France swelled our International Delegation to approximately 70. The week before we left, the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, of which we are members, sent 100 people to Israel.

We arrived at our hotel on Sunday evening and were greeted with a welcoming dinner.

Monday was reserved for touring. We ascended the Mount of Olives for an overall view of Jerusalem within the walls. We then entered the Old City at Jaffa Gate and visited the Municipal Museum of the History of Jerusalem, at the Tower of David. Since the Second Century BCE the fortress has guarded Jerusalem's vulnerable Northern and Western approaches, and was buttressed and rebuilt by each successive ruler of the City. Through the centuries, there has been a recurring cycle of building, ruins, and reconstruction. Following the Six-Day War and Jerusalem's unification, the Museum was established.

After viewing 3000 years of the history in the Museum, we walked along the Cardo, a main street with columns from the 6th century, excavated 20 feet below the ground level. We explored the Jewish Quarter established during the time of Herod and we saw the Broad Wall, which was part of the fortifications built by King Hezekiah in 701 BCE. We visited historic synagogues, ancient Herodian houses where wealthy families of the aristocracy and priesthood lived, two mikvahs (one for guests staying over). The houses date from 37 BCE to 70 CE. Then we visited and prayed at the Kotel, the Western Wall.

On Tuesday we met with our British comrades from AJEX and the assembly, and approved resolutions condemning Palestinian terror acts against Israel and, of course, the terrorists' act of 9/11; encouraged immigration to Israel; condemned anti-Semitism, commended the Commemoration Monument for Jewish soldiers at Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem. Finally we approved the application of Ukraine for membership to join the International Assembly of Jewish War Veterans, along with the U.S.A., Australia, Benelux, Canada, Finland, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Israel (TZEVE and the Jewish War Veterans League), Lithuania, South Africa and the United Kingdom, the Headquarters of the International Council.

The highlight of the day was the ceremony and visit to Ammunition Hill in Jerusalem, commemorating the Six-Day War victory over Jordan which finally reunited the city. The hill was Jordan's most heavily fortified stronghold and we viewed a film showing the battle. We visited the City Hall to meet Mayor Ohlmert and later met with President Moshe Katzav at his residence. Some of us went to the Grand Synagogue in Jerusalem (walking from our hotel) to hear the Megilla reading on Shushan Purim, listen to the graggers at the mention of Haman and see the costumes worn by children. At a party at the synagogue we ate Hamantashen and drank samples of several different wines. We were successful in recruiting a veteran member of the congregation into the local JWV Jerusalem Post 180. Later that evening we met with several members of Post 180 for over an hour at our hotel.

Wednesday we traveled to Tel Aviv and attended two seminars at the Jaffee Strategic Research Center on Terrorism post September 2001. Professor Hy Feldman spoke to us about the heart of conflict locally. Then Dr. Frank Kom discussed the outside threat to Israel from Iran, Iraq and Syria, and the positive and negative effects of the withdrawal from Lebanon. At Tzevet Headquarters we heard two lectures by senior military intelligence officers: Major General Yenad head of Operations in Samaria and Judea (territories) and Brig. General Yosse Coferwasser, Chief of Research in intelligence sector. He believes there is a clash of civilizations, not just a war on terrorism. Palestinian incitement against Israel increased since 9/11. In Egypt the No. 1 hit song is "I Hate Israel."

In the evening we had a solidarity rally at the Dan Panorama in Tel Aviv, joined by 2000 TZEVE members and Defense Minister Benjamin G. Eliezer and IDF Chief of General Staff Lt. General Shaul Mofaz, who both addressed the rally. PNC Zweiman, speaking on behalf of the U.S.A., spoke of 9/11 and the death of a 29-year old son of the Judge Advocate General of Israel in the Twin Towers tragedy. PNC Sam Greenberg had opened the assembly on behalf of the U.S.A. and PNC Ronald Ziegler gave concluding remarks at the final proceedings in Rishon Le Zion. Entertainment was provided by the IDF with Israeli and patriotic songs that brought tears to our eyes. Thursday started with lectures by two individuals with distinctly different points of view. Major General (Ret.) Donnie Atof from the Labor Party -- formerly an aide to Israeli Prime Minister Rabin -- former head of Mossad, Chief of Staff to P.M. Ehud Barak in charge of Political and Security issues. He outlined his opinion of steps needed to be taken "to get out of this situation" and emphasized the impact of the Saudi Plan.

Then General Sharit, former Head of Mossad before Gen. Atol, told us Arafat is the biggest obstacle to peace, but he acknowledged that Barak's action and offer to Arafat served a purpose -- no one had ever before put Arafat to the test. The problems are deep-rooted and complex, with no easy solutions. The key time-frame is the next 5 years - before enriched nuclear material is fully developed by Israel's enemies.

We next left for a visit to Reshon Le Zion, the fourth largest city in Israel, celebrating its 120th anniversary. We met with Mayor Meyer Niezam, leader of the city where the Israeli national flag was first flown, where "Hatikva" was first sung, where Hebrew was first taught, where the first Hebrew plough was invented and where the first Hebrew orchestra played. Much of JWV's leadership left Friday morning to return home to prepare for the upcoming NEC meeting. The remainder of the US delegation went on to Tiberias and other locales. PNC Sam Greenberg, PNP Gloria Teller and PDC's Steve Rosemarin, Marty Greenberg and Alvin Selnick remained in Israel 'til March 5.

As Ambassadors, we from JWV who attended the assembly encourage all to go to Israel as soon as possible.

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## The Allied Veterans Mission 2002

By PNC Monroe E. Mayer

As our aircraft left Israeli airspace on April 4th, we were all glad to be returning home, and leaving the unhappy place called Israel behind us. Yet, we felt that while glad to leave, we were in turn leaving something behind us, something that didn't want to be going home. There was unfinished business still there, and we were not going to be a part of it. Nevertheless, reality sets in.



Here was a group of seven strangers who first met on March 24th, 2002, two Jews, four Roman Catholics and one Armenian Orthodox were going home as close friends. With us was John Martin, SVC Dept. of Mass. VFW from Rockland MA.; Bob Proctor, NEC American Legion of Florida; Ron Markarian Maj. Genl. (CA RET) and Director of California's Selective Service; Lynn & Maj. Gen. Paul Glazer(USA Ret), former Director of NJ National Guard; and Joan and myself. We had seen sights together that none of us would forget. This tour was prepared and planned for Christian tourists to behold the wonders of Israel, and to see first hand the problems of the Palestinian Intifada and the horrible results of terrorism. Our friends saw the worst and best of all possible worlds.

Our first day took us south of Tel Aviv to the Biblical Towns of Ashdod and Ashkelon, where new settlers have arrived and built new modern towns on Biblical territory. Kibbutz Mordecai, where the Egyptian Army was held down for days during the 1948 War of Independence, and the parking lot just north of the Gaza Strip border where room for hundreds of buses for working Arabs was deserted. Our guests were told that at one time, hundred of buses left each morning with Arab workers destined for their jobs in Israel. Today, their economy is in ruins because of the actions of those in the territories and Gaza who oppose peace with Israel.

We ended the day in Jaffa and the open market in Tel Aviv, where all of us went shopping. The next day, we headed for Jerusalem, stopping at the Israeli Tank Museum at Latrun, where the military in all of us enjoyed a trip thru the past. The Trappist Monastery and Olive Tree Garden was the stop before arriving in Jerusalem.

Our guests, though very knowledgeable of world events, cannot have the same emotional bond with Israel that we as Jews have. Yet each of them expressed a feeling of antipathy toward those who would invade this quiet yet exceptionally busy country, and routinely blow themselves up in the midst of innocent civilians. The silence was permeable when we viewed the site of the Park Hotel where the suicide bomber killed almost 30 people at the Passover Seder in Netanya. The feeling was reinforced in Tel Aviv at the night club that was destroyed on a recent Saturday night. However, while stories of incidents throughout the country were reported daily on CNN in our hotel rooms, our group arose each morning looking forward to the day's events, and never once expressed any feelings of concern or worry. They conceded though, that relatives back home were very apprehensive. E-mail's were sent to families who were connected to the internet. In Jerusalem, we saw all the Christian sites from the Mount of Olives to the Church of the

Holy Sepulcher. Traveling through East Jerusalem, I pointed out to the group the graffiti on a wall that portrayed a Jewish Star, an equal sign and a swastika. Elsewhere, signs reading from "the river to the sea" were visible. The Passover Seder was held at the hotel in Jerusalem, which was equipped with a Shabbos elevator. I had my hands full explaining that one!

We visited the Sea of Galilee, Tiberias, the Jordan River and many more sites of interest to the non-Jewish visitor. Especially interesting was the Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth where a mosque was to be erected directly in front of the church. When the Israeli Supreme Court finally stopped construction, the Vatican reacted in a most positive manner. This was not lost on the members of the group. They agreed as one that the ability to access Christian sites and churches would never be as viable under Palestinian rule as they are today.

A highlight of the trip was the encounter with Gen. Anthony Zinni on Good Friday evening at the YMCA in Jerusalem. He was most gracious, and accepted our thanks for the difficult job he is doing and in turn wished us all well. On the way to Megiddo and the Golan Heights, we picked up a Israeli soldier who needed a ride to his base. Though against the rules now, because of the possibility of attacks on soldiers, this one took the chance because we were a busload of obvious Americans. It developed that he was a Israeli Bedouin, married with children, living in a Bedouin settlement and serving full time as a tracker. Two weeks before, he and another tracked two infiltrators at the border, caught and killed them. Our friends were suitably impressed, and congratulated him. Since it was Passover all week, most everything was shut down, restaurants included. The ones that were open were all Kosher'l Pesach, and our guests were great sports. Total immersion was the philosophy and they all enjoyed the experience. We visited Gilla Gerzon at the USO in Haifa, which made a great impression of those who had never been aware of this activity. John Martin had served on one of the carriers that visited Haifa, subsequent to his term of service. We finished at the Bahai Center, Carmelite Nunnery, and finally the ancient town of Caesarea. Each member individually expressed complete faith and support in Israel, and had great hopes for her future. They talked of getting together again on a reunion, and I feel certain that firm supporters and friends were made for Israel.