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Marine Saves Money and Lives

By Cpl. David Salazar, USMC

Saving the U.S. Government millions of dollars often requires the work of a highly-trained team of financial advisors. But, for an airframes chief in the Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 362, it's all in a day's work. Staff Sgt. Jason N. Cohen, a 25-year-old Marietta, Ga., native, single-handedly saved the Marine Corps, U.S., German, and Israeli air forces millions of dollars and saved hundreds of lives through a remarkable discovery he made while performing a routine inspection on a CH-53D Sea Stallion Helicopter.



“Staff Sgt. Jason Cohen found a leak in the vicinity of an indicator button designed to alert ground crews of a system fault,” said Capt. Daniel Rubel, the HMH-362 Quality Assurance officer.

When Cohen went to check the source of the leak, he found that the second stage hydraulic system was severely contaminated. The contamination was so severe that it had disabled the indicator button intended to ensure free-flow of hydraulic fluid to crucial flight control systems on CH-53Ds and similar aircraft.

Given the age of these multi-million dollar aircraft, Cohen didn't think twice about checking the rest of the squadron's helos for similar discrepancies and found that every single HMH-362 aircraft had the same potentially lethal fault.

This sparked Cohen to investigate further. The result was that every CH-53D in the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing Aviation Support Element, Kaneohe, were equipped with the faulty indicator button.

Cohen's discovery was then immediately reported to the Naval Aviation Depot at Cherry Point, N.C., who summoned the helo's manufacturer and found that it also affected the aircraft in the German, and Israeli air forces.

Not only did Cohen's discovery save each of these forces millions of dollars in potential damages, but the lives of flight crews operating the helicopters throughout the world.

“As old as these aircraft are and given the fact that none of the filters or indicator buttons worked, it's pretty amazing that none of the systems here have seen catastrophic failure,” said Gunnery Sgt. Franklin Klein, the HMH-362 Quality Assurance chief from Beaufort, Ohio.

“Since the indicator buttons were defective, there was no telling exactly when and where the systems would have failed. We could have lost the system anytime, even in mid-flight,” Cohen said.

Aside from saving countless dollars and lives, Cohen also garnered intangible gains from his find in the form of respect from peers and co-workers.

“He saved lives and money and set the example for us by doing the right thing at the right time,” said Cpl. Kenneth R. Oswald, a 20-year-old HMH-362 airframes mechanic from Romney, W. VA.

“In the 17 years that I’ve been in the Marine Corps, this is by far the best find I’ve ever seen,” Klein said. “Everybody is going to benefit from it throughout the U.S. and the other countries who operate with this aircraft.

Although it was Cohen’s expertise that helped discover this major flaw in the helo’s hydraulic system, he insists that it was all in a day’s work.

“It is part of my job. I’m qualified to do what I do. I’m supposed to find things like that,” explained Cohen.

“Without the help of the Marines in my shop, it never would have happened.” Staff Sergeant Jason N. Cohen is the grandson of Past National Commander Jerry Cohen.

The article and pictures appeared in the Marine Corps News.

Jewish Soldiers in Iraq Celebrate Holidays in Saddam's Former Palace

By Joe Berkofsky, JTA

When Rabbi Mitchell Ackerson blew the shofar this past Rosh Hashanah, it reverberated throughout one of Saddam Hussein’s former palaces. More than 100 Jewish members of the U.S. forces stationed in Iraq attended the High Holiday services at the former Iraqi dictator’s Baghdad compound. They seemed shocked and awed, not least by the echo. “It was a 25-foot ceiling, so it really goes,” Ackerson said, describing the shofar’s blast in a telephone interview from Baghdad on Monday. Many of the young Jews also “kept looking at all the marble, the gold, the fancy chairs,” the rabbi said. “It was rather magnificent.”



Then under a late afternoon sun, the group performed the customary Tashlich ceremony outside the palace, casting pieces of bread representing sins into a private lake once owned by the Iraqi dictator’s sons, Uday and Qusay. “It was a gorgeous setting,” said Ackerson, who is from Baltimore. “It tells me we can actually put these places to good use.” For Jews serving in Operation Iraqi Freedom, the High Holidays began on a sweetly ironic note: They made history by celebrating a new year in unusually elegant fashion, in the heart of Saddam’s turf, which now serves as a U.S. military base.

As the senior rabbinic chaplain for the U.S. operation in Iraq, Ackerson said he wanted this High Holiday season to start with a spiritual bang for the estimated 500 Jews among the 130,000 U.S. troops in Iraq and Kuwait. It seems to have worked. “One sergeant told me it was the most meaningful Rosh Hashanah he’s had in 20 years,” Ackerson said of the palace services.

There were also services for Jewish service personnel in Tikrit, north of Baghdad, which drew some 50 people, and two services in Kuwait, where U.S. forces also are stationed. American donors enhanced the holiday celebrations for the Jews serving in the Gulf. Three New York synagogues donated four Torah scrolls, each insured for \$10,000, and one

Maryland congregation sent prayer books and Hebrew learning material for the holiday events, which will include Yom Kippur and Sukkot services.

The Torahs capped a months-long civilian grass-roots effort dubbed “Operation Apples and Honey” by the Jewish Educators Network of New York. The group also sent 1,200 kosher dinners and 800 bagel-and-lox lunches to the troops to complement their usual ready-to-eat meals, along with prayer books, books on Judaism and ritual objects such as kiddush cups.

Meredith Weiss, president of the Jewish Educators Network, said she decided to organize the aid effort after corresponding by e-mail with a Jewish Marine and was shocked to discover how many Jews serve in the U.S. armed forces. “I decided that we need to take care of them,” said Weiss, of Nanuet, N.Y. Armed with the blessings of the Jewish Welfare Board’s Jewish Chaplains Council, which oversees the military’s rabbinic chaplaincy, Weiss began corresponding with Jewish troops, chaplains, U.S. pulpit rabbis and others.

One key request kept surfacing: real Torahs rather than the standard-issue paper version. “We had real sifrei Torah to use, and that had a tremendous impact on the soldiers,” Ackerson said, using the Hebrew term for Torah scrolls. “Many had never seen a real Torah scroll – and they couldn’t believe people would ship Torahs to Iraq for them to use.” After the Baghdad service, Ackerson said one soldier “asked me to send a note to his mother, saying he went to Baghdad for Rosh Hashanah — and he had an aliyah,” the honor of being called up to recite the blessing before the Torah reading.

Rabbi Jacob Goldstein, chief chaplain of the New York National Guard, carried one of the Torahs along with Sukkot supplies with him to Kuwait, where he led services at Central Command in Doha, Qatar. Other military chaplains leading services during the High Holidays include Rabbis Carlos Huerta, a former West Point chaplain, and David Goldstrom, based in Fort Hood, Texas. Others pitched in. A Chabad center in Millburn, N.J., donated candlesticks and Stars of David chains. Children from an Orthodox synagogue in Palm Beach, Fla., sent cards and Sukkah decorations. “No one said no to me,” Weiss said.

Maj. David Rosner, a U.S. Marine who served in the first Gulf War in addition to the current conflict, said Jewish troops deeply appreciate such efforts. Rosner, whose tour of duty ended in time for him to make it home for Rosh Hashanah, remembers attending Passover seders in Kuwait in April, which featured “the bare minimum of supplies: matzah, gefilte fish, and tuna fish.” He called Weiss “a mitzvah meidele.” When the Jewish troops weren’t attending discussion groups and reading books such as “The Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur Survival Kit,” Ackerson said they slept relatively comfortably in Saddam’s former house.

But not all Jewish armed personnel made it to the holiday services. One Jewish GI who had planned to attend the Baghdad service on Rosh Hashanah was Spc. Matthew Boyer, 24, a member of the field artillery unit of the Army’s 101st Airborne Division, 3rd Brigade, which is guarding oil fields north of the city. But Boyer — who participated in the mission that hunted down Uday and Qusay — was called to a special mission instead. During that mission, a friend was fatally shot in the neck. “Other than give him CPR and try to save him, there was nothing he could do,” his mother, Judy Ledger of Atlanta, told JTA. “He’s pretty distraught.”

Ledger said her son, who managed to attend a recent Shabbat service by hitching a helicopter ride from his position, was unable to divulge many details of the raid on Saddam’s sons. “He was driving a Humvee, trying to duck low, with attack helicopters overhead and shooting all over the place,” she said. “He said he was never so terrified in his life.”

Other Jewish servicemen were able to come home, at least briefly, for the High Holidays. Kayitz Finley, 21, a marine corporal from Los Angeles, is at home on 30 days’ leave. The son of ex-Marine Rabbi Mordecai Finley of Congregation Ohr HaTorah in Los Angeles, the young Finley said he has encountered all kinds of hostilities in Iraq. In his first of many

firefights during the war, Finley recalled lying in a ditch and watching a rocket-propelled grenade fly over his head “so close you could see the engravings on it. But I wiped away all the fear, picked up my rifle and just went to work.”

After the war, Finley was stationed in Hilal, 40 miles south of Baghdad, where he helped train police, repair basic services and visit schools. Generally Iraqis welcomed the U.S. forces, he said, and he made a point of telling many of them he was a Jew who “put my life on the line to free their country.” Typically, he said, that declaration met a “sour” reception, with many Iraqis blanching and walking away or asking him to leave a house where he had been welcomed moments before.

Finley, who last April had held an impromptu seder in the former Iraqi secret police headquarters in Baghdad, said he asked one 35-year-old school teacher how he felt about Jews before divulging his identity. The teacher told him that the Koran taught him to kill Jews. “So I showed him my dog tags,” which identified him as Jewish, “and said, ‘Here’s my knife, do your mission, kill me!’ I was ready,” Finley said, “but he couldn’t.” Finley told the teacher that life is too short for such bigotry, before the man walked away. The teacher returned the next day, Finley said, and told the Jewish soldier “life’s too short to hate.” “I felt at least I could change one life,” Finley said. “It was ironic, you know?”

My Mitzvah (My Good Deed)

By Bernard Friedenber, Commander Post #39, JWV

During the Battle of the Bulge, we suffered very heavy casualties, and infantry replacements were badly needed. Unfortunately, the replacement depots had been drawn on heavily, and there just weren’t any more infantry replacements there at that time. The powers that be came up with a solution of sorts. They pulled men out of the rear echelon units and shipped them up front to us as riflemen. We were not overly pleased to be getting replacements who were not experienced or qualified riflemen, but, on the other hand, I don’t think these men were overly thrilled at the prospect of joining us either.

Our regimental chaplain was a Catholic priest named Father Deery. Father Deery had landed on Omaha Beach with the regiment and had demonstrated great courage and devotion to duty on that day. I recall having seen him giving last rites to any number of dying men while the battle was going on, and he seemed to be oblivious to all of the fire around him. He was greatly respected by all of us, not only as our chaplain, but also as a brave soldier.

I was ordered back to regimental headquarters and told to report to Chaplain Deery. The Father greeted me warmly and told me I had been sent for as I was the ranking Jewish non-commissioned officer in the battalion. He told me that a major counter attack was anticipated, and heavy casualties might be expected. Catholic services had been arranged, and he told me he had a chaplain’s assistant, a soldier who intended to study for the ministry after he was discharged, who was going to conduct services for the Protestant soldiers. He asked me if I could arrange a service for the Jewish troops, and, of course, I said I would be delighted to do so. He handed me a box of Jewish prayer books and said he would supply me with anything else I might need. I sent word out to all of the Jewish boys in the battalion, and about thirty men showed up in my congregation.

We met for our service in a large open grass-covered field. My bima (altar) consisted of wooden crates that held thirty caliber machine gun ammunition piled one on top of the other. Our steel helmets served as our yarmulkes. Now, I can daven (recite prayers in Hebrew). I’m not very good at it, but I was determined to give it my best shot. I started the service and was struggling along when a little guy approached me and offered to take over. He told me his father was a rabbi and that he was going to attend the Yeshiva when he was discharged. He was one of the men sent to us as a replacement, a former clerk/typist with the Air Corps. I had never seen this man before, but I don’t think I was ever so

glad to see anyone as I was to see him. He stepped up to our makeshift pulpit and started to daven. He had a nice voice and conducted a beautiful service. I don't think I've ever enjoyed a service as much as I did that one.

When our service ended, I stepped back to our pulpit and thanked our rabbi. Then I asked everyone to stand and recite Kaddish (the prayer for the dead) for all of the men who had died in battle during the months since D-Day. I asked that our prayers be for all men regardless of faith. When it was over, I looked around and saw that practically every man there had tears in his eyes. In that I was not alone.

Now I had a brain storm. I sought out this soldier's platoon sergeant and inquired about him. When I mentioned his name, the sergeant got a pained look on his face, and he told me that this man was probably the worst soldier he had ever come across. He said he could not handle his weapon properly, didn't know how to throw a grenade, knew nothing about hand-to-hand combat, and he went on and on. He said this man was sure to get himself and probably some other men killed. He told me he wished he could get rid of this man, and I told him I would see if there was anything I could do to help him out.

I went back to Father Deery, thanked him for arranging this service for us, and told him how wonderful the service was, thanks to this soldier. I told him this man was the son of a rabbi and was to go back to school and become a rabbi himself when the war was over. I suggested to Father Deery that he make this soldier a chaplain's assistant, as we Jews needed someone with his capabilities to conduct services for us. The good Father said he thought this was a good idea, and he would see what he could do about it. Before the day was over, my "rabbi" was transferred to regimental headquarters and reclassified as a chaplain's assistant.

I don't know if this man survived the war, and I don't even remember his name, but I do know that his chances for survival were one hundred per cent better at regimental headquarters than they were in a line company. I would like to think that he did go home, finish his education, and become a rabbi. I would like to think that he now has his own congregation. I wonder if he ever thinks back to the service he conducted in an open field in Belgium. There is one thing I am sure about, though. I'm sure he could never have a more appreciative congregation than he had in us.

Also, I like to think of what I did as a mitzvah.

Be Not Afraid

By Majority Leader Tom Delay

After my time here, I have a new appreciation for the threat terrorism poses, and for the president's sense of urgency in fighting it every day and everywhere. It has been an amazing six days here. I know I speak for everyone who made this trip with me when I say none of us will ever forget the things we've seen here or the people we've met.

I sat with former refuseniks, heroes who spoke truth to power and helped bring an evil empire to its knees. I visited the Kohel, the ancient Western Wall of the temple that still stands as a symbol of God's infinite strength and love to billions of believers of many faiths all around the world. I shook the hand of the owner of the Moment Café which was bombed last year. Today that café has been rebuilt. Moment Café is now open for business in defiance of terror.



We hear your voice cry out in the desert, and we will never leave your side. Because freedom and terrorism cannot coexist. Terrorism cannot be negotiated away or pacified. Terrorism will either destroy free nations, or free nations will destroy it. Freedom and terrorism will struggle — good and evil — until the battle is resolved. These are the terms Providence has put before the United States, Israel, and the rest of the civilized world. They are stark, and they are final.

Israel's liberation from Palestinian terror is an essential component of that victory. And it's a liberation we are determined to secure — not merely a paper-thin cease-fire. False security is no security, and murderers who take 90-day vacations are still murderers. The violence must stop.

In democracies, governments serve the people; not the other way around. And, by their nature, democracies neither enable terror nor instigate war. Citizens in democracies are too busy engaging in "Tikkun Olam"... "repairing the world." Raising their children. Supporting their families. Strengthening their communities. Terrorism, like its tyrannical forebears, is borne of the idea that with enough guns, enough fear, and enough violence, human power can control the human spirit. That through brute force, powerful men can erase the imprint of the Almighty etched into the souls of all His children. That through domination of the weak, in the words of the serpent, "Ye shall be as gods."

Ladies and gentlemen, IT IS A LIE. It was a lie at Auschwitz. It was a lie in the Gulag. It was a lie behind the Iron Curtain. It was a lie in Kabul and Baghdad. And today, it remains a lie in Beijing, and Havana, and Tehran, and Pyongyang, and Damascus and Ramallah! But history has taught us, The Lie's grip on civilization is only as tight as civilization permits. After September 11, 2001, OUR tolerance for The Lie is no more.

All people who desire peace and freedom are therefore allies of the United States. And included in that number are the Palestinian people who yearn for peace, who for too long have been used as pawns by their terrorist leadership. Their plight is real: they have been oppressed and abused by a pernicious enemy. But their enemy is not Israel, nor its people, nor its democratic government. Their enemy is Yasser Arafat. Their enemy is Hamas, Hezbollah, and the vast network of violent men who threaten this region like so many desert scorpions.

Leaders of these groups — "who sharpen their tongues like swords" — blame Israel for the blood they themselves draw and the squalor in which they themselves confine their people. But the evidence is clear and the conclusion indisputable. Israel is not the problem; Israel is the solution! Just as freedom is impossible amid terror, so too is peace.

Terrorists are incapable of peace, because they live only to terrorize, to intimidate, and to kill. Democracies, therefore, must only make peace with those men capable of it. A prerequisite to a lasting peace is the establishment of a genuine Palestinian democracy that serves the Palestinian people. Terrorism does not exist in a vacuum. The campaigns of evil visited on innocent men, women, and children around the world rely on state sponsorship. Governments in Iran, Syria, and elsewhere who continue to offer support and safe harbor to terrorists will be held accountable for their actions, and suffer the consequences. Terrorism is going to be ended in the Middle East and everywhere else, and so too will regimes that support it.

So I say again, to all Israelis and Palestinians who seek peace: "Be not afraid." Your liberation from The Lie is at hand. More blood may be spilled and more tears shed, but a future of freedom is certain.

One day, Israel — with the United States by her side — will live in freedom, security, and peace. And terrorism will perish from the earth. But until that day dawns, free men the world over — whether of the cross, the crescent, or the Star of David — will stand with Israel in defiance of evil.

Free men will never succumb to the ease or expedience of The Lie because we will never forget that when fighting evil, determination is destiny. May the God of Abraham continue to bless the United States, Israel, and each and every one of you.'

And in His name: Ahl teerah [Be not afraid]!

Allied Veterans Trip to Israel

By Dan Ortiz

The annual trek to the Holy Land was a great success. This year's group leader was Steve Rosmarin, Past Commander of California. The original date planned had a little set back due to the political climate, but the new date worked out fine, and everyone made it. We had representatives from the major veteran organizations from all over the United States. Clarence Hill of Florida, State Commander of the American Legion; Tim Brown of Texas, State Director of the Vietnam Veterans of America; Charles Carroll of New Jersey, State Adjutant and Past State Commander of the Disabled American Veterans; Bob Morrell of New York, Past State Commander of the American Legion; Jim and Dianne Fratolillo of Massachusetts, State Commander of the American Legion; and Dan Ortiz, Vet, of California, representing the Veterans of Foreign Wars.



Everyone began to get to know one another right away as we started boarding for what was to be a long flight. The camaraderie was great. Upon our arrival in Tel Aviv, we were met by our tour guide Rueven, who as we found out is an expert on all aspects of Israel and its struggles for independence.

We immediately headed towards the port city of Haifa; the views were spectacular. While in town, we met with Ms. Gilla Gerzon, who runs the USO. Seeing that this is such a small world, it turned out that one of our group members met Gilla while he served in the Navy some years back.

Its amazing just how much this woman does for our troops visiting Haifa. Unfortunately, her USO Office may be facing a closure, but at this point we're not sure. It would sure be a shame to let that office close.

In Haifa, the group visited the "Roof." This is a home for veterans that are continuing their education and have no family in Israel. There are a lot of lessons that can be shared about veterans affairs between our two nations. For instance, in Jerusalem, for disabled veterans there is a rehabilitation center that is state of the art.

The sites were spectacular and the weather was beautiful throughout the stay. From the Golan Heights to Nazareth and Ceasarea, the group thoroughly enjoyed themselves. Ancient sites came to life in our minds, the visions of Roman conquerors, Muslim invaders and the destruction they left was evident. But equally visible is the growth that has occurred thanks to the Israelis. One memorable event that stands out is planting trees in the Holy Land. To know that we have been a part of the re-growth of this land is gratifying.

The tourism had declined in recent times due to the instability of the region and the war in Iraq, yet we were greeted with open arms everywhere we went. The locals were friendly and truly appreciated the fact that we visited. Although there were a few terrorists acts during our stay, they were isolated and no where near our group. The military presence was visible, and some may fear the soldiers patrolling, but in reality there was a sense of safety knowing they were there for our protection. For myself, the only moment I had any fear was crossing the check point into Bethlehem, currently under Palestinian control.

Views of the Dead Sea from the heights of Masada were so memorable, and the history came alive as our tour guide detailed the events that happened there. The group even took some time to dip in the Dead Sea and cover themselves in the mud which is rumored to have healing effects.

There are so many memories that I could discuss but this publication would end up being a book instead of a magazine. In the end, we all went away with new friends, new memories, and a new insight into the struggles and triumphs of Israel. As we return to our organizations, we can help spread the word of how it really is in the Middle East, with a personal point of view rather than just hearing about it on the evening news. It was a trip that we will all remember for the rest of our lives. Thank you to the Jewish War Veterans for honoring me with this trip.

Written by Dan Ortiz, a native of Los Angeles and combat veteran of the Gulf War, who works for the Veterans of Foreign Wars Service Department is currently a candidate for the high office of Junior Vice Commander of the State VFW. Upon this trip, Dan has reflected on his own faith and began to study Judaism, even learning that his own neighborhood of East L.A. was once a thriving Jewish Community.