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Passover in Boot Camp—1943

By Richard Golden, Adjutant, JWV Post 202

Irving Koren was a small town boy who grew up helping his folks run an egg business in rural Wisconsin. In 1943 he traveled to Milwaukee to be sworn in as an enlistee in the U.S. Navy. Here is Irv's story as he related it before Pesach of 2005.

After my initial swearing in I was on my way to Farragut Naval Training Station in Idaho. Kids my age seldom traveled more than twenty miles from home in those days. The longest trip I ever took was during the High Holidays when the family traveled to Milwaukee for synagogue services. The train ride westward was a great adventure for all of us who were on our way to kick the "H" out of Hitler and Tojo.

I arrived at Farragut Naval Training Station and began boot camp right off the bat. At nineteen, I was ready to face a new life's experience. Our initial training tool about eight weeks, and we were ready for more training in special rates. They were being assigned after some personnel guys talked to us. Several in our company made radio school, others gunnery, machinists, medics, etc. Since I had a background in food services (the family egg business), which dealt with cold storage, warehousing, and distribution of foods, I was made a cook's mate 3rd class.

One chilly spring day several of us were standing around on the food loading dock. The officer in charge walked through and bellowed to the chief, "Why the hell are cooks screwing off on the docks. Get those guys back in the galley area!" That's how it all started. That was the beginning of "THE BIGGEST SEDER" in American Naval History.

I was assigned to the galley's chief petty officer. Soon I was preparing salads and vegetables for six companies of men, three meals a day...about six thousand hungry sailors. This was the early spring of 1943. A few days after this assignment a call came out from the Base Commandant's office that the Jewish Chaplain, Rabbi (Lt.) Shulman, was interested in speaking to any ship's cooks at Farragut who were Jewish. Rabbi Shulman was from Ft. Wayne, Indiana, and a great person. The chaplain heard there was an Irving Cohen, Ships Cook 3rd class in the detail, and I was called to his office. He explained that he spotted the name Irving Cohen right off, and that sealed my fate. I was his guy.

Rabbi Shulman wanted to have a Seder for the Jewish sailors and had permission to go all out to achieve this. We had only three weeks to complete all plans and be ready. We organized a compliment of four sailors to prepare everything. Transportation was provided since we traveled some distance into Spokane, Washington, where we received the help of the president of the sisterhood of a shul there. I was in charge of the detail to bring this together. Than G-d for the sisterhood president who taught us everything in her Spokane kitchen. I am sorry that I can't remember her name or the name of the congregation in Spokane. However, if anyone reads this and remembers the event, please let me know.

Working with me were three other sailors who were experienced cooks in civilian life. One was a Greek lad from Chicago, one from Austria who was a former chef in a fancy hotel, and a Hungarian guy who was a great baker. I wish I could remember their names, but I do have a picture. We followed our sisterhood lady's recipes for chicken soup, chopped liver, tzimmes, gefilte fish, knaidlach (matzah balls), and lamb shank. With tearing eyes we grated horseradish, chopped onions, and rendered schmaltz from the chickens. All this was done in units of ten so that we could expand the recipes to feed the Jewish guys (and others) at Farragut. Cases of Kosher L'pesach wine were delivered to Farragut. However, we could not find enough matzah meal for the matzah balls, and, as a result of grinding so many sheets of matzah we burned up a Hobart grinder. We even had decorated Seder Plates on some of the tables. The Jewish sailors partook of a traditional Seder after the first companies were fed. Nevertheless, many non-Jewish lads joined their mates and had everything from charoses, salt water, lamb shank, parsley, egg and bitter herbs. Rabbi Shulman conducted a memorable Seder. Elijah made his way into the galley later and helped the four cooks finish the kosher wine.

All in all, about six thousand boot camp trainees were fed that evening.

Editor's note: Ship's Cook 3rd class Irving Cohen legally changed his name to Irving Koren and is a well-known cheese expert in the United States.

Army's First Female Rabbi Celebrates Passover with Victory Troops

By By Spc. Mary Rose

Troops and civilians stationed at Camp Victory joined together Saturday for a Passover Seder in observance of the Jewish holiday. Passover is the most celebrated Jewish holiday and is filled with traditional food, prayers, storytelling and rituals.

With only nine rabbis in the active duty U.S. Army, Chap. (Col.) Bonnie Koppell, a rabbi with the Army Reserve, volunteered to travel from Fort Bliss, Texas, to Iraq to share the Passover holiday with other Jewish service members. "It isn't every day that I get to be a rabbi in the Army," Koppell said.

She explained why the holiday is so important to those with Jewish beliefs and how the story of Passover is similar to the situation in Iraq. "Passover is a celebration of the exodus of the Jews from (ancient Egypt)," she said. Koppell then explained the similarities by quoting a Jewish book called the Haggadah, which is read at Seder.

"We have dedicated this festival tonight to the dream and the hope of freedom. Though the sacrifice be great and the hardships many, we shall not rest until the chains that enslave all men and women be broken." "Liberation is costly," she said. "We need to acknowledge our enemy." She explained that it is very easy to objectify our enemies and to see them as less than human.

During the Seder, they use traditional Jewish foods to represent their traditions and beliefs, like unleavened bread called matzah, wine, a roasted egg, a bitter herb called maror and roasted lamb shank bone. "I think the importance of the tradition of Passover and Seder is that you have to have compassion for the humanity of others and the suffering they endure for the gaining of their freedom," Koppell said.

Being saved and fighting and struggling for freedom seem so relevant and contemporary right now in this environment, she said. "Passover is a major Jewish holiday," said 1st Lt. Erin Sadownik, 20th Engineer Brigade, Fort Bragg, N.C. "You

know your family is doing the same thing, so you can have that connection." It is important to keep part of yourself that isn't military-related in a combat zone, and that includes religion and beliefs, Sadownik said.

Koppell, who has been in the service for 26 years and was the first female rabbi commissioned in the Army, said the U.S. government is taking care of its Soldiers when it comes to their religious traditions and beliefs. "The Army is now producing kosher and unleavened-for-Passover MREs," Koppell said.

Even though Koppell will only be on Camp Victory for about a week, she said she wants to come back to Iraq to worship again with the service members during the Jewish holidays later this year. "It touched my heart to be able to do this," Koppell said. She plans to continue traveling in Iraq, worshipping and celebrating Passover with Jewish troops, until her scheduled return to the U.S. May 6.

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After Sixty Years, A Thank You

By Gabe Ferber, Post 25

For more than sixty years, the Jewish people have been in mourning. When you lose six million people, who have to mourn a long time. Two thousand years ago, we lost our holy temples, the focal point of our worship. Our people were slaughtered at the hands of cruel oppressors. We still mourn. We know that sixty years is not sufficient time to mourn the loss of six million souls, nor is 600 years, nor even 6000. We will always mourn for them. We will never forget. And yet...and yet, even after the calamity of sixty years ago, when once again, the most powerful nation on earth sought to destroy us --- Am Yisroel Chai --- the People of Israel Live! For that, we give thanks.

Students of history know that the victory of the Allies over the Nazi war machine and its Axis allies was no sure thing. In many ways, it was nothing short of miraculous. On paper, the Axis Powers should have won. But for a number of seemingly fortuitous events, they would have. Germany, Japan, and Italy had prepared for wars of conquest for nearly ten years. They practiced the tactics of war in Spain, China and Ethiopia. German boys learned war in the Hitler Youth. American and British boys joined the Boy Scouts. At the beaches of Dunkirk, the German army, having crushed France in a matter of weeks, was poised to wipe out the British army. For some inexplicable reason, the Germans hesitated and decided to use bombers instead of tanks to finish the job. The delay gave British citizens, in a flotilla of watercraft, the opportunity to bring their army home. A year later, during the aerial combat that was the Battle of Britain, the Luftwaffe had nearly bombed out the airfields of the Royal Air Force when it changed tactics to, instead, bomb British cities. This gave the RAF a respite that enabled it to regain strength and ultimately defeat the German air forces. In the Pacific, it was fortuitous that the American aircraft carriers were not discovered before American planes had the opportunity to sink four Japanese carriers. At Moscow and Stalingrad, it was fortuitous that the German armies arrived late, and the Russian winter, the coldest in decades, arrived early, giving the brave Russian people weather as an ally against the Nazi invaders. On D-Day, it was fortuitous that weeks of bad weather cleared for 24 hours to enable the Allied landings and that Germany's best and most aggressive general, Irwin Rommel, was away celebrating his wife's birthday.

Had these or any number of other occurrences been different, the outcome of the war could have been different. If Great Britain had been conquered early in the war, if the Russian people had not been victorious at Leningrad, Moscow and Stalingrad, if the American forces had been defeated in Normandy, who of European Jewry would have been alive in the death camps when, if ever, the camps were liberated? How many Jews would have been left to go to Palestine? What United Nations would have recognized the State of Israel?

We are grateful not just for miracles, but also for the courage of individual soldiers, sailors, airmen, men and women. To the extent that, sixty years ago, God acted to stop the annihilation of the Jewish people and set the stage for the creation of the State of Israel, the Armed Forces of the United States was one of the instruments of his salvation. American soldiers saved the Jewish People. They saved humanity. They did not act alone, but without them the job would not have been done. They have protected us since then and continue to protect us. For that, we ever must be grateful.

We are grateful for the courage of soldiers like Buffalo's William Schwartz, who, as an 18 year old rifleman, scared, but doing his duty, earned a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart protecting the little Belgium town of Stavelot against the oncoming tiger tanks of Joachim Peiper, the ruthless German colonel who led a German spearhead during the Battle of the Bulge. We are grateful for the courage of sailors like my father-in-law, Irving Schwartz, who while serving on a small jeep carrier in the Pacific during the Battle of Leyte Gulf, fought a Japanese fleet led by the largest battleship in the world, the Yamato, in order to protect American soldiers landing in the Philippines. We are grateful for men like then Second Lieutenant Charles Sandler, a tank commander and a liberator of Mauthausen-Gusen, who only recently passed away. We are grateful for Private First Class Lawrence Slutzker, the uncle of Steve Yonaty, and one of four brothers from Binghamton, New York, who served in WWII. He died in the Battle of the D-Day Beaches and is buried in Normandy. We are grateful for the soldiers in the Russian Army, men like my cousin Sam Clayton, who led an artillery unit on the Eastern front and had Jewish comrades "amhu" die in his arms. We thank these men, then little more than boys, for their courage, for their sacrifice.

Our gratitude is not diminished for those who did not serve on the battlefields of WWII. They went where our country asked them to go. They served where and when their duty called them. Over the last sixty years they have defeated aggression, kept our country free and preserved the peace. We owe them much.

The Stars and Stripes that fly over American Military Cemeteries throughout the world, in Normandy, in the Ardennes, in North Africa, at Manila and at Arlington, do not fly over crosses alone. They also fly over Stars of David. Many of our people have answered the call of duty. As Americans, they know that freedom cannot be taken for granted. As Jewish Americans they know that the religious freedom we enjoy is not without cost. As Americans and as Jews, they will always have our thanks.

[Editor's Note: This address was originally delivered to the Congregation of Kehillat Ohr Tzion in Amherst, New York, on Veterans' Shabbat, May 7, 2005.]

The Twentieth Allied Mission to Israel

By Norman Rosenshein, National Budget Officer

The Twentieth Allied Mission trip to Israel was a great success. The Department of California sent MG Roger Brautigan, Undersecretary of the California Department of Veterans Affairs, and the Department of Florida sent American Legion Service Officer Loretta Young; the Department of Massachusetts sent DAV state Commander Leo Mooney with his wife Nancy; the Department of New Jersey sent Donna Keefer, Senior Vice President of the VVA. The Department of Texas sent Olie Pope, Travis County Service Officer and William "Tim" Brown now from Minnesota, who was returning for his third Allied Mission trip along with his wife Carol on her first trip. Tim is from the Vietnam Veterans Foundation of Texas, his original home.

The trip started off at Newark Airport with an eleven-hour El Al flight to Ben Gurion airport. After landing we were met by our guide Michael Enav at the airport. Everyone quickly bonded with each other. We immediately started our Mission journeying to Haifa, stopping at Caesarea to check out the amphitheater and arena. Continuing on our way to Haifa we

stopped and checked out the Roman Aquaduct system feeding water to Caesarea and arrived in Haifa at our hotel in late afternoon.

The next day we visited the Church "Stella Maris," Mt. Carmel and Elijah's Cave, the Bahai Gardens, and the Basilica of the Annunciation. We stayed one more night in Haifa and then headed out to the Golan Heights. Looking out over the borders, it became quite clear to everyone why this was considered an important military position for all Infantrymen. Leaving the area we traveled along the Jordan border seeing a section of the Jordan River where it crosses over to Israel. The border fence facing Jordan is touch sensitive to notify Israel if anyone has crossed into the territory. However, most of the border "Wall" is not a real wall except in Jerusalem. It's a fence--not a wall. We went on then into the River itself where Baptisms are held. Traveling on, we arrived in Jerusalem.

Early the next morning we traveled to the Beit Halochem rehabilitation center where Tim Brown of the Vietnam Veterans of Texas Foundation presented a \$500.00 donation on behalf of his organization and the JWV for continued rehabilitation efforts. We returned to see other churches and other sites around Jerusalem, and then we entered the old city, traveling to the "Wall" for the first time. For those who had never been there before, it was quite thrilling. Afterwards the group went for a walk on the wall of the Temple Mount arriving at the Stations of the Cross and continued to all of the stations up to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. We continued to travel around the Old City and went in the underground tunnel below the Western Wall, seeing the largest stone there--45 tons.

We continued on to Mt. Herzl and the National Cemeteries, where we conducted a short service at the grave of Jonathan Netanyahu who lost his life at the Entebbe Raid, traveling on to Yad Vashem and the Eternal Light, then to the Shrine of the Book where the Dead Sea scrolls are kept. Our guide Michael arranged a side trip to Bethlehem for the afternoon. On route we stopped at Rachel's tomb and then went on to Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity and Saint Catherine's Church.

The next day we left for Qumran National Park, where we saw the caves in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. Via Camel ride we proceeded on into Masada and the original wall paintings, then to the Dead Sea where Roger and Olie mudded down to help improve their skin. Returning to Jerusalem, as it was Saturday evening and Purim night, we went to Zion Square for an evening of fun and street dancing. On Sunday we went into the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of the tomb of Jesus.

The next morning we met with Jerusalem Post 180 and then went on to Latrun where new recruits are trained, the memorial for fallen soldiers, the Haganah Museum and more sights.

On our last morning we had an Intelligence Briefing at Tzevet offices with Gen Levy and Gen Gerun and a presentation from the IDF by an Intelligence officer who discussed the present ground conditions of the Peace talks and of returning the Gaza Strip.

All in all it was an extremely informative and enjoyable trip for all.

UP OR DOWN VOTE—FACT, FICTION OR FANTASY?

By COMMENTARY Robert M. Zweiman, PNC Chairman, Coordinating Committee

Filibuster rights of minority and dissenting Senators to express objections to judicial nominations have been compromised into limbo. It worked so well on judges; the threat can easily be reused on legislative issues or the total elimination of a minority “right.”

“Veterans rights” is a good example of rights which are not just elective or an entitlement but a predetermined obligation owed by this Nation to its veterans. “Up-or-Down” vote now appears to be the slogan for the usurpers. Without a concerted effort, “veterans rights” may diminish into rhetorical “illusory rights” for use in political campaigns.



The Minority Leader called the compromise a “victory for the country.” The Majority Leader reflected on the accommodation as “a basic principle: whether to restore the precedent of a fair up-or-down vote...or to enshrine a new tyranny of the minority into the Senate rules forever...It had some good news, it has some disappointing news, and will require some careful monitoring...bad faith and bad behavior” would require a return to stage one. In other words, it was truly a political bad faith challenge devoid of any attempt at integrity or at good faith—makes you realize that Machiavelli is not dead.

When PM Chamberlain of Britain sacrificed pieces of Europe to Germany, it was called “Appeasement.” His slogan of “Peace in our times” effectively led to an abandonment of honor and the entry into World War II. The filibuster compromise is the epitome of appeasement and a surrender of political integrity into the ultimate naked arrogance of a pure and effective majority political control with the combined power of the three branches of government—Executive, Congressional and Judicial.

Now that an immutable policy is being recognized, allowing for a “fair up-and-down” review and vote on issues, the majority controllers would now have the unilateral ability to call for an unconstrained change in veterans’ benefits. Now here comes an official of the Department of Defense (DOD) who, in discussing the VA budget, claimed as matter of “fact” that veterans benefits are responsible for the Pentagon’s inability to provide weapons and equipment for our troops.

By ignoring that every VA benefit, especially VA medical care and rehabilitation, is the on-going cost of war, it becomes apparent that the DOD’s bottom line was that the VA budget should not be increased, but should be revised and compromised since those benefit monies are vital to the DOD budget and thus would adversely impact on our capability to fight the terror war. It would further allow DOD to create more veterans who can then return from war to no health care or benefits. Not even the most talented of Jewish mothers could lay guilt with such panache.

Both the majority and the minority play by one immutable rule—that majority political control requires winning. Some of you may recall, in the most recent Presidential election, veterans were glorified for their many contributions to America’s defense and stability and were used by all candidates as the frosting on the cookies at rallies and political events. We were seduced into believing that we were important. After the election, the winning candidates proceeded to screw the veterans.

By having the creative bean counters retreating on health care for you—what are they going to do for the returning veterans? Will they tell us that the 24,000,000 surviving veterans have intentionally been living too long? So, if the Control Freaks can only figure out how they can substantially increase the 400,000 annual veteran death rate, will they even consider entertaining VA health care without enrollment fees, deductibles, co-pays, etc? Brings to mind a

suggested formula for Social Security survival by increasing the age for entitlement to 75 years of age, while providing each recipient with two cartons of cigarettes and matches with each monthly payment.

While fairness and up-and-down votes are now the vogue, veterans should take advantage of this vogue by calling for the immediate vote on Mandatory Funding of VA health care (HR 515 and S331) by

- 1) Demand that each one of your Representatives and Senators sign on as an active co-sponsor on the Mandatory Funding bill by letters, phone calls, e-mail, faxes or visits to their local offices.
- 2) Send letters to the editor of your local newspaper expressing thanks to co-sponsors, and make sure all of your local members also send such letters.
- 3) Make sure that all of your members vocally refuse invitations to appear at any rally or event for a non-consenting candidate and by placing an ad explaining the reason for rejection. That would include campaign or any other such event.
- 4) When we have sufficient sponsors and the “up-or-down votes” to pass the legislation, we must call all sponsors to have it placed on the calendar for vote. Insist that all of the sponsors and leaders in the House and the Senate not allow themselves to become shallow political hacks. “Up-or-down” are the key words.
- 5) Once the legislation is passed, keep pressure on the VA to immediately implement the legislation by calling and visiting their offices and facilities for applications and complaints about any delays in service.
- 6) In the last election, only 18% of us voted—so the Control Freaks may feel safe that you will continue to be as equally ineffective—they are confident that you are all words with no follow through—so they can make their usual inadequate offers to move us off our challenge.
- 7) So, if you don’t fight for the above approach to mandatory funding or to any other action program to preserve health and other veterans rights—then the Control Freaks are absolutely correct to call us paper tigers who are deficient in resolve with all talk and no action, or to sum it all “up-or-down” that veterans are plain stupid in seeking to secure their rights.
- 8) They win—you lose. Thus, fact, fiction, and fantasy are all the same.