



Machal Memorial

***“You came to us when we needed you the most, during those dark and uncertain days in our War of Independence.”***

Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel and Minister of Defence at the dedication of the Machal Memorial on April 25, 1993

## **Christian and Jew, they fought together for the creation of the State of Israel**

Route 1, the Tel-Aviv –Jerusalem highway runs from the coast, before entering the ascending hills still 15 miles from Jerusalem. The road easily flows through broad open plains suddenly tightening, the two lanes climbing, vanishing, into a steep, constricting gorge called Shaar Hagai (Gate of the Valley). In 1948, the road through the hills was the lifeline to Jerusalem. Arab forces commanded the heights. It was through this gauntlet of death, the convoys bringing life, had to fight their way through. Today the chassis of the improvised armored vehicles are still on the road close to where they fell.

Forty five years after that terrible struggle a dramatic memorial was erected in a quiet area of forested hills near the valley entrance. The memorial, large Hebrew letters, Mem, Chet, Lamid, spell the acronym Machal - Volunteers for Outside of Israel. At the memorial’s dedication in 1993, the commander of the Harel Brigade that liberated part of the heights spoke. He was a young officer then and the Prime Minister of Israel at the dedication, Yitzhak Rabin.

“Dear friends, the Machal, the volunteers of the Machal were a special group, a group of people - Jews, non-Jews - from 29 countries, that managed after participation in the Second World War, to remain alive, to come, to volunteer in the service of the newly-born State of Israel, in the newly organized Israel Defense Forces, and to contribute far beyond their number to our capability to fight the most decisive war of all the wars that the State of Israel has experienced - our War of Independence - the war that its results decided if we will be or will not be as a Jewish State.

And we succeeded - with your help, with your participation. You came over here, not knowing the conditions; many of you didn't know even the language, the Hebrew language. I remember then, in the Air Force, the language was English, because most of the pilots of the first squadron of fighters were Machal people from English-speaking countries - from the United States, Canada, Britain, South Africa, and other places. My generation will never forget what you have done, how much you made it possible for us to achieve what has been achieved.”

Having grown up in the Yeshivah world, in Washington, D.C., I learned little of Christians and even less of their contributions to the creation of the State of Israel. I was quite typical. We created Israel all by ourselves.

About a year ago I was wandering through the German Colony of Jerusalem, along Emek Refaim Street as I have done countless times enjoying the ambiance. There is a Christian Cemetery at the intersection of Emek Refaim and Rachel Emot streets. The high stone walls are as impenetrable to the eye as are the two white sheet metal gates. You cannot even see through a key hole. The gates were never open. Last year one late afternoon the gate was open. Being curious about where I was not supposed to go and seeing an opportunity to know what was behind the walls I went in. If anything went wrong, I would switch to English and be a dumb tourist and leave. Perhaps it was *beshert*, (intended to be). I wandered in and discovered an unusual large white tombstone. The stone read in part, Rev. John Stanley Grauel, *Exodus 47*. Quite baffled, I wondered who was this Christian? I had never heard of him. What had he to do with the most famous, the most iconic story and ship in the creation of the State of Israel? Returning to my hotel room I turned on my computer's search ability and discovered the extraordinary story of a Christian minister who was a secret Haganah operative deliberately placed on the *Exodus*. He was more than a secret operative. Without Rev. Grauel's effort's the story of the birth of Israel might have been very different, if at all.

I began a journey of discovery, the discovery of Christian and Jew coming together to bring about the creation of the State of Israel. I discovered much about Christian men or God, Reverends Hechler, Blackstone, Voss, Niebuhr, Hull. I learned about good Christian men of conviction, Granados, Patterson, Van Passen and many others. My discoveries are ongoing. It may yet shape itself into a book.

As World War II drew to a close the horror of the systematic, blood lust murder of 6,000,000 Jews by the Nazis and their supporters, slowly emerged. Dazed, traumatized, Jewish survivors searched for loved ones, their homes gone, pogroms and vicious Jew hatred still filled the air. The only place that wanted them was heartlessly limited by the British – Palestine. When the need was most desperate for the survivors, the door of salvation was closed, despite the Balfour Declaration of 1917. The moral conscience of the world was awakened but the British were not shaken. Israel would come to be but only with the travails of a difficult birth. Try as they might, Jews needed the support, money and political influence of the Christian world. Christians too recognized the opportunity to do what was right and help in the birth of the Jewish State.

From around the world Jews came and took an Oath.

*“As long as I assist in the War of Liberation of the Nation of Israel – I hereby swear on my word of Honor, to accept unconditionally and without reservations, the rules and discipline of the Israel Defense Army. To obey all its instructions and orders given by its authorized commanders and to do all in my power, and even to sacrifice my life in the Defense of the Freedom of Israel.”*

It was not only Jews who came to take the Oath. Christians came and shouldered their rifles next to their Jewish comrades to defend Israel.

From the United States, Canada, South Africa, France, Sweden, Britain and many other countries, Christians came and volunteered. Compared to the Jews who came to fight they were small in number but they came.

Some came because, after the horrors of the Holocaust, they felt it was the right thing to do. Some came because their faith in God commanded them to do so. Others came for adventure, or compensation. Some came as part of Machal, others came separately. They came for many reasons.

They served on the illegal immigration ships. Men such as Rudy Patzert captained the Paducah bringing 1,388 Holocaust refugees in. Many were highly experienced pilots and air crews. One was a British World War II ace, George “Buzz” Beurling. He saw a possibility of adventure but also a fulfillment of Biblical commandments to support the Jewish people.



“Buzz” Beurling

The origins of the Israeli armored corps came when British soldiers disgusted at the cynical, even vicious, British Mandate response convinced them of the moral imperative to help the Jewish people. They “borrowed” a few Cromwell tanks. Christians joined in the ranks facing battle on the ground and in hand to hand combat. Christians volunteered as nurses and physicians.

Two Black American Christians are known to have served.

An American Navajo Indian, Jesse “Tex” Slade fought for Israel.



Jesse "Tex" Slade

While serving with the American Armed forces Slade was severely discriminated against by all except one infantry Captain; Captain Grossman, his Jewish commanding officer.

Most of the Machalniks, the men and women, Christian and Jew, came to do a duty. Many returned to their countries of origin after their service. Some never returned. They yet sleep in the land of Israel.

Buzz Beurling, Leonard Fitchett, Fred Stevenson, Glenn King, Oliver Holton, died in plane crashes and combat. Pilot Spencer Boyd and four of his seven passengers were murdered by passing Arab irregulars when his plane made a forced landing. Bill Edmonston died in an ambush on the Jerusalem road. Leif Nils Elwing, a Swedish volunteer, was killed during an attack on the Israeli Navy ship Eilat. Raymond "Lofty" Dodge fell in the Egyptian attack against Ashdod.

How many Christians served in active military duty during the 1948 war is not yet fully recorded. What is known, recorded and valued, is their service. We, the Jewish people, can only humbly thank all of them.

The stories of Christian men and women, who worked, gave and served so that Israel could be, are many and will be told. There are many stories yet to share.

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