

THE volunteer CONNECTION

A Letter to Volunteers

January 2009

Shalom to our Sar-El volunteers.

We would like to thank all of you who called and wrote to us asking about the situation here and whether volunteers are needed on an emergency basis. We know that you are watching the news reports and are up-to-date on what is happening.

Yes, we need more volunteers at this time. We are receiving requests from bases that support the fighting units. In order to accommodate the bases and supply them with volunteers, we must have the groups meet on Sunday mornings so we can send them to the bases. So it is necessary for the volunteers to plan to be in Israel some time over the weekend, so they can meet early on Sunday morning at a designated place. The volunteers will be told specific information when they arrive in Israel and call Pamela Lazarus.

In addition to these special groups, we definitely need more volunteers for the regular groups according to the schedule that is posted on the web site.

Again, we appreciate all of your concern and help. Your help is crucial during this time.

ISRAEL ("SOLO") GEVA
Executive General
Manager, Sar-El

The Situation Room The PR & Propaganda War

A War Fought with Words and Images

Israel has taken the initiative in the propaganda war over Gaza. A special IDF unit, headed by Major Avital Leibovich, has been designated to coordinate this uphill job with an information plan. Placing videos onto YouTube (www.youtube.com/user/idfnadesk) is part of the effort to use modern means of communications to get Israel's case across. They are also employing frequent, even daily interviews with titled spokespeople who patiently speak English.

Initial Israeli PR is directed towards two main aims: mobilizing the moral high ground to justify the air attacks— Hamas is to blame for raining rockets and showing that there is no humanitarian calamity in Gaza (trucks with food and medicine crossing the border, calling home dwellers prior to bombing). Both aims are targeted to strengthen Israel's position internationally, while enabling its diplomacy to act as an umbrella to fend off calls for a ceasefire while the military operation unfolds.

HooRah. This is vindication for many Americans who for years, and through several wars, have been bewildered by Israel's previous lack of basic Madison Avenue PR skills and eloquence. They

fondly recall Abba Eban in the 1970s who said, "The Arabs never miss an opportunity to miss an opportunity." We wish he was still with us.

In the face of organized and effective Arab propaganda, Israel is finally in the game. However, it is challenged by a world media that rarely reports the facts. The Arab TV news channel Al Jazeera is providing graphic reports that have affected opinion across the Arab world. The (fair & balanced?) BBC also has its local bureau hard at work, recycling endless emergency room trauma involving babies.

Two quiet facts are simmering in Israel's favor. First, while the neighboring Arab populations are noisy, their governments are noticeable quiet while Israel does the dirty work of cleaning out the Hamas movement. The second is the little-noted but ongoing convergence of European and U.S.-Israeli thinking about the Islamist threat, terror, clash of civilizations, and "Arab Fatigue," particularly since 9/11.

Transparency for military operations will never happen. However, overall, "Quite a few outlets are very favorable to Israel," reports Major Leibovich. Hopefully, the residual effect will be positive for international media coverage in the future.

Steve Plotkin



VFI National President's Message

Vade's View

Friends, Fellow VFI Volunteers,

I know all of you are keeping up with the news from Israel even as I write this. By the time this issue is in your hands, I expect the "incursion", as the IDF calls it, will be over. We all hope that the IDF's goals are achieved by stopping Hamas from firing rockets into Israel and stopping the smuggling of arms into Gaza via tunnels from Egypt. We will hope... It seems small for Hamas to agree to these conditions in light of the deaths and injuries of and to the citizens of Gaza plus the damage to the infrastructure of Gaza. However, we remain confronted with the knowledge that Hamas still wants Israel gone from the Land and they express that under the guise of "stop the occupation." So, the fighting goes on.

I want to thank many of you who have responded to the call that went out for volunteers. You are going and others are

planning to go over the next month. Others wrote us and said they would like to go but health and/or finances no longer allow them to go. Two notes are worth mentioning...one woman wrote that her mother had passed away recently but she had carried her "dog tags" until her last few days. Another elderly couple wrote they could no longer go but they considered their participation as the most satisfactory experiences of their lives.

Lastly, thanks to many of you for the donations you sent. VFI's mission can only be achieved with your support. I speak for all the leadership when I say thank you.

Shalom,
Vade Bolton
National President

We stand ready to assist you. You can reach me at vadebolton@comcast.net.

"If somebody was sending rockets into my house where my two daughters sleep at night, I would do everything to stop that and would expect Israel to do the same thing."

— U.S. PRESIDENT-ELECT OBAMA AT SDEROT, 2008

Do you know the VFI work program includes?



FREE accommodations, plus

FREE kosher meals, plus

FREE military work uniforms, plus

FREE lectures, possibly guided trips, plus

FREE adventure of a lifetime, plus

FREE memories of making a difference, plus

Earned immense personal satisfaction.

VFI Officers and Board Members for 2009

Officers:

Vade Bolton, National President, VA,
703.860.0504, vadebolton@comcast.net

Larry Feldman, Vice President, MD,
410.486.6876, lf730@aol.com

Marian Sacks, Treasurer, MD,
301.603.9099, mbsacks31@hotmail.com

Ed Kohl, National Coordinator, MI,
248.788.0551, michigan@vfi-usa.org

Beverly Cohen, Recording Secretary, PA,
610.584.0468, bevcohen@comcast.net

Board Members:

Renee G. Bassell, CA

Jeanne S. Schachter, PA

Mila Bensonoff, MA

Steve Plotkin, PA

Jay Bernstein, NJ

Barry Stein, PA

Josef Herz, WA

Carol Stein, PA

Ed Koplín, CO

Kay Warren, CA

A Short Back Story on Gaza.

Gaza was part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years until WWI ended and the British governed it under a League of Nations Mandate, which expired in 1948. Egypt governed Gaza from 1948 to 1967 when Israel “won” the coastal enclave from Egypt during the Six Day War. Israel governed Gaza for 27 years until August 2005, when it single-handedly uprooted and withdrew completely, wished the Palestinians good luck, and had high hopes of a stable neighbor. These idealistic dreams were soon dashed.

Gaza is 25 miles long, the size of a commute to work, and between 4 and 7 miles wide. It contains 3 cities and 1.5 million inhabitants.

Hamas is a Sunni Islam terrorist and political movement spin-off from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. In 2006, this rogue Palestinian faction surprisingly won a public election in Gaza. In 2007, they seized the territory and expelled Arafat’s Fatah party. Hamas, backed by Iran, promptly disregarded all prior peace agreements, and began waging a permanent war against Israel.

After years of tolerating thousands of rockets raining on its border towns with an ever-increasing kill radius, and several cease fires, Israel finally was pushed to act to protect its citizens. In legal terms, Hamas is guilty of war crimes by firing indiscriminately on civilians, commingling war activities with civilians, and hiding behind civilians.

Operation Cast Lead began on Sabbath, December 27, with decisive force and a barrage from the air on selected Hamas targets. The land-sea-air invasion began on the seventh day with the expectation of a tough campaign against entrenched Islamic-fascist elements with their leader safely in Syria and their sponsors 1,000 miles away in Iran. The pincer movement isolated the cities and penetrated in all directions. This is not a repeat of the 2006 war in Lebanon.

This is the middle-east and the end-game is hard to predict. The eventual “winner” will be somewhat decided by world opinion based on intangibles. Hamas will claim victory if they merely stay alive for another fight. Israel will claim victory if they accomplish regime change, decapitate Hamas, or substantially alter the facts on the ground in Gaza, particularly involving rocket fire, and perhaps engaging Egypt and foreign nations at the borders.

—Steve Plotkin



MY MOST MEMORABLE VFI TOUR

I have enjoyed three VFI tours on four different IDF bases, but last fall I had the most unique experience. I was assigned to an operations base attached to a military court and prison. Most evenings we listened to soldier’s stories of their border duty and assignments within Gaza and the West Bank. We were stunned into silence when one soldier described his unit’s mission to arrest a suspect in Ramalla that very night. We worried all night until we heard that they succeeded and faced no resistance.

Our job was to inventory and pack the regiments’ gear for a major move. The work was sporadic, so our Madricha arranged a visit to the court. A military lawyer briefed us before entering the courtroom. The accused was one of four Arabs arrested for shooting into a group of soldiers at a checkpoint. Fortunately they hit no one. The charges were: unlicensed weapon ownership, reckless endangerment of human life, attempted murder, and membership in a terrorist organization.

Although eyes peered through door slots as we passed the holding cells, the Arabs gathered outside paid no attention as

we entered the courtroom, which looked like a traffic court in my hometown. There were three judges in military dress and three armed guards. The accused, a handsome, bearded elder, smiled at his two adult sons in the audience and joked with a guard. Because everyone in Israel has the right to a trial in his own language, the trial was conducted in Hebrew and Arabic. The translator bounced on his chair as he turned between the judges, the defendant, and the attorneys.

The proceeding was an attempt at plea bargaining. The defendant admitted to the first two charges but not the latter two. The judges decided not accept the plea bargain until more research was done regarding his relationship to terrorist organization members in his village who bore his same last name.

Amnesty International representatives took notes during the trial. They said this court would get high marks for respectfully protecting the defendant’s human rights. We wondered where else in the Middle East this would possibly happen.

—Kay Warren

Donations Received by VFI

(October 1, 2008 — December 31, 2008)

Jewish National Fund Trees planted for the following:

Contributor

Maddy Tyree, Betty Baron
Sherry Goldstein, & S. Pukel
Marian and Shelly Sacks
Lecia and Tony Lacy
Maddy Tyree
Barbara and Alan Cornblatt
Barbara and Alan Cornblatt
Robert Kirschner
David Elliot
Bonnie Dassa
Harold Stein

Contributor

Michael Parisi-Presicce
Paul Duckor
Harold Stein

Harold Stein
Nancy Lindeman

Barbara and Alan Cornblatt

Renee G. Bassell & Family

Sarah Katz, Savta Dina &
Uncle Jaimie
Grandma Sara Simon

In Memory of

Harriet Resnicow

Lydia Plechash
Ida Stein
Beverly Kaufman
Delores Merceron
Ronald D. Barrett
Eric Janke
Charles Liebowitz, grandfather
Ellen Kopito Barrows, cousin
Laura Stein

In Celebration of

Bar Mitzvah of Samuel Reznicoff
State of Israel
Martin & Ellie Korfman,
Anniversary
Ira & Terry Stein, Anniversary
Ann & Leonard Rabinowitz,
Anniversary
Corey Eric Drake, High School
Graduation
Florence & Bert Silver,
50th Anniversary

Jordan Katz
Miss Kari Davis

Contributor

Sarah Katz, Savta Dina &
Uncle Jaimie
Sarah Katz, Savta Dina &
Uncle Jaimie
Ms. Maddy Tyree
Grandma Sara Simon

Contributor

Joel Nessim
Mr. & Mrs. Leonard I. Cohen
Miriam Colbert

Specific Donations to Volunteers for Israel®

Contributor

Renee Feinswog
Marion Taube
Louis Goldowitz
Sondra Greenberg
Art Greenberg

Contributor

Herbert & Marilyn Cohen

Jonathan & Ruth Tepper
David Boxerman

Zachary Schepps

Jessica Bernstein & Susan
Kupferberg

In Celebration of

Moshe Katz

Ms. Temima Neshama Katz
Seena & Morris Pukel
Seth Davis

In Honor of

Nessim Family Trip to Israel
Adrian Friedman, Birthday
State of Israel

In Memory of

Louis Feinswog
Alan Feinberg
Murray Lefkowitz
Irma Fischer
Rachelle & Nettie Greenberg

In Honor of

Dorothy & Phil Mero,
60th Anniversary
David & Rachel Wolfe, Thank You
Paul & Sheri Robbins,
Your thoughtfulness
Bar Mitzvah Project of
Zachary Schepps

Richard Bernstein

You can designate your gift; use the enclosed envelope.

“Treat your friends as you do your pictures, and place them in their best light.”

—Jennie Jerome Churchill

Volunteer Program Schedule for 2009

Programs start only on the Sunday and/or Monday shown below. Volunteers can join for 1, 2, 3, or more weeks. Classes in Hebrew for beginners (the Ulpan option) are designated.

2009 SCHEDULE — 27th Anniversary Year

Feb. 8/9-Feb. 26, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Feb. 8-Feb. 12, Special 1-week program

Mar. 1/2-Mar. 19, 2-or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Mar. 22/23-Apr. 8, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Apr. 19/20-May 7, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

May 10/11-May 28, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

May 10-May 14, Special 1-week program

May 31/June 1-June 18, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

June 21/22-July 9, 3-week program, International
Youth Group

June 21/22-July 9, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

July 12-July 30, 3-week program, International Youth Group

July 12/13-July 30, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Aug. 2/3-Aug. 20, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Aug. 23/24-Sept. 10, 2-week program, *Ulpan*

Sept. 13/14-Oct. 1, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Oct. 11-Oct. 15, Special 1-week program

Oct. 11/12-Oct. 29, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Nov. 1/2-Nov. 19, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Nov. 22/23-Dec. 10, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Dec. 13/14-Dec. 31, 2- or 3-week program, *Ulpan*

Ulpan Practical Hebrew Class

Classes are taught 2 nights a week by experienced professionals. The one-time fee of \$50 covers up to 3 weeks of classes. Sign up at the time of your volunteer registration.

Please visit our web site at www.vfi-usa.org for frequent special programs.

NEWSBYTE CORNER

Serving on the West Bank

Our group of ten volunteers was assigned to a police border camp located on a hilltop, a few kilometers from Jenin, on the West Bank. The camp is very small, yet heavily fortified and is responsible for that area. We worked very hard predominately providing KP services.

One morning, as a special treat, when everything was quiet before breakfast, they took us out in jeeps for a ride along the separation barrier. After the initial shock of being where we were, we all felt comfortable and secure. This unique experience is a totally different part of Israel and was absolutely fascinating, the best of my three Sar-El tours.

Joel Teisch

Sale Price on VFI Travel Journal

The VFI Travel Journal is a 40-page spiral bound book for travelers to Israel to record their numerous memories. It makes a great gift and is now sale priced at only \$10.00 per copy. You can use your enclosed envelope to order your journal.

Flying to Israel

Flying to Israel (TLV) during March is very reasonable with low watermark fares. For example, major airline round trip airfare from JFK starts at \$897, Philadelphia starts at \$950, Chicago starts at \$990 and San Francisco starts at \$1,180. Check out informational air travel sites www.yapta.com and www.kayak.com.

Have yapta.com track the airfares on various flights before you buy and notify you when the price drops. Once you purchase a ticket, have them monitor the price. If it comes down, you might be eligible for an airline travel credit.

Improving VFI's E-Mail Lists

We need to continually update volunteer e-mail addresses from volunteer lists received at the end of your program. Please send us a copy of your volunteer list showing e-mail addresses. Thanks for helping us keep current. Please mail them to Steve Plotkin, TVC Editor, 1340 Brighton Way, Newtown Square, PA 19073.

FROM UK SAR-EL RECRUITING POSTER

Sar-El is a civilian programme for men and women of different ages and faiths, to help the Israel Defence Force maintain its effectiveness.

Sar-El volunteers live and work on army bases, doing essential support work for the I.D.F., freeing young soldiers for their core duties. Sarelniks live and work alongside soldiers, wearing the same uniform and sharing dining rooms and eating the same food.

Sarelniks have their own sleeping and bathroom accommodation and are looked after, on and off base by their own young soldier guides (madrivot).

Work for Sarelniks is varied — it could be packing medical supplies, reorganising warehouses, provisioning armoured vehicles, packing kit bags — whatever the I.D.F. need, Sarelniks are there to help.

The Sar-El programme provides the I.D.F. with over 440,000 net man hours per year, work that would otherwise have to be done by soldiers. It's a vital help, especially while Israel remains under threat.

Sar-El is not for everyone, but if you want to help Israel, challenge yourself and have an adventure, go to the Sar-El website and find out more.

Sar-El Volunteers for Israel — UK



Editor's Corner — Recruiting Volunteers

It's war time again. The glossy paper you are reading is a recruiting tool for you to circulate among your friends and acquaintances. Your duty is to get the information out, to **Kindle the Light**. Half of all new VFI volunteers are recruited via word-of-mouth.

We are also seeking your personal VFI story, which will be read and inspire countless others down through the ages.

Steve Plotkin, Editor

steveplotkin@erols.com, 1340 Brighton Way, Newtown Square, PA 19073, 610.358.5366, Fax 610.361.8896.

The Volunteer Connection is the national quarterly newsletter of Volunteers for Israel® (VFI). Copyright 2009, all rights reserved. ISSN: ISSN 1945-7588. VFI is a nonpolitical, nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation with headquarters at 330 West 42nd Street, Suite 1618, New York, NY 10036. Telephone: 866.514.1948. E-mail: info@vfi-usa.org. Web site: www.vfi-usa.org.

Permission to reprint in whole or in part is hereby granted, provided the following credit line is used: "Reprinted by permission from Volunteers for Israel, www.vfi-usa.org." All trademarks herein belong to their respective owners. VFI and the Editor aim to publish accurate information and recommendations. Responsibility cannot be assumed by VFI, the Editor, contributors or any member, in the event of a claim of loss arising from any recommendation. Statements of contributors are their own and do not necessarily reflect VFI policy. SUBSCRIPTION FREE UPON REQUEST to info@vfi-usa.org or toll free 866.514.1948.

—Steve Plotkin, Editor, steveplotkin@erols.com

—Barbara Abbott, Copy Editor

—Regina Stinger, Graphic Designer

VFI HAPPENINGS AROUND THE COUNTRY

Atlanta/South Region — Covering the states of AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, TN, is forming a special volunteer group to participate in the program starting March 1, 2009. We have 20 committed volunteers and even more expressing serious interest. With gracious Southern hospitality, volunteers from other states will be welcomed to join this unique group. For information about this special group, contact Leon Rechtman at 770.328.4573 or atlanta@vfi-usa.org by Feb. 1. For further information and schedule update please contact: Alan Mintz at agmintz@hotmail.com, Leon Rechtman at leon2579@mindspring.com, Tim Anderson at tandrsn52@hotmail.com.

Chicago Midwest Region — Calls are coming in to help Israel. Can you interview, distribute posters, or follow up with returning volunteers? Do you want to speak about Volunteers for Israel to encourage MORE help for Israel?

If you have been on the program, you can schedule a presentation at a community center or a synagogue and request a VFI DVD to take with you. Perhaps have a parlor meeting in a home with your friends. Keep your experience alive and help us. If you have other ideas to promote VFI, please call Charlotte at 888.246.3037 and let us know what you will do! E-mail chicago@vfi-usa.org. We are only as good as the help we get!

Great Lakes Region — For further information and schedule update, please contact Ed Kohl at 248.420.3729 or michigan@vfi-usa.org.

Las Vegas News — For further information and schedule update, please contact Fran & Jerry Gardberg at 702.914.6863.

Long Island Region — VFI flyers have been sent to every Rabbi on Long Island. A VFI Ambassador will be speaking to a JCC in early Feb. Ambassadors are taking many calls, answering questions, and locally interviewing volunteers in person and sometimes on the phone to expedite the process. Seven volunteers are going on the program within the next month, and we expect more will follow. If you live on Long Island you can be processed at the Long Island Regional office. For further information and schedule update, please contact Eric Steinberg at 631.815.3530 or ESTeinb173@aol.com.

Los Angeles Region — For further information and schedule update, please contact Carol & Isaac Hananel at 866.345.3352.

Metro New York — All former and prospective volunteers are invited to a meet and greet at 7:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 16. Our guest speaker is Mark Werner, author of "Army Fatigues: Joining Israel's Army of International Volunteers". Mark is an attorney in Raleigh, North Carolina and a seven time volunteer. He will discuss his humorous experiences on the program. He is also active in UJC and AIPAC.



Inna Baker at rally in NYC

The event will be held at 350 W.42nd St.(31st floor) which has tight security requiring a guest list for entry. To attend you must RSVP to jbernstein@vfi-usa.org. Bring your friends, neighbors and co-workers to this enlightening presentation. Israel needs us now more than ever.

For further information and schedule update, please contact VFI at 212.643.4848 or e-mail new-york@vfi-usa.org. Sharon Stein & Richard Bernstein

Mid-Atlantic Region — We continue sending a steady number of volunteers to Sar-El; however, we wish to increase that number in 2009. We want to schedule a regional meeting. This is an opportunity for recent volunteers to attend and bring prospects as well as young people who have attended the highly successful International Youth Program. If you are interested in helping plan this activity and live in Maryland, please contact Vade Bolton at 703.860.0504 or vadebolton@comcast.net. If you live in Virginia, contact Marian Sacks at 301.603.9099 or mbsacks31@hotmail.com.

New England Region — VFI participated in the Boston Rally for Israel with a table for recruiting. Anna Krasko reports dispensing tons of literature and signing

20 new potential volunteers. Thanks to all who assisted. For information and schedule update, please contact us at 866.512.3255.

Philadelphia — Fifty five people attended our final meeting of 2008 on December 13 co-hosted by Barry & Carol Stein. A brilliant D'Var Torah regarding Chanukah was provided by David Goldberg. Our speaker was Mark Werner, an attorney from Raleigh, who has been on the program seven times and is the author of *Army Fatigues: Joining Israel's Army of International Volunteers*. He discussed his experiences on the program, some poignant and some humorous. After a spirited question and answer session there was a book signing. The next meeting will be on March 11 with a representative from the American-Israel Political Action Committee (AIPAC) as our guest speaker. Meetings are held at the Klein Branch JCC, Red Lion Rd. and Jamison Ave. in Philadelphia starting at 7:00 p.m. Call Jeanne Schachter at 888.473.6527 for more schedule details.

San Francisco Region — All former and prospective volunteers are invited to our annual Reunion and Informational Meeting from 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. on Sunday, February 22, 2009 at Congregation Emanu-EL, 2 Lake Street (at Arguello), San Francisco CA. Speaker to be announced. For more information and to help out at future events, call Kay Warren at 510.339.0183 or e-mail vfi5000@hotmail.com.

Ambassadors and Regional Directors

— **Light the Flame** — A very exciting development... we are hearing from volunteers, some being Ambassadors, who are making contacts with Jewish leaders and Rabbis in their communities, sending information including press releases to local papers, making phone calls, and other activities to promote and recruit new volunteers. We know that the best recruiters are those volunteers who personally tell and share their VFI experience. Our job is to do all we can to "light the flame." When you need help with an event, promotional materials, presentation ideas, etc., please contact Ed Kohl, Ambassador Coordinator, at eskohl@comcast.net or 248.788.0551.

Rebecca & Zachary

I just opened the letter from Zachary, telling of his raising money for VFI as his Bar Mitzvah project. My granddaughter similarly raised money to purchase tools to be sent with volunteers as her Bat Mitzvah project. Rebecca and Zachary are not related but their meaningful example and actions are worthy of praise and admiration. Here are their stories.

Rebecca's story

For my Bat Mitzvah project I sold notepads to raise money for the Volunteers for Israel program. This program is important to me because every year my grandfather travels with the VFI program, lives on an Israeli army base, and helps the soldiers with routine jobs so that they can have more time to spend on more important work. The money raised will be used to donate new tools to various Israeli army bases. The tools in these buckets will also be donated.



Shabbat Shalom, Rebecca Friedman



Zachary's Story

For my mitzvah project for my Bar Mitzvah I sold reusable shopping bags to benefit VFI and Autism Speaks. I raised a total of \$327.50 for each. I really like the idea of people from all over the globe going to Israel to help the IDF and its branches. It really shows Israel that it is not alone. It also frees up soldiers so that they can go on patrols or do other things of the sort. I hope the money makes a difference.

Sincerely, Zachary Schepps

—Leon Rechtman

***“Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.
The important thing is to not stop questioning.”***

—Albert Einstein

Elliott and the IDF Uniform

Wearing the IDF work uniform as a Sar-El volunteer makes me feel 25 again. Not exactly the same as my 2 years in Korea some 50 years ago, but military routines are similar with the early wake-up, flag raising, latrines, barracks clean-up, chow times, work assignments, and our Madricha sergeant.

This tour however was different as my bunkmate Elliott also happens to be my 16-year-old grandson. No stranger to Israel, Elliott visited Israel with his 8th grade class, and his Bar Mitzvah was at Masada. Nonetheless, he was thrilled to volunteer and accompany his Grandpa.

Our artillery base had 15 mostly young men and woman volunteers and young soldiers. Elliott, with his honed Hebrew skills, was thoroughly comfortable. Our eclectic volunteers came from Hungary, Germany, Czeck Republic, Mongolia, and around the United States. All spoke English well enough, even some Hebrew.

Our 3-week tour in July was brutally hot, so we drank water constantly. We all worked without the slightest complaint, even when the schvitz ran like rivers. Our principle assignment involved warehousing equipment, loading and unloading trucks, painting, and even KP.

Cooler evenings were a treat and everyone socialized after work hours. We had several seminars; the 155 self-propelled cannon, field first aid skills, several movies, and a talk about the front lines in the Second Lebanon War. The nearby canteen was convenient and the young folks played cards until the wee hours. We wondered why we were issued winter sleeping bags, as it was too hot to sleep.

For our third week, the roster was down to a hand full of volunteers and we became one family with Rina, our Madricha. She ran a tight efficient ship and had us working like a well-oiled machine. We all loved her singing, guitar skills, and baseball skills. Work was FUN FUN.

Prior to our final weekend, our group toured Jerusalem and joined other Sar-El volunteers groups at a water park for swimming and music and a visit from General Davidi. Our Madricha took us home for a real Israeli dinner, then we were off for a Tel Aviv weekend.

The friendships and meaningful relationships are a life long treasure, and my grandson can't wait to spend part of his senior year studying in Israel.

—David Galler • bdg159@aol.com

What Do Volunteers Really Do?

Here Is One Interesting Mission

Volunteers have been assigned to: repair radio headsets worn by the tank crews, pack combat kits for army combat units, fill equipment orders for the navy, disassemble and clean M-16 rifles and machine guns, repair tanks and trucks, and dig gun emplacements, and more. Not all the work is sexy. Some volunteers do kitchen duty and clean bathrooms. The point is we do the work that is necessary to operate Israeli military bases.

Let me tell you a true story how Sar-El volunteers did work that was far from routine and that recently played a key role in Israel sending a tough message to Syria. In September 2007, Israel bombed a nearly-completed Syrian nuclear facility. Wanting to discourage Syria from responding with offensive military operations against the Golan Heights, Israel signaled in advance of the bombing that any Syrian attack would be met with fierce resistance. One way Israel sent this signal involved a group of Sar-El volunteers.

Volunteer groups of between 12 and 40 people are normally assigned to a large number of bases throughout Israel. But in August 2007, the Israeli army assembled an unusually large volunteer contingent on a single base in the Golan Heights to work with Israeli soldiers on the nearby Syrian border.

Israeli soldiers joined with 125 volunteers to re-dig gun emplacements for heavy artillery on nine hills facing Syria. These gun emplacements had been left untended since the

1973 Yom Kippur War and were completely overgrown and unusable. The teams re-dug and sand-bagged the gun emplacements, cleared vegetation to allow for free field of fire in front of the emplacements, installed camouflage, and laid barbed wire obstacles.

The Syrians, upset by this highly visible activity, filed a formal protest with the United Nations, claiming a violation of the 1973 U.N.-brokered truce terms, which prohibit Syria and Israel from placing heavy artillery within a specified distance of the border.

The U.N. inspectors visited the volunteers' work sites, saw artillery gun emplacements, but found no actual artillery. Therefore, they reported back to Syria that there was no violation — only empty gun emplacements.

The bottom line is that the Syrians got the message. It would take the IDF less than 24 hours to place artillery in those newly-operational gun emplacements, thus discouraging Syria from initiating a military response against Israel following the bombing of its nuclear facility. Sar-El Volunteers take pride in their role in making that happen.



Mark Werner, author of *Army Fatigues: Joining Israel's Army of International Volunteers*

To how many people will this be circulated?



330 West 42nd Street, Suite 1618 • New York, NY 10036
 RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED
 HAS YOUR ADDRESS CHANGED?
 Do you know anyone who would like a free subscription?
 Please e-mail us at info@vfi-usa.org or call toll free 866.514.1948
 Are you receiving VFI e-mail updates?
 To receive them, simply send an e-mail to info@vfi-usa.org



What's Inside:

- VFI PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE PAGE 1
- A SHORT BACK STORY ON GAZA PAGE 2
- MY MOST MEMORABLE VFI TOUR PAGE 2
- DONATIONS RECEIVED BY VFI PAGE 3
- VFI PROGRAM SCHEDULE PAGE 3
- NEWSBYTE CORNER PAGE 4
- VFI HAPPENINGS AROUND THE COUNTRY PAGE 5
- REBECCA AND ZACHARY PAGE 6
- ELLIOTT AND THE IDF UNIFORM PAGE 6

NON-PROFIT
 ORG.
 U.S. POSTAGE
 PAID
 MEDIA, PA
 PERMIT NO. 100

CONNECTION

THE VOLUNTEER

ISSUE 13 | WINTER 2009