



Hbricha Movement

Europe 1944-1948

Habricha

- “Habricha” (meaning: “The escape”) was an underground movement that helped Jewish Holocaust survivors escape from post WW-II Europe and reach Eretz Yisrael/Palestine.
- The activity of Habricha started spontaneously by the survivors themselves, who emerged from the concentration camps, the forests and their hiding places and began helping each other.
- Emissaries from Eretz Yisrael, sent by “Hamossad Lealiya Bet” of the Haganah, joined them and took leadership of the movement. Together with the help of British-army “Jewish Brigade” soldiers and with funding by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), Habricha organized the emigration of about 300,000 refugees from Europe and took a central role in the founding of the State of Israel.
- Habricha - on the roads of Europe, and Ha'apala - on the Mediterranean sea - present together a story of courage, wisdom and love for the Jewish people and for our ancient homeland - Eretz Yisrael.

On the way...

They break paths through the woods...



End of the War

- The victory of the Allied forces begins late 1944 in Poland and concludes in 1945 with the surrender of Nazi Germany. There are joyous celebrations everywhere, but not for the Jews.
- A Jewish Soviet officer, liberator of the Auschwitz death camp tells a Jewish survivor:
 - “Do not go East – there they do not like us”*
 - “Do not go West – there they do not like us either”*
 - “In fact – they do not like us anywhere...”*
- Returning home to look for family members, the survivors find their cities emptied of Jews and their homes taken.
- Their goal now is to begin a new life, to build a family and for many - to go to the Land of Israel.



*Meir Levin, Habricha activist
and wife at ruins after the
war*



At the ruins in Warsaw

Beginnings

- Survivor activists, veterans of Zionist Youth Movements and partisans coming out of the woods are beginning to organize locally.
- Refugees organize "kibbutzim"- houses where a Jew can find shelter, security and a sense of family.
- The members take care of each other, providing food, blankets, clothes and - whenever possible - information about who survived and who did not.



Members of youth movements preparing to serve bread

Displaced Persons camps

- With no open routes to the ports of the Mediterranean sea, Habricha finds the way to the U.N. Camps for Displaced persons in Germany.
- Ironically, Germany becomes a land of asylum. Refugees are put up in U.S. army camps and deserted hospitals. Jewish American soldiers do their best to help their refugee brethren.
- Conditions in the camps are harsh - they are overcrowded, there is great uncertainty and the stay is long.
- Habricha organizers create educational frameworks and offer care and warmth.



Overnight shelters

The Jewish Brigade

- An important contribution comes from the Jewish Brigade soldiers of the British Army - Jewish fighters from Israel, who volunteered to fight against Nazi Germany.
- The encounter of the refugees with the soldiers wearing a Star of David on their uniforms is an awe-inspiring experience. The star, so similar yet so different from the yellow star they had to wear during the war...
- Brigade Soldiers help run programs in the camps offering professional training, teaching Hebrew and preparing refugees for their immigration to Eretz Yisrael.
- They recruit British army trucks to secretly transport refugees to ports where illegal ships are waiting for them.



The wondering continues...



Voyage Schéma



On the way to Eretz Yisrael...

The Israeli Schlichim (emissaries)

- In the fall of 1945 the commander of the Mossad LeAliyah Bet of the Haganah sends undercover emissaries to Europe to organize the Habricha movement. They soon deploy Habricha all over Europe, exploiting weaknesses and finding loopholes under conditions of risk and uncertainty.

- Yochanan Cohen, a Habricha emissary in Poland says: *"It was not simple. On one side of the border they wanted to send out illegally 2000 people and there they said: "wait a week, there is no place to put them up". So we worked by the method of determining facts"*.



Zvi, emissary from Israel, with activist survivors

- Habricha commanders are faced with difficulties and overcome them. Habricha falsifies identity cards, provides care, food, shelter and transport for the refugees moving them from town to town, from district to district and from country to country. They cross borders illegally, sometimes on foot at night, often in rain or snow. They cross the Alps and the Tetra Mountains carrying children and old people on their backs.

The Commanders

Shaul Avigur



Yehiel Duvdevani



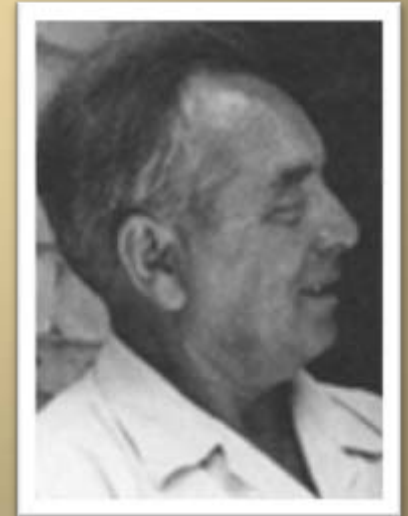
Mordechai Surkis



Efraim Dekel



Meir Sapir





Map of Habricha trails

JDC – “The Joint”

- The American Joint Distribution Committee, an umbrella organization of Jewish American welfare groups, has large financial means and enjoys a semi-official status, being associated with the Allied forces
- Due to this status the Joint cannot perform political activity. Nevertheless, Europe's Joint administrator Joe Schwartz signs a confidential agreement with Hamossad Lealiya Bet's commander Shaul Avigur, ensuring the Joint's financial support for Habricha.
- This agreement conflicts with the policy of the British Government, which closed the gates of Eretz Yisrael to Holocaust refugees by land and sea.
- The contribution of the JDC to the Habricha is enormous



On the Czechoslovakian border, a “Joint” jeep taking refugees to the West

Anti-Semitism

- The repatriation agreement signed in 1946 between the Soviet Union and Poland allows the return to Poland of about 200,000 Jews who fled to the U.S.S.R. during the war. Upon their arrival, violent incidents of anti-Semitism occur almost daily.
- Jews are thrown out of speeding trains or murdered by the Poles who took their homes. In the summer of 1946, in Kielce, a pogrom occurs. Members of a Polish fascist movement kill and wound Jewish Kibbutz members.
- The Kielce pogrom becomes a turning point for Habricha
- The border check point between the Czech Republic and Poland, Nahod, becomes filled with refugees. Conditions are harsh. In spite of long days on the road and of being tired and cold, people continue to cooperate, to follow instructions, waiting patiently to continue their journey.
- Sharon survived Auschwitz and decides to join Habricha: *"I was 19 years old. Suddenly, from being a camp refugee without hope I became a member of an amazing movement. I'm helping Jews, I am performing tasks that are above and beyond"*. Sharon is to be the Habricha commander of the Nahod check point.

*Kielce Pogrom, mourners
and victims' coffins,
Poland 1946*



*Jewish refugees on the road,
resting*

Forged Papers

- Holocaust survivors have no papers, no certificates. They require identity papers to move on the roads and to cross borders.
- Habricha opens creative, efficient, illegal identity paper laboratories.
- *"From a Pole I became a Greek and was taught to say kalimera and kalispera. Then I became an Austrian refugee born in the British occupation zone. From this I turned to be an Austrian refugee born in the American occupation zone and only when I arrived to Salzburg I became finally who I really am: a Jewish refugee from Lithuania. For all my identities I had, of course, appropriate certificates"*. This is told by Aba Gefen who was a survivor and became the commander of Habricha in Salzburg.
- Like him, tens of thousands of survivors receive various documents, as required to continue on the road to Eretz Yisrael.



The Children

- The need to save the children who survived the Holocaust becomes an urgent and dramatic problem.
- The war has left thousands of orphans, children separated from their families, children who saw their parents being murdered in front of their eyes, children who suffered torture and starvation, illness and fears. There are thousands of children who have received no education and have not been taken care of by an adult. There are children who were hidden in monasteries or with Christian families, and some of them now refuse to give them back.
- Habricha people find the children and take care of them.



“The little one shall become a thousand, and the small a mighty nation”

Jewish children everywhere

- Quotes from Habricha commander Dekel's book "The Remains of the Sword", (Ministry of Defense, 1963, pp. 17-18):
 - ❖ Hundreds of children remain in the camps in Germany and Austria, most of whom from the death march in the Tyrol Mountains.
 - ❖ Nearly 100 children are found In Auschwitz.
 - ❖ Partisan children are coming out of the woods.
 - ❖ Approximately 500 children are found alive in Buchenwald camp.
 - ❖ Approximately 8000 children in Hungary are waiting for Aliah (immigration to Eretz-Yisrael).
 - ❖ Hundreds of children surviving in Transnistria are expected to be returned to Russia.
 - ❖ Over 10,000 children are still in the hands of their rescuers in monasteries and churches.
 - ❖ Six children are murdered by Poles near the Czechoslovakian border.
 - ❖ News from 22.3.1945 - Out of the one million Jewish children who lived in Poland before the war, only about 5,000 - 6,000 survived.

Political Influence

- In Eastern European countries the governments begin to stabilize and there is fear that the borders will be closed. The British Government pressures European governments to close their borders to Jews. The border crossings to Italy are closed, but Habricha trains are racing on.
- Displaced Persons camps in Germany are extremely crowded. Two hundred and fifty thousand refugees are waiting in very difficult conditions. Images of these camps find their way to the press.
- Two years after the war, shocking photographs are published. The world has difficulty to look at them and Habricha takes advantage of it. The solution for Jewish refugees in the camps and on the roads becomes one – to allow the Jews to establish a state of their own.
- David Ben Gurion recognizes the inherent power of the refugee situation for recruiting international support to the Zionist enterprise: *"They have no future anywhere but in the land of Israel"*.
- A Joint Anglo-American Committee whose role is to offer a solution to Jewish displaced persons is appointed by President Truman.

The End

- Between 1945 and 1948 Habricha operated 50 centers in 10 European countries, with 150 representatives from Israel and 350 Holocaust-survivor activists who volunteered to help. Their names, unknown during those years, are still unknown today. However their contribution is enormous.
- From the 300,000 refugees who moved the Habricha routes about 120,000 managed to make their way to the port cities in France and Italy. From there started the second illegal movement of immigration to Eretz Yisrael – Ha'apala on ships. For some of them the way will linger, their ships are captured by the British patrol boats and they are deported to temporary camps, mostly in Cyprus. Some of them remain in camps until 1948.
- With the establishment of the State of Israel, they immigrate to Eretz Yisrael, helped by the government of the independent State of Israel. The movements - Habricha and Ha'apala - have completed their missions





A night's rest on the road



Habricha and Ha'apala – mission accomplished

Habricha Legacy Association

- The story of Habricha is not familiar to many and is not publicly well presented. The “Habricha Legacy Association” seeks to give this chapter the place it deserves in the Israeli and Jewish collective memory.
- The Habricha Legacy Association invites those who are interested and care about this heroic-historical chapter to join us in raising awareness to Habricha's story and its contribution to the Holocaust survivors after WW-II.

For donations and further information contact us:

<http://www.habricha.org.il>

habricha45@gmail.com

Dr. Miri Nehari

P.O.B 45

Ramat-Hasharon 4710001

Israel

Tel: +972-54-6298888



Non-Profit association
for Habricha Legacy

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