

The Jewish Pilots of World War II

Marking 76 years since WWII: Meet the Jewish combatants who fought with the allied forces, came to Israel and formed the foundations of the IAF. "Joining the IAF felt like getting home"

The Israeli Air Force

Talya Yariv

Jewish warriors go back to World War I, when a million and a half Jewish soldiers took part in the war, from both sides. Jewish pilots have fought in the German Air Force and in other Air Forces around the world. 21 years after WWI, a second global war broke out and threatened to annihilate the entire Jewish people. "The country that sent the Jews to the Extermination camps is the same Germany that was loyally served by Jews 2 decades before", said Lt. Col. (Res.) Elimor Macbeth, a history enthusiast and writer of "Jewish pilots in the German Air Force during WWI".

Many soldiers came from abroad to join the lines of the IAF in its early days and have led it through the 1948 Independence War. Three IAF commanders were among them - Maj. Gen. Ezer Weizman, Maj. Gen. Aharon Remez and Maj. Gen. Dan Tolkovski. One of those pilots is Colonel (Res.) Paul Keydar who flew on the "PBY Catalina" planes with the British Royal Air Force in 1943 and later brought these planes to the IAF. "I flew as part of the patrols that guarded and monitored the coasts of Britain during WWII", he said. "Our main mission was searching and pursuing enemy ships and submarines, a mission that required extremely long flights which included arduous scans and navigations over the Indian Ocean". After the establishment of Israel, Colonel (Res.) Keydar settled in Israel and was appointed the Head of IAF Air Operations Division and the commander of the "Elephant" squadron. "Joining the IAF felt like getting home and the transformation was not so difficult for me. The IAF consisted mainly of South African, British and American volunteers so the whole operation was conducted in English".

"I survived the war for this mission"



"Jewish refugees who arrived from Germany to South Africa began telling stories about the oppression and violence"

76 years ago, Harold "Smoky" Simon, who is currently 96 years old, got exposed to the horror stories about the fate of the Jews in Europe. "Jewish refugees who arrived from Germany to South Africa, where I was born, began telling stories about the oppression and violence against Jewish people", he said in an interview to the IAF Magazine. "I immediately decided that I will do everything in my power to fight the Germans, if and when I will be needed". "Smoky" decided to volunteer in the South African Air Force, where he received his nickname and in June 1942 was positioned in the 21th squadron of the Allies' Desert Air Force as a combat navigator and a bomber.



Lou Lenart, leader of the "Messerschmitt" quartet in the attack of the Egyptian force at "Ad Halom" bridge

Lou Lenart, who recently passed away, is also famous for taking part in WWII as a pilot. Lenart drafted in the Marines in June 1940 and was a new fighter pilot when he was sent to the Pacific in 1944.

"When I drafted in the US Marines they were still not directly involved in the war, but I assumed that when the US would officially join the war, the Marines would be first and I would be able to kill Nazis", he said to IAF Magazine. Lenart took part in attack missions in the Pacific and towards the end of the war was also involved in assistance missions for ground forces and covering missions for reconnaissance planes and bombers. After the war, he returned to the USA and was released of duty as a Captain. In April 1948 he came to Israel and served as a pilot in the IAF, leading the "Messerschmitt" quartet in the attack of the Egyptian force at "Ad Halom" bridge. "It was the most important event of my life", he said. "I survived WWII to perform that mission".

