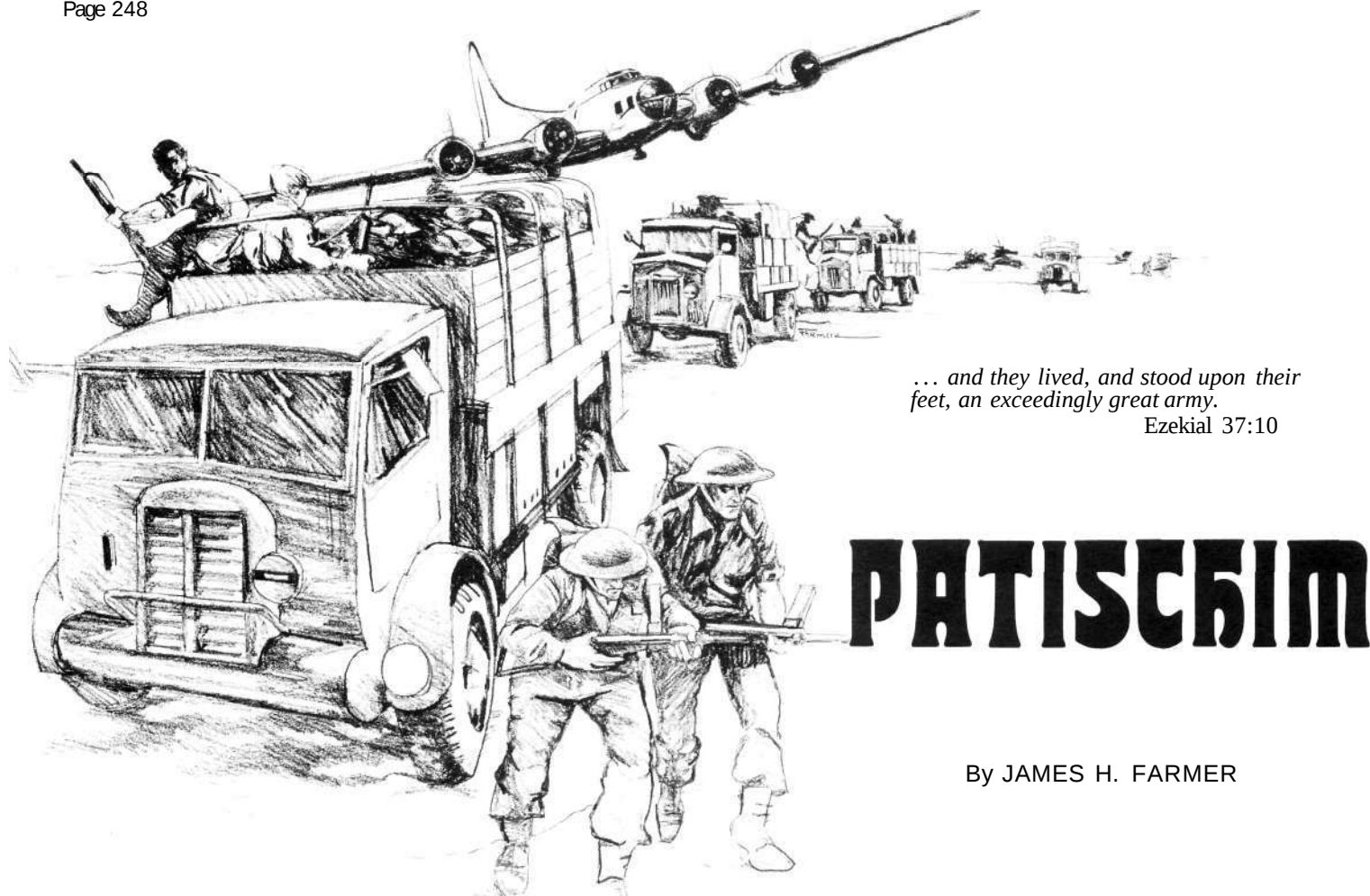




... and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.
Ezekial 37:10

PATISCHIM

By JAMES H. FARMER

Returning from what was perhaps the first air raid on Damascus, Moonitz and his crew came upon this desert column. Pencil sketch by James H. Farmer.

The small plywood door leading from the bombay slammed open. Bracing his small British frame in the plane's open bulkhead Ray Bloch leaned into the cold hundred-mile-an-hour eddies that now rushed into the cockpit from the cavernous opening behind him. One of the bombs was still hung up in its shackle. Both pilots instinctively snapped a look into the darkness behind them. Moonitz told his American copilot, "Dusty" Miller, to take the controls. Unstrapping his seat harness the husky New Yorker quickly moved his six-foot-two inches through the rocking flight deck and onto the narrow bombay ramp that rested, that evening, above 15,000 feet of cold and decidedly hostile Egyptian air. Through the torrents that circled about him he could make out the sounds of metal hitting metal.

Miller lunged the big bomber out of the target area, through the last of the heavy flak. In the bombay Moonitz cursed with all the intensity that his Brooklyn upbringing could muster as the oddly-shaped, ill-fitting missile continued to sway dangerously in the darkness before him. "A 50 kilogram GERMAN bomb had no d. . . business being in the belly of an American-made Flying Fortress.. ." They would have to run the gauntlet a second time. Moonitz would try to kick the bomb out while Miller made a second run on the target.

Quickly Moonitz appraised the situation — "who would ever believe it!" — there certainly were no contingency plans for such an operation in his old USAAF flight manuals. Oh, he knew the airplane well enough, after all he had trained on the B-17 with the Third Air Force in Florida during the last months of World War

Two. As for the rest of the circumstances associated with the events of that anxious evening of July 14, 1948 — "No one could have trained for that!"

1,900 miles out of a secret Iron Curtain airfield he had left some eleven hours earlier Moonitz found himself that evening — for his first exposure to combat — in command of a flying Fortress originally designed for daylight operations but recently converted for use as a civilian cargo carrier. Stripped of nearly all its original military equipment the American-made Fortress was guided to its target area by a map "borrowed" from a library atlas, to drop German-surplus bombs aimed by a Czechoslovakian artillery gun sight and "defended" from possible aerial attack by eight international volunteers operating light Czech hand-held infantry type submachine guns. It was enough to make any self-respecting ex-Brooklyn fireman wish he were back at the firehouse waiting for the alarm to sound. For Moonitz however, an alarm of sorts had already sounded some eight months earlier.

Meeting in a former Long Island war plant, a special session of the General Assembly of the United Nations voted on the 29th of November, 1947 to recommend the partition of Palestine. Within two weeks of this proclamation Great Britain announced that she would withdraw from her mandated territories in the Middle East within six months — by the 15th of May, 1948. For the exiled Russian Zionist (and nominal head of the Jewish underground organization — Haganah) David Ben Gurion, the signs were clear. If there was to be established a Jewish homeland in his time his people would have to fight for it. But from the beginning the

deck was stacked against him, for while the U.S. and Britain quickly established embargoes on the sale of arms in the Middle East, the armies of the Moslem world had already been well equipped by the withdrawing forces of the Allies following the end of World War Two. Ben Gurion's Zionists would be forced to go underground to "extralegally" equip an army and an air force for the inevitable fight ahead.

From the start they knew time was against them. The establishment of an orthodox military machine was out of the question — there was neither the time, the money, nor the facilities for such an approach. As the British would be in nominal control of the country until May 15th Ben Gurion knew whatever air force his new state of Israel would have must be amassed outside of Palestine in "friendly territory," ready to strike — by May 15th.

In the months that followed partition Haganah agents and representatives under various guises sought out war surplus aircraft in numerous nations throughout the world. Clearly the need for a strong Israeli Air Force was vital to the international movement's success, for by May of 1948 Arab air strength would be estimated to exceed one hundred aircraft. This would include forty Spitfires and five Furies along with twenty-five Dakotas and fifteen Harvards — all to be used for bombing. By January of 1948 Zionist groups in Palestine possessed less than a dozen aircraft — all light, single engine Piper Cubs and Austers.

As Spring approached the Haganah's search for surplus military aircraft took on a new urgency. In South Africa a former SAAF pilot tried financial backers for the purchase of some fifty WWII surplus P-40 Kittyhawks. In England a small number of ex-RAF officers, on various pretexts, sought the purchase of the more easily accessible light twin-engined Avro Anson and Austers, while another group in that same Island Kingdom sought the purchase of RAF-surplus Beaufighters on the pretext that the aircraft were to be used in the filming of a motion picture. In Canada agents looked longingly after the highly versatile Mosquito fighter-bomber. In Mexico a "Mr. Brown" began negotiations with government officials for the sale of surplus

MAF P-47D Thunderbolts and B-25 Mitchell bombers. In Czechoslovakia a Dr. Felix would initiate negotiations for the sale of twenty-five Avai C-210 fighters — a temperamental Czech variant of the German Bf-109G Messerschmitt.

It was however to the United States, with her vast surplus stocks in and outside of the country, and to New York Jew Adolph Schwimmer that the Haganah would turn with the greatest hope of finding what they needed most. For Schwimmer, a former TWA flight engineer, the key to the defense of Israel had always been in the air. As early as the Summer of 1947 he had begun to make the rounds of the various Jewish Agencies in New York City suggesting that: "airplanes might make a difference" in Palestine.

In January of 1948 Service Airways, Inc., with offices at 250 West 57th Street in New York City, became the newest of the Jewish underground's 'special agencies,' the cover company for the purchase of airplanes and the recruiting of pilots for the planned airlift of planes and materials from the Americas to Palestine — "Operation Yakum Purkan."

By mid-March Schwimmer had been able to purchase 3 USAAF-surplus Constellations, C-69s, at Burbank's Lockheed Air Terminal in California together with 10 surplus C-46As purchased at the nearby Cal-Aero storage depot in Ontario. Two BT-13 trainers had earlier been picked up in Boston.

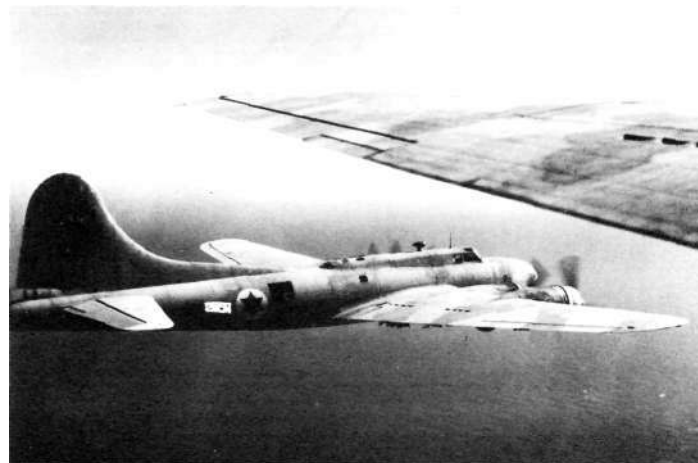
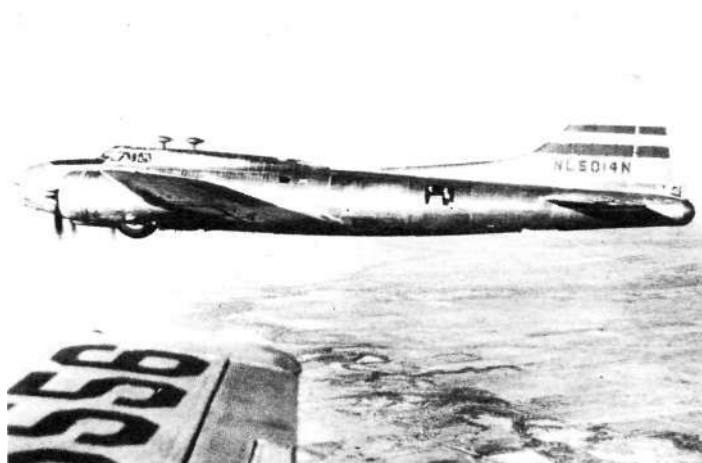
Setting up shop in January at Burbank Airport on five acres of land rented from Lockheed, Schwimmer had — almost over night — set up "Schwimmer Aviation Service." Employing upwards of one hundred mechanics he had within two short months completely overhauled and demilitarized his 15-plane air force. Meeting, and in some respects surpassing the stern export laws then in force, as a result of the current Mid-East embargoes, the last of five C-46s had left Southern California March 14th bound for Mexico.

After that Schwimmer Aviation Service of Burbank closed shop as quickly and as mysteriously as it had begun two months earlier. The last four of these transports arrived in Tocumen, Panama on or about the 23rd of April, fleshing out what would be for the time being that country's new flag airline: "Lineas Aereas de Panama Sociedad Anonima (LAPSA for short.) There they would wait for another two weeks for "Operation Balak." Among the group of predominately Jewish-American pilots recruited for this operation was a typically young, recently discharged WWII veteran from Brooklyn, New York — Norm Moonitz.

By the 15th of May the new state of Israel was one day old, the British having withdrawn one day early, but it existed in name only — totally defenseless against aerial attack. That same day Egyptian Spitfires raided Tel Aviv for the first time. A stray rifle

Below left, one of first Fortresses converted to civil use, B-17G-95-DL, 44-83811, as it appeared in late 1947, flying for Universal Aviation of Tulsa, Okla. It was then used for mapping the southwestern U.S. (Photo - Boeing News, via Bruce W. Orriss.)

Below right, believed to be the same airplane, ex-44-83811, as it appeared in the final stages of the 1948-1949 Palestine War. (Israeli Defense Force)





Norman Moonitz and his crew beside their B-17 in Zatec, Czechoslovakia, shortly before takeoff on their initial ferry-flight/bombing mission to Israel on July 14, 1948. The three B-17's of the flight all left Zatec without camouflage or national markings of any kind.

The crew, left to right, standing: "Dusty" Miller, American, copilot; Ray Bloch, English, radio operator/gunner; Norm Moonitz, American, pilot; Unknown, gunner; Al Dobrowitz, American, navigator/bombardier, Unknown, gunner; kneeling: Unknown, gunner; "Dev" Judah, South African, intelligence officer for Israeli Air Force; Burt Dinn, South African, gunner; Unknown, South African, armament expert; Unknown, gunner. Two men in the nose of the B-17 were Israeli mechanics. (Photo — Norm Moonitz)

shot forced one of the British-made fighters to ditch in the surf at the foot of the Jewish capital. With this raid however the Egyptians had succeeded in destroying Israel's in-country 'air force': the 3 to 4 light recon planes parked at the city's local airport.

Schwimmer's luck in finding fighter and bomber aircraft for Israel had been no better than other Haganah volunteers in the other Western nations. By mid-April the only fighters available for immediate sale had been the 25 Czech C-210s. Nevertheless the first disassembled C-210 fighter was airlifted from the former German fighter base at Zatec, Czechoslovakia on the 20th of May by a chartered American C-54. On the 22nd the first of the nine American-manned, former LAPSA C-46s arrived in Zatec from Panama to aid in the fighter plane airlift — "Operation Balak." The tenth C-46 was destroyed in a fatal crash on take-off from the Mexico City Airport, three weeks earlier. On the 22nd a second C-46 was destroyed flying into a low ridge near the former RAF base at Ekron, Israel while attempting a landing through a zero-zero overcast. The crash cost the life of the plane's navigator and destroyed the fuselage half of a C-210 fighter. Norm Moonitz, the C-46's command pilot, would spend ten days in the hospital as a result of the injuries sustained in the crash.

The 22nd would prove to be a significant day for both the fledgling Israeli Air Force and Moonitz. By the beginning of the third week in May, Schwimmer and other Haganah leaders were acutely aware that while the airlift of arms and defensive fighters from Eastern Europe had become a reality, Israel still lacked an effective aerial strike force. It had been hoped to build a fast, highly mobile tactical air arm around the likes of the B-25 Mitchell bomber but the predominant military uses of this type were so obvious as to make the export or even the smuggling of such aircraft out of any western nation next to impossible.

Schwimmer would return to the United States to see what he could find. With Israel currently fighting for its very survival,

time would always play a major roll in the procurement of aircraft during those first months of fighting. In the United States it became clear that the most easily accessible aircraft would be those ex-military types readily useable as civilian aircraft. Preferably types that had already been purchased from the government, were demilitarized and — most important — already carrying legal U.S. civil registration numbers. With such aircraft his chances of escaping early detection were greatly enhanced.

The only aircraft type then available that met these requirements was the B-17 Flying Fortress, the backbone of the USAAF's 8th Air Force over Germany only four short years earlier. The Fortress had already been adopted by a number of civilian companies for use as VIP transports, high altitude camera platforms and as cargo carriers. Schwimmer would be able to purchase four such aircraft.

Schwimmer registered at the McAllister Hotel in Miami, Florida as "Ervin L. Johnson" on the same day Moonitz crashed near Ekron. By the 9th of June Schwimmer had purchased Israel's first "strategic bomber squadron." The first two B-17Gs, converted cargo carriers registered NL-1098 (s/n44-83851) and NL-5024N (s/n 44-83753) respectfully were purchased from Charles T. Winters of Miami, Florida. Winters had tried unsuccessfully to get an island-hopping freight line started in the Caribbean following WWII, but "business had been lousy." The two converted bombers were gladly disposed of by Winters.

The third Fortress, civil registration number NL-5014N (s/n 44-83811) had recently been used by Universal Aviation of Tulsa, Oklahoma under contract to the U.S. Army Mapping Service to photograph and, for the first time, accurately chart much of the Midwestern and Southeastern United States. The aircraft had since been sold to Levin and Co. of Hollywood, California who in turn sold it to Schwimmer, alias "E.L. Johnson." The first three bombers would receive a cursory going over in Miami before being flown out to the Israeli staging base in Zatec,

44-83811 was long-lived. Here it is shown as a "prop" for the 1961 production of the English film, *War Lover*. Actors Robert Wagner, Sean Kelly, and Bernard Braden look into the nose section of THE HOUSE OF USHER' (Courtesy of Columbia Pictures Corp.)



43-83811 again, shown here as it landed at Lydda Airport outside of Tel Aviv on 8 March 1958, returning from Bone, Algeria, where it had been interned by French authorities nine days earlier. (Photo from Charles Cain, of Air-Britain, via Roger Freeman)



Czechoslovakia, on a "navigational training flight," via Puerto Rico and Santa Maria in the Azores during the last week of June.

The fourth B-17, tentatively identified by the manufacturer's serial number as "17075," is believed to have been purchased at Tulsa Municipal Airport, Oklahoma. It had left on the morning of July 11th bound for Westchester County Airport in New York State. The press of events in Israel would force this last desperate chapter in "Yakum Purkan" to a futile conclusion. By May 29th an advancing Egyptian mechanized column had driven to within 25 miles of Tel Aviv. The commander had boasted that he would be in Tel Aviv "within 48 hours." On the 29th the first four freshly assembled C-210s, earlier airlifted in from Zatec, were ready for flight.

Prepared to strike the forward Egyptian fighter base at El Arish they were diverted to the Ashdod bridge, south of Tel Aviv, where ever 500 enemy vehicles including tanks and artillery waited on the south bank, temporarily halted by the bridge's destruction the previous night. One of the most experienced fighter pilots then in the Palestine theatre, Lou Lenart — late of the U.S. Marine Corps. — took part in this first Israeli fighter sweep, the first mission for Israel's first fighter squadron, the 101st. While the results of the first bombing and strafing sorties were minimal — on the first mission most of the fighters' cannon's jammed after only a very few rounds had been expended — the brigade size column was stopped dead in its tracks. Digging in south of the Ashdod bridge the Egyptians had advanced as far as they were ever to go — they would never get closer to Tel Aviv during the 1948/49 war or later.

Five days later, June 3rd, Modi Alon, the 101st's young Israeli squadron commander, shot down his first two enemy aircraft south of Tel Aviv. Both were C47's which their Egyptian crews had been using as bombers by kicking high explosive charges out of the cargo hatches. The following day his fighters successfully repulsed Egyptian warships approaching the Israeli coast.

It was a modest beginning and the hard pressed Israelis were seldom able to get more than two of the cranky little Czech fighters in the air at any one time. But with that first fighter sweep of May 29th the air campaign began to swing to the Zionists. As of July 9th, the end of the first U.N. imposed cease fire and the beginning of the Ten Day Israeli offensive, the tiny state still faced the combined might of Egypt, Syria and Iraq — without an effective bomber force. Time was growing short, the enemy was becoming not less daring.

In desperation a decision was made to attempt one last mass flight of aircraft out of the United States on Sunday, July 11th. Four A-20 light attack bombers, reportedly purchased "at a surplus depot in Arizona" and flown to Fort Lauderdale, Florida were prevented from taking-off that day by suspicious customs agents. They would later be impounded by authorities in the U.S. and South America. A number of AWOL USAF non-com volunteers from an air force base in Texas would be arrested, some would eventually receive general court-martials. Two of Schwimmer's three Lockheed Constellations were also grounded for similar reasons this day in Millville, New Jersey. The B-17 would be the only aircraft able to escape the country's borders and the watchful eyes of the authorities.

The arrival of the B-17 at Westchester, New York was described by an airport spokesman as all "very hush-hush." More than 2,300 gallons of fuel were pumped into the plane according to

purchase arrangements made the previous week. Still an unusually large aircraft for its day the bomber would attract more than its share of attention. Pressed by a covey of local newsmen the pilot, Irvin "Swiftly" Schindler - alias "Capt. E.R. Chandler," former U.S. Naval air transport pilot — erroneously claimed that the B-17 was owned by the Overseas Air Trading Company of Salina, Kansas. That firm, the press soon found, was not listed by the American Aviation Directory, as indeed any legitimate company would have been.

Further, one of the nine men on board reported that: "the plane was going to Palestine."¹ When asked about this by the reporters, Schindler coolly insisted that they were on a "navigational training flight, but some of the men did speak Jewish."² Airport mechanics later reported that: "the plane was in no condition to fly so far" - if indeed it was bound for the Middle East. According to the July 16th issue of the *Reporter Dispatch*: "On the first of three attempts to take-off, the bomber, weighing with its load twice as much as the 30,000 pounds prescribed, failed to gain altitude enough, grazed a radio-equipped airport patrol jeep and stripped off its antennae, then stalled in a ditch at the side of the side of the field with one motor (No. 3) ablaze." After removing one spare engine from the fuselage along with parts of a second, at the insistence of assistant airport manager Frank Ward, the balking No. 3 engine was restarted with the help of a jeep pulling a heavy line wound around the hub of the propeller shaft.

Arriving in Halifax late that evening Schindler claimed "bad weather" had blocked his return to the United States. Although promising to return as soon as "weather permitted and repairs were made on No. 3 engine," he was fined \$100 for illegal entry into Nova Scotia. Filing a flight plan for an escorted flight to Boston, 'officially' scheduled for Sunday July 18th, Schindler and the B-17 (less one set of engine cowlings) took off late the night of Saturday, July 17th bound for Santa Maria in the Azores. Once airborne he switched off all aircraft lights in an

effort to conceal his true heading. By this time however U.S. officials were well aware of Schindler's intentions as the first 3 B-17s were already in action over the Sinai. Despite a number of 'influential friends' in the Islands, Portuguese authorities there finally and for the last time interned the plane and its crew.

By the 11th of July, the first three bombers had been at Zatec for well over a week. They had flown in totally stripped of their original military trappings. The aircraft lacked turrets, armor plating, and bombardier's Norden bomb sight; even the original oxygen systems had been removed. The three bombers were to be ferried out of Czechoslovakia on the morning of July 14, 1948 for a base near Tel Aviv — bombing Cairo and a military base in the Sinai desert on the way.

The three bombers were to be piloted by Ray Kurtz, Bill Katz — both 8th Air Force veterans — and Norm Moonitz. All were veterans of the Balak airlift. For Moonitz, only recently released from the hospital after his first 'encounter' with Israeli soil, the prospects of such a long over water mission — with a detour to Egypt — were not the most encouraging, the manner in which the aircraft were equipped least of all!

He recently recalled when interviewed... "We all had bomb sights in the planes." (Did you have the Norden?) "No, it was a gun (artillery-type) sight, and you know the first time I saw it I got hysterical; because you have this big nose — I don't know if you've ever been in the nose of a B-17 but it's fairly roomy, you know, and right in the middle of the floor, at the base of the plexiglass nose, was a little thing as big as this (hand movements indicating a 12 to 15 inch narrow cylinder). The Norden was fairly large by comparison with its associated instruments and computers but this thing had nothing. All it would give us was a trail angle; there was no drift or anything. It was really by guess and by God."³

Lacking armor plating and turrets the Fortress's only defensive weapons were Czech infantry-type machine guns mounted in the waist windows aft of the main wings and two similar guns mounted through side windows in the nose. Other types of hand-held Czech machine guns would be used by the crew from what ever opening in the ship was available should the need arise.

As for bombs, their Czech hosts would supply them, as Moonitz now remembers "at some really exorbitant price," with 50 kilogram WWII-type German bombs. The bombs did not fit properly in the Fortress's bomb bay and as a result would wobble excessively in their shackles while in flight. Extremely long safety wires were therefore employed on the bombs so that none actually were armed until they had cleared the B-17's bomb bay by "a good many feet." Moonitz recalled that they would never drop anything larger than a 100 kilogram bomb during the first months of fighting.

As Kurtz had had the most combat experience in B-17's he would lead the Cairo raid. He had been responsible for what overhaul and reconversions were done on the airplanes in the limited time available at Zatec. Shortly after 7 A.M. on the morning of July 14th, 1948, Kurtz began his last take-off roll down Zatec's main runway. Soon Moonitz formed off his left wing, Katz on his right. Flying a loose Vee formation they began their last flight out of Eastern Europe. For Kurtz the initial check points were by then second nature to him. They headed south over Pilsen and then on to Geske Budejovice where fellow Israeli volunteers had received their transition training in the Czech '109s. On into Austria, passing over Linz, they would go on instruments as they flew through the solid overcast that hid the Carinc Alps from their view. Flying into the clear once again they found their way to the Adriatic where they took a southeasterly heading, keeping the Italian boot off their right wing tips as the coasts of Yugoslavia, Albania and Greece slowly passed to their left. Some 1,300 miles and more than seven hours later they would reach the island of Crete.

Moonitz continued: "We all flew in formation to Crete where we split up. Two of us, (Moonitz and Katz), poured the coals to the Forts so we would go on ahead. From Crete in it was about 600 miles, which you know in the '17 was maybe three and a half hours. "Out of the three planes only one plane (Kurtz) bombed Cairo because that was the only one that had oxygen. The other plane and myself bombed a base in the Sinai desert near Rafah. The plan was that we were going to bomb the base approximately a half hour before the other plane was due over Cairo — it was a diversion thing."⁴

At the time of Kurtz' raid on Cairo this famed Egyptian city was considered by many to be the most heavily defended target in the Middle East. From Crete, Kurtz' B-17 headed by a circuitous route for Cairo. Finding the city at dusk he sought out the Abdin Palace of Egypt's King Farouk.⁵ Limited by his makeshift bombsight he was able to drop only a few 50 Kilogram bombs. They missed the palace, but this first token raid was to have a tremendous psychological impact on the Moslem world. Never again would they be able to take the small Israeli Air Force for granted. Unprepared, the Egyptians offered Kurtz and his crew little resistance. About the diversionary raid Moonitz would later observe:

"Rafah was a big staging area. We heard later on that it was full of British troops that weren't supposed to be there ... and we were supposed to have really done a lot of damage. And oddly enough we ran into a hell of a lot of anti-aircraft fire and the crew that bombed Cairo said it was the easiest job they'd ever done."⁶

Asked if he believed he hit Rafah pretty good Moonitz added ... "I know we hit it good." What altitude were you flying? "About 15,000 feet, we couldn't go much higher because we didn't have any oxygen." Did both of you drop simultaneously? "We went in separately. The other fellow had an Englishman with him who had been a pathfinder bombardier. He had gone in first but said he was not sure of the target and had to go around a second time — and they really caught hell. We had to make several runs anyway ourselves because the old WWII German bombs we were carrying would not hang properly in their shackles." One bomb had hung up in Moonitz' bomb bay on the first bomb run over Rafah.

After the raid ... "we all landed at one field — the main IAF base near Tel Aviv. They were worried about being bombed so we dispersed the planes. We flew up to Ramat-David because it had been a British bomber base, and they had revetments there." Ramat-David was one of several modern air bases left behind by the withdrawing British in 1948. Earlier the field had been occupied by U.S. B-24Ds of the 345th and 415th bomb squadrons, 98th Bomb Group, during the North African Campaign of 1942/43.

Moonitz flew less than fifteen missions in the B-17s before returning to his air transport duties. But of these few Fortress missions there was one that quickly came to mind — the first air raid on the Syrian capital of Damascus.

"We made one pass because I was afraid, to be honest with you, because we only had the one B-17 with not a hell of a lot of armament. We had no armor, we had these crummy Czech guns with the old ring sights. We had a lot of the Czech tommy guns aboard — they were like a tommy gun. And of course we figured that in case we crashed we'd be able to fight our way out — of anything — we were loaded.

"We also bombed the airport on the way to Damascus. I remember seeing the bomb bursts at the airport but I don't think we did much damage. Then on the way back we dove down and we strafed anything we could see. They had told us that there was a big push being made by the Syrian Army — as much as a division. We spotted a mechanized

column ... we dispersed the whole thing, broke the whole thing up! You know, got them off the road, trucks going all over the place — we were right on the deck."

Interviewer — "You mean that they were shooting out the waist windows?"

"Yah, out the waist, out of everything. But you know really you couldn't do a hell of a lot of damage ... but it was fun!"

In the following days Israeli fighters and other aircraft, pressed into service as bombers, pressed home the attack which Moonitz had begun and turned a Syrian advance towards Israel's northern frontiers into a temporary retreat.

Within the short span of a month and a half the entire complexion of the air campaign had changed. With the air over the front secured from regular fighter attack by the newly arrived Avia C-210s and their predominantly American and Commonwealth country crews, the three Flying Fortresses, during the course of the Israeli Ten Day offensive from July 9th to the 19th, boosted the weight of bombs dropped by the fledgling air force fivefold. For the Israelis these three B-17s were to become their first official bombardment squadron.

To Ray Kurtz and the rest of the American crewmen who flew the big bombers during those first months the unit became known as the "69th Squadron". To the Israelis they became known as "Patischim": The Hammers — the eleventh hour Sunday punch they had needed to tip the scales.

A final tally of those aircraft that reached Israel by war's end in 1949 revealed that 85 air planes, of a total 192, came from the United States or U.S. surplus depots in Germany. No country would contribute more. While most of the Avia C-210s were phased out of first-line operations by the early 1950's the three Flying Fortresses, Israel's first bombardment squadron, remained a part of the Israeli Air Force until 1958. At least two of these extended themselves to new heights during the Suez Crisis of 1956, pitted once more against overwhelming odds. Noting the relative strengths of his country's air arm. Major General Moshe Dayan observed in October of 1956: "As for bombers, we have but two piston-engined B-17 planes against two Egyptian squadrons — 30 to 60 planes — of Ilyushin-28 jet bombers". Neither Israeli aircraft would ever fall victim to enemy action.⁷

In 1958 the three war-weary Fortresses were at long last declared surplus by a grateful government. One of the bombers, s/n 44-83811, was in fact purchased by a New York City 'business-man' on the 17th of February, 1958* For ferrying purposes he reregistered the aircraft as N-9814F, but it was interned on the 28th of February, reportedly enroute to Latin America, by French authorities in Bone, Algeria. There the cache of arms that was found on board were removed and held under seal by the French. On the 8th of March the B-17 returned to Israel for the last time, landing at Lydda Airport, to await the fate of its two sister ships — at the scrapper's ovens. Partially dismantled, the fuselage of 44-83811, formerly NL-5014N, was purchased by Columbia Pictures Corp. of Great Britain in 1960 for the shooting of the interior scenes in the 1961 production of *The War Lover*.

And what of the American volunteers who dominated the ranks of the air crews during those first pivotal months — why had they gone to the Middle East? "Most of the guys in the original batch went there to fight for the cause. Later on, about September,

October '48 they started getting guys, you know, who were looking for the money; but there was no real big money." Moonitz concludes: "After the fighting was over ... the feather merchants began moving in to bring military order, rank and formal regulations to the Israeli Air Force. It was at this point that a lot of the guys moved on. Most of us had become all too familiar with the military way of life during the recent world war and wanted no part of it."

Moonitz turned down a commission in the regular Israeli Air Force and moved on to El Al as an airline command pilot. Ray Kurtz, the first unofficial commander of "Patischim," was later lost at sea while ferrying a Mosquito fighter over the Atlantic enroute to Tel Aviv. Of this popular leader and his last flight Moonitz observed, "He needed the money."

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Westchester County (N.Y.) *Reporter Dispatch*, July 12, 1948.
2. *Ibid*.
3. Interview, Norman Moonitz, by Author, August 1, 1971.
4. Slater, Leonard. *The Pledge*. New York: Simon & Schuster, Inc.; 1970. Slater indicated (p. 311) that a number of bases were hit in the Sinai area on this raid by Moonitz and Katz. In *The Israeli Air Force Story* Jackson named (p. 13) the Egyptian base at El Arish as one of their targets this evening.
5. Jackson, Robert. *The Israeli Air Force Story*. Gateshead, England: The Northumberland Press, Ltd.; 1970. Here as in a number of other instances Jackson's chronicle differed with Moonitz's recollections of the event; Jackson stated Kurtz's target was the main airport — not the palace.
6. Though Kurtz and his crew met no hostile fire over the Egyptian capital, Moonitz reported, as did Jackson (pp. 14-15), that the lead B-17 had no end of mechanical trouble during the entire trip. Over Cairo a number of Kurtz's crewmen fainted because their makeshift oxygen system had been inadvertently filled with impure welder's oxygen in Czechoslovakia.
7. Dayan, Maj. Gen. Moshe. *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*. New York: Harper & Row, Publishers; 1966, p. 80.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- a. Lichtman, William. "Kheyl Avvir." *Private Pilot* magazine, June 1971.
- b. O'Ballance, Edgar. *The Sinai Campaign, 1956*. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Inc.; 1959.
- c. Peltz, Stephen P. "Israeli's Air Force." *Air Pictorial* magazine, August 1963.
- d. Robinson, Donald, Editor. *Under Fire*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc.; 1968.
- e. Svenson, William. *Zanek! A Chronicle of the Israeli Air Force*. New York: Bantam Books, Inc.; 1970.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

James H. Farmer has been of invaluable assistance in obtaining artworks for recent and coming issues of the *JOURNAL* in conjunction with various artist Members of the Society. He also keeps his own hand in by teaching high school art and history classes, and an occasional sketch or drawing for AAHS. The pencil-sketch for "Patischim," on Page 249 is his; the Fall 1973 issue included a similar one for "Prelude To A Mission" as well as side view profile of the Corsair for the continuing series, "Art & The Airman."

*The identity of the three B-17's flown to Israel and the dates of activities in Florida relating to their acquisition are based in part on the correspondence of the U.S. Customs and Federal Aviation Agency personnel involved in the investigation. This and related correspondence are available through the Records Division of the FAA at Oklahoma City, OK.