

JEWISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY of Southern Alberta

A Tribute to Jay Joffe^z1

Based on the presentation made by JHSSA Director Therese Nagler at our AGM on October 23, 2006

The fact that we are assembled here tonight to celebrate the 16th annual general meeting of the Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta is, in itself, a tribute to Jay Lionel Joffe.

Jay, born in Drumheller in 1931 to the late Hattie Diamond and Noah Joffe, was the proud grandson of the first permanent Jewish settlers in Alberta – Jacob and Rachel Diamond, who arrived in the area in 1889. This fact, coupled with the knowledge of the community-building spirit of the older Diamond, may have sparked Jay’s quest for the retention of our collective history.

Jay was a resident of Calgary for most of his 75 years and an ardent volunteer for many organizations. The creative ability which enabled Jay a successful career in advertising also served the community well. His vision and motivational skills launched many projects within our city; such things as the presentations to the International Olympic Committee which paved the way for the acceptance of the Calgary’s bid to host the Winter Olympics in 1988; and the successful bid to Rotary International, which brought to our city the largest convention, to that time, ever hosted here.

Jay had served as a President of the Rotary Club of North Calgary, a President of the Southern Alberta Pioneers and their Descendants, a member of the Calgary Stampede Historical Committee – and author of their acclaimed “Parade of Posters”, an active member of the committee to form the Centre for Performing Arts, a board member of the Harry and Martha Cohen Foundation, a respected docent at the Glenbow Museum and so much more.

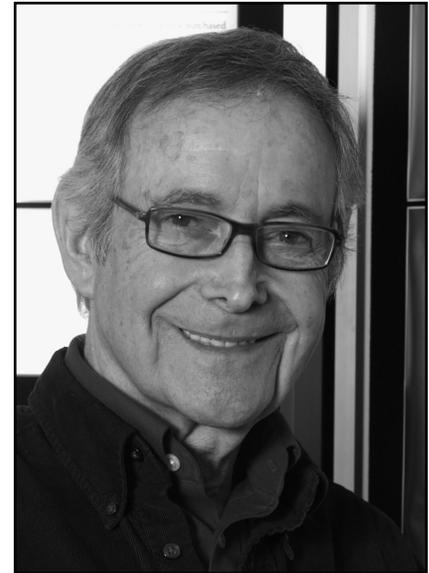
Once he retired, Jay’s passion for discovering and preserving history became inflamed. A visit to the Southern Alberta Pioneer’s building, where he saw his grandfather’s photo displayed on the wall, re-ignited his desire to learn more and to share

this knowledge. He sought to broaden it to include the entire Jewish community. The importance he placed on passing on the message of our early settlers derived from a premise which he had observed. Jay often said, “In general, when people speak of the early settlers, they are called ‘pioneers’; when referring to the Jews, they are called ‘immigrants’.” To dispel this myth, he devoted much time and energy.

No “ivory tower” projects for Jay – he felt that everyone should be a historian. Each family’s contribution could and should be documented and all of us could take part in weaving together our collective past. Jay Joffe was a humanist and that was his approach; he valued details concerning all our forefathers and loved unearthing their stories. History, he felt, was not something to be kept in boxes, but to be viewed and enjoyed by all of us. Participation was the key.

In 1988 this “fire in his belly” brought him to Calgary Jewish Community Council, where he revealed his dream of publishing a history of the community and of setting up an organization to do just that. He was convincing. After hearing Jay’s proposal, Hal Joffe, Jewish Community Council president, stated, “Our community is now a vibrant and active one, but we must ensure that our pioneers are remembered for their efforts to firmly plant cornerstones for us.”

Riki Heilik, serving as liaison from Community Council, assisted with providing some organizational records and direction to obtain grants and monies for this purpose. With a small provincial grant, Jay involved Trudy Cowan and Robert Paine as researchers and in 1989, *Shorashim (Roots)* was published. This project catalogued and summarized all known Jewish historical resources in Calgary and brought together fragmented information previously not readily available to the community.



Jay Joffe, 2005. Photo: Impressions by Switzer.

To quote Riki, “It was an inspiration to work with Jay. He was a visionary, a person with a dream, but also a pragmatist who had the skills to implement his vision. Some people “dream” and some “do”. Jay did both.”

His love of history and the desire to share it continued to grow and he struck a committee which led to the formal incorporation of our organization, The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta, in

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This issue of Discovery is sponsored by Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Post #2, Calgary. Their support is greatly appreciated.

A Tribute to Jay Joffe

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July of 1990. Jay Joffe was elected President. Among those at that initial meeting were Dinah Spindel, Mel Polsky, who became the financial secretary, Mel Nagler, named a vice-president, and Henry Gutman, who agreed to be treasurer – an office he holds to this day. Mel Polsky remembers Jay's excitement, which largely stemmed from his pride in his heritage and all that the early pioneers left to our area.

With his wife Barbara's constant love and support, he worked to leave a "yerusha" (legacy) for their sons, David and Jonathan. Jay elicited an entire community to dream with him. He sought to recognize the contribution of our early settlers and did so by honouring long-time residents of Western Canada at an annual meeting. It has become an established tradition, since 1991, for JHSSA to document and celebrate 80th birthdays with the presentation of certificates to our seniors who have reached this milestone.

An important early project was *Discovery*, the little paper we love so well. The first edition was published in the fall of 1990 with Sid Macklin as editor and Jay, associate editor. We're certain Sid will agree – we know where the inspiration lay. This exciting first edition featured articles about the Switzer family Reunion and "Recollections of a Woman Reporter in Banff in 1918". There also appeared an editorial by Jay Joffe entitled "Looking Back – Looking Forward", outlining the aims of the Society and inviting the community to contribute photos and stories for a planned future exhibit. The next many issues of *Discovery* saw several editors, with Jay co- or associate editor, nurturing the paper and promoting his vision. Jack Switzer joined Jay as editor in 1993 and has been at its helm ever since.

Dating back to the first and many subsequent issues of *Discovery*, Jay implored, coaxed and cajoled the community to collect material for our then limited archives; and to send us photographs of our early pioneers. This, then, was the inception of *Land of Promise*. At this point, material was coming in ever so slowly. The hoped-for response did not occur spontaneously and Jay was becoming slightly discouraged. A few of our group volunteered to go out and "get the goods". A short while later, after interviewing several families, Avrona Gutman and I presented Jay with some delightful photos and anecdotes. He was like the proverbial "kid in a candy store". Even more convinced of the possibilities – and

with infectious enthusiasm – he never looked back.

In 1992, with the interest and help of a variety of people, one of Jay's inspired dreams became a reality. *Land of Promise*, the Society's major exhibit of our history to 1945, had its debut at the Calgary Jewish Centre. Over 400 reproductions of photographs, documents and artifacts were displayed. *Land of Promise* was later enjoyed by the general community at Fort Calgary and in 1993 it also traveled to Edmonton and to Vancouver. *Land of Promise*, the book, followed in 1996 with the inclusion of numerous family histories and additional photographs. Jay Joffe's "labour of love" has brought dignity and pride to all of us in Calgary and Southern Alberta. The publication has been widely acclaimed and has a place on the shelves of libraries and universities throughout North America and beyond. One of Jay's proudest moments had to be when it was announced the 1,000 copies had been sold right out.

Meanwhile, other projects had been initiated by Jay and the JHSSA. Early on, Trudy Cowan held classes in how to conduct oral history interviews and so many of our elders' stories were told both on tape and on video. A committee was struck and material that might otherwise have been lost is now on record. This very important facet of the Society's work has recently been headed by Bertha Gold and the need for on-going recording speaks for itself.

Jay, in his "spare time", took a history course at the U of C and authored a paper on the Jewish Cemetery. This piqued his interest in that part of our history and a momentous project was undertaken. Under Jay's direction, the Society applied for a grant and hired two summer students. Thanks to Jay's perseverance, the Society has inventoried all the Jewish burial sites in Calgary, Medicine Hat and Lethbridge. Each gravestone was photographed and all inscriptions were translated into English. This is an on-going project which is updated every two years.

With one successful exhibit and book under his belt, Jay looked to the "future" promotion of our past. To celebrate our province's centennial, he envisioned a new exhibit telling the proud story of more than 100 years of Jewish contribution to life in southern Alberta. A steering committee chose the names of people, places and organizations which had made a difference in the development of our community and our province to be featured on 100 panels

forming our 2005 *A Joyful Harvest* exhibit.

Jay's introductory panel to *A Joyful Harvest* contains his heartfelt message, "...this exhibit shows that those early seeds have borne choice fruit. It illustrates that an ethnic community, regardless of size, can make a significant contribution to the social, cultural and economic welfare of the surrounding society within Canada's multicultural setting."

A Joyful Harvest became Jay's passion, his fulfillment and his joy. He worked tirelessly with his team of writers, Maxine Fischbein, Jack Switzer and Tyler Trafford and with the other volunteers, to bring this achievement to fruition.

Maxine reflects, "I have never met a more dedicated or tenacious human being in my life. The enthusiasm and fervour he had for this exhibit put his stamp on each and every panel and page. This is an absolute testimony to his effort and his love of Jewish history."

As we proudly recall, it was November of 2005 when the Lieutenant Governor of Alberta, the Honourable Norman Kwong, opened the *A Joyful Harvest* exhibit. The accolades to Jay and the Society were many, and we acknowledge that without Jay's magnificent vision and courage, it would not have been possible. *A Joyful Harvest* is now on display at the Provincial Archives in Edmonton until the end of January and will open at Calgary's Glenbow Museum in June, 2007.

Jay was awarded a 2005 Centennial medal for his contribution and, as with many other awards attained over the years, he was pleased to be recognized; but his real delight was in sharing the work with so many – and in having our story told.

The Society's second book, *A Joyful Harvest*, based on the exhibit, will soon be going to print. What a brilliant legacy to his family and to our entire community. Jay has touched each and every one of us. It was a privilege to be associated with his endeavours.

Samuel Coleridge, in one of his essays, penned, "The dwarf sees farther than the giant when he has the giant's shoulders to mount on." We were so fortunate to have had a giant in our midst. Jay was a gentleman, a gentle giant and his vision, his determination and his heart were, and will continue to be, a beacon for all of us. With his shoulders to climb on, we can see a great distance into the past and into the future. May his work and his spirit endure forever.

Israel Joseph Friedman – A Fallen and Forgotten Canadian Soldier Remembered

By Joe Spier

On October 28, 1918, Israel Joseph Friedman of Medicine Hat, Alberta was killed in action in France, a Canadian casualty of World War I. He was buried near where he fell, his name fading from memory, not recited at the slow cadence of Names, not listed as a Jewish War Veteran of Southern Alberta nor remembered by the few who remain from the once vibrant Jewish Community of Medicine Hat.

Friedman may have remained forgotten except for the intersection of a photograph and an inquisitive mind. Two years ago, Terence Etherton of London, England, while taking photographs in a military cemetery in the French village of Romeries, snapped two pictures of a headstone chiseled with both the Maple Leaf and a Magen David and inscribed "Sapper, Israel Joseph Friedman, Canadian Rly. Troops, 28th October 1918 age 29". Within the Magen David was carved, in Hebrew, the abbreviation for "May his soul be bound in the bonds of life".

Etherton, thinking that the photographs might have some value for the Jewish community of Canada, sent copies to Ralph Charad of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada, in Montreal. Charad, in turn, sent a letter to The Canadian Jewish News, inquiring if any of Friedman's relatives might be interested in having the photographs.

Charad had checked with Veterans Affairs Canada, who told him Friedman had enlisted as a resident of Medicine Hat, Alberta, and included this information in the newspaper enquiry. No relatives responded to the letter, but this writer saw it and became intrigued with its contents. I checked with some Medicine Hat old timers (my wife grew up in "the Hat"). None had any recollection of Friedman; nor did the Calgary Post of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada have any record of his service.

Who was Israel Joseph Friedman? The question led me through an odyssey of inquiry, taking me to the National Archives of Canada, Department of Veterans Affairs, Canadian Jewish Congress, Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Museum of the Regiments, Medicine Hat Museum, Medicine Hat News, the "War Diaries of the Canadian Railway Troops" and the manuscript "Canadian Expeditionary



Grave of Israel Friedman, Romeries Communal Cemetery Extension, France. Friedman's is the only Canadian grave among the 832 burials in the cemetery. Photo by T. Etherton, London, England; courtesy of Ralph Charad, Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Montreal.

Force 1914-1918", the official history of the Canadian Army in the First World War.

That question can now be answered, at least in part, although much remains to be answered, perhaps by other enterprising inquirers.

Israel Joseph Friedman was born on October 11, 1888 in Disna (Dziszna), Russia, the son of Joseph and Sarah Friedman. In 1897 the community, then in Czarist Russia, had a population of 6756; nearly three-quarters were Jews. Between the world wars, Disna Jews were Polish citizens. The town, "Judenfrei" since the Holocaust, is now in northern Belarus, near the border with Latvia.

Friedman was first recorded as being in Medicine Hat in 1914, as a school teacher. At that time his parents lived in Brooklyn, part of New York City, but how long they had lived there is unknown. When Friedman left Russia, and how he got to Medicine Hat, perhaps from Brooklyn, remains a mystery.

In 1914 Friedman enrolled in a Military Officers' training course in Calgary but for

whatever reason, perhaps physical limitations (he was short, slight of build and required glasses), did not pass and was deemed unfit for army duty.

By 1917, the Canadian Government, unable to maintain its manpower commitment to the war effort through voluntary enlistments, passed the Military Service Act, introducing mandatory conscription and the draft. At that time Friedman, a school teacher, was probably in an exempt class. Later, as the Government's need for reinforcements increased, standards dropped and some previously exempt groups were conscripted.

In April 1918 Friedman was drafted and ordered to report for military service in Calgary. He took his physical on April 13, 1918. His Medical History Sheet reports that he was 29 years of age, 5 feet 4 and 1/2 inches tall, weighed 135 pounds and had low vision requiring glasses. Not exactly one's image of a soldier but nevertheless deemed fit for duty. Incidentally, Friedman's eyes were blue, his complexion and hair were fair and his two lower wisdom teeth had been previously extracted.

He was enrolled in the army on April 29, 1918 and placed in the Canadian Railway Troops, as a Sapper, the lowest rank, equivalent to that of a private. His enrollment papers list him as being single and residing at 233 - 5th Street B, Medicine Hat. Friedman listed his religion as "Hebrew". On the day of his enrollment Friedman executed a Will, a requirement of military service, naming his father as sole beneficiary.

Canadian Railway Troops were responsible for the work of construction, repair, maintenance and protection of the railway service behind allied front lines, a dangerous line of work since the troops were subject to intermittent heavy shelling and rail lines were often mined by retreating German troops. Canadian Railway Troops were composed for the most part of men beyond normal military age, which would explain why Friedman was assigned to that unit.

While training in Calgary, Friedman resided in the Victoria Barracks. Although he was to be engaged at the front in work of a mechanical nature he, like all others, would have been trained as a fighting soldier.

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Israel Joseph Friedman

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By June 1918 Friedman's unit was ready for overseas service. On June 20th he, together with 4 officers and 444 enlisted men of the Canadian Railway Troop, boarded the troop ship SS Waimana and set sail for England.

Friedman's troop arrived in Purfleet, Essex, the English headquarters of the Canadian Railway Troops, on July 7, 1918, where they continued to be drilled and trained in anti-gas measures and musketry. On September 5th Friedman was sent to France and on September 9th was "taken on strength" by the 1st Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops who at that time were working directly behind Canadian and other Commonwealth front line troops preparing to attack Cambrai in northern France near her border with Belgium.

By the time Friedman arrived at the front the Allied victory was pretty well assured provided they could breach the formidable Hindenburg Line, a vast system of deep and wide trenches, thick belts of barbed wire, machine-gun positions, concrete bunkers and tunnels constructed by the Germans, who considered the line impregnable. The Allied strategy was to attack the Line at different points, one being at Cambrai.

The task of Friedman's Battalion was to push railway track forward to the advancing front troops as well as maintain and repair existing lines. The work was critical as success depended on keeping up supplies of food and ammunition for the troops at the front. The work was hard and arduous, the men putting in 10 to 12 hour days without rest. It was also dangerous, as the troops were subject to aerial bombardment, artillery shelling and hidden mines.

On the day Friedman arrived at the front, German aircraft bombed his Battalion. All indications are that the Battalion performed admirably, the Commanding Officer noting at the end of September 1918 that theirs was the "finest performance of any railway construction in France". Canadian Railway Troops were building rail at a rate that made European engineers gasp with astonishment.

Friedman, from the beginning, was thrown into the battle for Cambrai. For 47 days Canadian forces were engaged in that battle, fighting forward some 23 miles against very strong resistance, liberating 54 French towns and villages and finally smashing through the Hindenburg Line and liberating Cambrai. The ferocity

of the battles is evidenced by the fact that Canadians suffered 30,806 casualties, wounded, killed or captured.

Canadian troops then continued to push on for a further 35 miles and were engaged in the battle for the town of Valenciennes, at France's border with Belgium, where the war ended for Friedman.

October 28, 1918 was a fine day greatly appreciated by Friedman's battalion who had earlier been struggling in the rain and mud. It was also a day in which little action was reported. The Battalion spent the day repairing and cleaning track and bridges. Both contact and delayed action mines plagued them during this work.

By the end of the day Friedman had been killed in action. The precise manner of his death may never be known, but it is likely that he was involved in the dangerous work of de-mining and was killed during that process. This would account for the fact that Friedman was an isolated Canadian casualty.

Fourteen days after Friedman's death, Germany surrendered and World War I, the war to end all wars, was over.

Friedman was likely buried near where he fell and his remains moved shortly following the end of the war to his final resting place in the nearest Commonwealth war cemetery, the Romeries Communal Cemetery Extension, one of over 2,000 Commonwealth war cemeteries in France and Belgium.

Israel Joseph Friedman lies in Grave IV.B.II, beside 719 soldiers of the United Kingdom and 112 from New Zealand, he

being the sole Canadian. Of these, 129 were never identified; their headstones read "A Soldier of the Great War – Known unto God." Each headstone is uniform, regardless of military rank or civilian status.

Interestingly, Friedman's headstone lists his age on the date of his death as being 29. This was an error as he turned thirty 17 days before he was killed in action.

To tidy matters up, the Canadian government, as a final act, in 1921, mailed Friedman's service decorations, a memorial plaque and scroll and his unspent pay of \$42.44 to his parents in Brooklyn. Incidentally, Friedman's pay as a soldier was \$31 a month.

Friedman's personnel record was then archived, where it remained undisturbed for over 80 years.

Each Remembrance Day features the recitation of the Ode from Laurence Binyon's poem, *For the Fallen*, in remembrance of the war dead who gave up their today for our tomorrow.

"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning

We will remember them."

Israel Joseph Friedman "alav ha-shalom" is remembered.

Joe Spier is a Calgary lawyer and a former president of Calgary Jewish Community Council.

Canada's Military Archives Available to All

By Jack Switzer

The three military stories told in this issue of *Discovery* all made extensive use of readily-available archival information. The website of Library and Archives Canada (LAC) (www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet) provides access to a wealth of historical data, including copies of original enlistment forms (called certificates of attestation) of the nearly 600,000 soldiers who served in the Canadian Army during World War I. Look for "Soldiers of the First World War". It also refers to information on WWI nursing sisters, 1925 – 1935 immigrant arrivals, homestead grants from 1870 to 1930, several census records, and other government documents.

World War II service records can be ordered from the Textual Records Reproduction Services of the LAC. The person being researched must have died; living veterans can get their own records or authorize someone else to have them. Ordering information is on the site. Average cost is about \$20, pre-paid by credit card.

LAC (www.collectionscanada.ca/genealogy) also provides links to other Canadian military sites, some run by federal departments, others by historical societies and museums.

Please share any military data you unearth with us so that we can tell the story of the spirit, valour, and sacrifice of Canadian Jews.

Strul Rabinovitz – A Great War Casualty

By Jack Switzer

The memorial scroll honouring "Pte. Strul Rabinovitz, Canadian Infantry Bn.", with archaic letters below a Royal coat-of-arms and bearing the inscription of King George the Fifth, is a very impressive document.

Similar scrolls were sent to the families of all members of the Canadian expeditionary Force (CEF) who died in what was then called the Great War, and what is now commonly known as World War I.

And there was a medal, again sent to the families of fallen soldiers. "I join with my grateful people in sending you this memorial of a brave life given for others in the Great War." A message from Canada's Defence Minister echoed that of the monarch: "This cross is presented to you in memory of one who in the Great War died for King and Country."

The documents, decorations, and several letters were among materials found in the Calgary home of an early and prominent Jewish family, that of Dr. George Robbins, who died in 1973 and whose daughters recently vacated the house.

Israel (Strul) Rabinovitz was George Robbin's older brother. Strul Rabinovitz had been a soldier in the Canadian army in World War I, died in 1922 and is buried under a military gravestone in the old Calgary Jewish cemetery. Family lore passed down through the decades said that Uncle Strul had been a victim of a German gas attack in France, had never fully recovered, and then died a few years later, one of nearly 60,000 brave Canadians who died under enemy fire or from their war wounds.

The young Calgarian's military records (found in the National Archives of Canada) throw a different light on Strul Rabinovitz's army career. His death was unfortunate, but was not the result of any combat action. Rabinovitz was overseas, but never left England. He was a casualty, but only of overcrowded troop ships, unsanitary barracks, and the unhealthy atmosphere of wartime training and staging areas.

Rabinovitz was a conscript, drafted into the army in the politically-divisive Military Service Act of 1917. Strul was in no position to appeal his draft notice. His address on his enlistment document, dated December 19, 1917, is given as the provincial jail, Nelson, British Columbia. He was born in Bucharest, Romania, in

1894. His "trade or calling" was waiter. His next-of-kin was Abraham Rabinovitz of Calgary, his father.

We do not know why Strul was in BC or why he was in jail.

He did not report for service until May 17 of 1918, when he joined the British Columbia Regiment at Victoria, BC. As a member of a Canadian Reserve Battalion he sailed from Halifax to Britain in August of 1918. There he was stationed at Seaford, a large CEF training base south of London.



This is believed to be a photo of CEF soldier Strul Rabinovitz, c. 1918. Source: Robbins family.

The armistice was signed on November 11, 1918, but the CEF bureaucracy ground on. On November 19th Rabinovitz was sent to the Canadian training school at Bexhill, presumably to become an N.C.O. – a corporal or sergeant. In mid-December he left the program and returned to Seaford, still a private.

The winter of 1918-19 saw the British Isles suffer from cold weather, coal shortages, and the influenza epidemic. Morale was low in the camps, with men anxious to be returned to Canada. Rabinovitz, a late arrival, knew he would be among the last to be shipped home.

Like many others during the post-war wait, Rabinovitz chafed at the continuing discipline of camp life. Late in January of 1919, he served 15 days of detention for

insubordination. He was found guilty of "refusing to obey an order given by an N.C.O. and making use of filthy language to an N.C.O."

He received no pay during his detention, and we assume that the \$15 per month, the "separation allowance" that was normally sent by the army to his parents in Calgary, was also affected. (Privates were paid one dollar a day.)

Another blemish on his record was physical; Rabinovitz suffered from boils, painful and unsightly bacterial skin infections. Hot compresses helped, but on April 30, 1919 he was admitted to the Canadian General Hospital at Eastbourne. His diagnosis was furunculosis, chronic boils with a susceptibility to skin infections. He was then classified as a "casualty (U.K.)".

Strul Rabinovitz spent two weeks in the hospital, returning to the BC Regiment depot unit at Seaford on May 14. He returned to Canada on the S.S. Aquitania (repatriation sailing No. 85) in June of 1919, landed at Halifax, and was discharged in Toronto later that month.

We have little documentation on Strul Rabinovitz's post-war years in Canada. He returned to Calgary, and was soon diagnosed with tuberculosis. Over 8,000 Canadian servicemen contracted tuberculosis during the war years; the government set up fourteen sanatoria across Canada to treat them.

A 1920 letter to Rabinovitz, addressed to him in Lethbridge, stated that his disability pension might be reduced if he continued to abuse the rules of the sanatoria where he was being treated. "...these institutions have found it necessary to discharge you before the completion of your treatment."

Presumably Strul complied with the Pension Board's requirement. He was in the Central Alberta Sanatorium in Calgary in October of 1922, when he signed a will naming his parents as heirs. He died the next day, on October 17, 1922.

A year later the federal government had completed the processing of Strul Rabinovitz's documents. The Department of National Defence classified his death as caused by a service illness, and sent the official memorial items – the scroll, medal, etc. to Toba and Abraham Rabinovitz.

The Canadian Legion helped Strul's parents to secure, in 1932, a survivor pension of \$20 a month.

Paul Belkin's Last Mission

By Jack Switzer

Paul Belkin, an RCAF officer, is one of ten Calgary Jewish servicemen who died in World War II. Details of his last mission, on the night of October 9, 1943, have recently come to light, and give us brief glimpses into the life, and death, of a young Canadian warrior.

Tragically, the fatal mission, a B-24 bombing run over Rangoon, Burma (now Myanmar), was also Paul Belkin's first combat flight in Asia. A Japanese fighter plane intercepted the Royal Air Force (RAF) bomber and shot it down. All eight crewmen died. Belkin was 22 years old.

Paul Belkin came to Calgary at the age of six in 1927, emigrating from Russia with his parents and older sister Lily. On arrival, he was known as Pinea Belkin. The family ran a small confectionery. He attended classes at both the Peretz School and Talmud Torah, went on to McDougall School and then to Crescent Heights High School.

Belkin worked as a clerk at Alberta News and continued to be an active member of the Calgary AZA chapter. In 1941 he enlisted in the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF). Paul took basic training at Central Flying School in Trenton, Ontario, and was sent to No. 2 Bomber and Gunnery School in Mossbank, Saskatchewan, for instruction as an air gunner.

In 1942 Paul Belkin, then a Flight Sergeant, was shipped to England and joined an RCAF bomber squadron. The

JHSSA has a photo of 21-year old Belkin on leave in London with a friend from Calgary, Army Sergeant-Major (later Captain) Jack Edelson. He recalls that "Pinea" as he was known in Calgary, was a shy and quiet young man whose nerves were greatly stressed by his tour of duty as a rear-gunner in the RCAF's nightly bombing missions in Europe.

A year later Belkin was assigned to RAF bomber squadron No. 159, which flew its American-made four-engine B-24 Liberator bombers from Palestine to India for action against the Japanese occupiers of south-east Asia. Inclusion of Canadians – and other British Commonwealth fliers – in RAF units became relatively common as the war progressed.

RAF Squadron 159 was based at Salbini, near Calcutta in eastern India. Combat missions began in November, 1942, and included bombing, mine-laying and reconnaissance as close as neighboring Burma, and as far away as the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). Its major objectives were to disrupt Japanese military operations in occupied territories and to prevent an invasion of India.

Paul Belkin joined 159 Squadron in the summer of 1943, and took part in Liberator training flights until weather conditions and aircraft availability made attack flights possible. His crew flew aircraft BZ841 "Q", a Mark III Liberator, the most advanced model available. BZ841 had no nickname or nose art. (Belkin and his crewmates are shown in a photo in front of another Liberator, with "Dumbo

Delivers" painted on the fuselage.)

The crew of eight included one Canadian (Belkin,) a Rhodesian, and six men from various parts of the British Isles. Its commander was Squadron Leader Louis Patrick Massey, 25, decorated twice for his bravery in European skies. Co-pilot was Ben Blue, a well-known British band musician. Paul Belkin was a beam gunner, manning a 50-calibre Browning machine gun at an open port on one side of the bomber.

Liberator BZ841 took off from Salbani at 1800 hours on October 9, 1943. Their target was Migaldon Airfield, a major Japanese air base on the north side of Rangoon. Two other Liberators from their squadron were on the bombing assignment, but they did not fly in formation on night missions.

Events over Rangoon were described in a Japanese propaganda newspaper, *Greater Asia*, printed in English for the many anglicized Burmese. Information also came from Japanese archival sources, assembled by American researcher Matt Poole, who has been studying the fate of Allied airmen in south-east Asia.

In a front page story on October 12, 1943, *Greater Asia* crowed: "Enemy Night Raid on Rangoon Frustrated – One Bomber Shot Down by our Fighter"

"The Hayabusa (Falcon) piloted by Sergeant-Major Daisuke Nishizawa distinguished itself in shooting down one of the two enemy planes, Consolidated B-24s, which came over Rangoon about 1:00 am (Nippon Time) on October 10. Sergeant-major Nishizawa intercepted them immediately and shot down one of them 12 kilometers north of Rangoon by machine-gunning thrice at it in a fierce dog-fight lasting only 30 seconds.

"Surprised by this defeat, the remaining one dumped all its bombs on a nearby paddy-field and flew away. Thus the much boasted enemy bombers, claimed to be invulnerable with heavy arms, perished in only 30 seconds dropping over Rangoon in the form of a fireball."

Japanese records record a more accurate and equally chilling story: "Captain Hideo Miyabe ... led three other Ki-43 Oscars into the air to intercept three incoming B-24s. Nishizawa spotted one of the B-24s as it was caught by searchlights at a height of 2000 meters.

"He tried a head-on attack against the B-24. When it rose to avoid crashing with his Ki-43, he sent a burst into the belly of the bomber. The B-24 was on fire.



Paul Belkin, lower left, with his crew in front of Liberator bomber **Dumbo Delivers**, India, 1943. Photo courtesy Matt Poole, Wheaton, MD.

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Paul Belkin's Last Mission

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Nishizawa zoomed upward ... and next made a head-on attack. The B-24 exploded in the air at 300 meters." (Nishizawa, the Japanese fighter pilot who downed Belkin's bomber, was killed by air-gunner fire from a 159 Squadron Liberator about a month later.)

Remains of the BZ841 crewmen were buried by the Japanese, and re-interred after the war in the Rangoon War Cemetery. Belkin's grave, with a Star of David, stands out, as do several other Jewish burial sites. Because the crew was initially reported as "missing" and had no known graves, their names, including that of Paul Belkin, are found on the memorial to missing Far East Commonwealth airmen at the Kranji War Cemetery in Singapore.

Also on the Singapore airmen's



Grave marker of Paul Belkin, Rangoon Commonwealth War Cemetery. Source: Matt Poole, Wheatland, MD.



Albert Margolis

WARRANT OFFICER (Class II) ALBERT ARTHUR MARGOLIS

WARRANT OFFICER ALBERT ARTHUR MARGOLIS, R-60404, R.C.A.F., of Calgary, was reported missing after air operations and presumed dead on September 9, 1942, according to an official announcement.

Enlisting in the air force in September, 1940, Flight Sergeant Margolis trained as observer and was posted overseas in July, 1941. He was attached to the R.A.F. Immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor he was promoted to flight sergeant and transferred to India. He was stationed at various action stations in the Pacific.

The son of Mrs. Tillie Margolis of 604 Centre Street, Flight Sergeant "Sherry" Margolis was born in Calgary in 1914. He was a member of the B'nai B'rith. Prior to enlistment he operated a delicatessen store.

Albert "Sherry" Margolis: RCAF, c. 1941. Source: Canadian Jewish Congress, "Jews in World War II, Part II, Casualties."

memorial is the name of Albert (Sherry) Margolis, 28, a Calgarian who was listed as missing after air actions and presumed dead on September 9, 1942. Sherry Margolis was a member of RAF 62 Squadron, which had lost most of its aircraft in the Japanese attacks on Singapore and Sumatra. The group was re-equipped in India with twin-engine Hudson bombers. We have no details of Margolis' last mission, but we assume he was a crew member of a 62 Squadron light bomber.

Despite the many aircraft lost to accidents and enemy gunfire, allied bomber crews suffered proportionately fewer casualties in the South East Asia Command than did their colleagues in the European war theater. Any allied servicemen who became Japanese prisoners were treated very harshly, and fared far worse than did German prisoners-of-war.

Canadians like Belkin who were part of RAF squadrons were not the only Canucks in the Far East. The start of the Pacific war saw 2,000 Canadian soldier at Hong Kong either killed or taken prisoner. (Signalman Hymie Greenberg, of Spedden, near Edmonton, died in the Japanese siege of Hong Kong on December 10, 1941.) Canadian fighter pilots took part in the 1941-1942 RAF defence of Singapore, Malaya, and Burma.

An India-based RCAF squadron flew bombers and Canso flying boats. Two Canadian squadrons flew Dakota (DC-3) transports "over the hump" from India to

Burma and China. Two Royal Canadian Navy warships saw action in the Far East.

The 5,500 Canadians who served in the Burma campaign during World War II were each awarded a Burma Star medal. Nearly 5,000 more Canadians served in other South and South East Asia areas, mainly Hong Kong and at less hostile bases in India and Ceylon.

Paul Belkin was promoted to the rank of Pilot Officer shortly before his fatal flight to Rangoon, but may not have been officially informed of his new status before BZ841 was shot down.

The loss of Paul Belkin and Sherry Margolis is noted on the Jewish military cenotaphs erected by the Calgary post of the Jewish War Veterans of Canada. Their names are also found on the Wall of Honour at Crescent Heights High School, which both attended.

Along with several hundred other Jewish Albertans, they willingly enlisted in their nation's armed forces and participated in the very perilous work of defeating cruel enemies. Our Jewish community should know their stories, and should regard their war service with pride and respect.

Sources: Matthew J. Poole, Wheaton MD; Jack Edelson, Jewish War Veterans of Canada, Post no. 2, Calgary; Michael Dorosh, ; Veterans Affairs Canada; S, Dunmore: "Wings for Victory; Canadian Jews in WWII"; JHSSA archives.

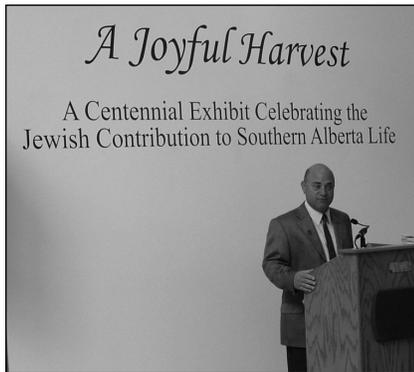
JHSSA News

Thank you to our Casino Volunteers

A hearty *yasher koach* goes out to Annette Kolinsky and her team of volunteers who helped to make our June casino such a success. The funds raised through their effort will enable us to continue our preservation and educational activities.

Jewish Book Fair Event – November 19, 2006, 7:30pm

The JHSSA is pleased to co-sponsor a talk by Calgary native, Douglas Century, as part of this year's Jewish Book Fair at the Calgary JCC. His book on boxer Barney Ross was published earlier this year.



Sheldon Smithens at the opening of *A Joyful Harvest* in the Esplanade in Medicine Hat, July 23, 2006. Photographer: Theresa Munch.

A Joyful Harvest exhibit travels throughout Alberta

The JHSSA exhibit, *A Joyful Harvest*, visited the Esplanade Arts and Heritage Centre in Medicine Hat, July 22 – September 16, 2006. Sheldon Smithens, representing the JHSSA at the opening on July 23rd, expressed his pleasure that the exhibit was available to the Medicine Hat community. Museum Curator Donny White reported that 1,850 visitors

JOIN THE JHSSA

Help record and preserve our local Jewish heritage.

Family membership – \$36

Single membership – \$18

Institution/Corporation – \$36

Patron – \$50

Benefactor – \$100

passed through the gallery during the Medicine Hat showing.

The next stop for *A Joyful Harvest* is the Provincial Archives of Alberta in Edmonton. The exhibit opened on October 25th and will remain at the PAA until January 26, 2007. All former Calgarians residing in Edmonton will find the exhibit specially interesting.

Finally, plans are well underway for the opening of the exhibit at the Glenbow Museum in June, 2007. The exhibit will remain there throughout the summer so visitors and all those Calgarians who missed the 2005 showing will have a chance to view *A Joyful Harvest*.

Galt Museum to feature Auschwitz exhibit

The Galt Museum in Lethbridge will feature "Auschwitz: The Eva Brewster Story" from January 27 to April 29, 2007. Eva (1922-2004) moved to southern Alberta after the war and wrote about her Holocaust experience in her book, *Vanished in Darkness* (1984).

Mona Libin, 1930 – 2006

The JHSSA lost a good friend with the passing of Mona Libin in June. Mona, together with her husband Alvin, provided support for all our society's major projects through the Alvin and Mona Libin Foundation. Her interest and support will always be remembered.

Historic Calgary Week

JHSSA was pleased to host 40 people attending the session about "Calgary's Historic Torah Scrolls" presented by

Rabbi Zev Friedman and Agi Romer Segal at the House of Jacob – Mikveh Israel synagogue in July as part of this year's Historic Calgary Week.

JHSSA Tribute Cards

Our dedicated volunteer, Carey Smith, has been busy all summer sending out tribute cards. Cards for all occasions can be ordered from Carey at 253-5152. If you are unable to reach her, please contact our office at 444-3171.



The cake served by Stella Sengaus and family to the 225 visitors at the Sengaus Centennial Farm Celebration in Rumsey, July 29, 2006. It was iced with wheat and an image of the early Sengaus home and bore a sign "100 years of farming." It is shown here flanked by photos of Elias and Victoria Sengaus and servicemen Willie and Tom Sengaus. Willie's widow, Stella, reported to the JHSSA after the event, "It was a celebration of a life time...our door is always open to anyone who would like to drive out." Photographer: Reva Kislik. Photo courtesy of Zena Drabinsky.

DISCOVERY

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The Editors welcome submissions for publication relating to areas of Calgary and Southern Alberta Jewish History. All articles should be typed, documented and sent for consideration.

Statements of fact or opinion appearing in *Discovery* are made on the responsibility of the authors alone, and do not imply the endorsement of the Editors or the JHSSA.

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Donations gratefully accepted.



A Joyful Harvest – The Book

The Jewish Historical Society of Southern Alberta is planning to publish a book in June 2007, based on our highly successful exhibit, *A Joyful Harvest*. The exhibit celebrated the Jewish contributions to southern Alberta in honour of the province's centennial in 2005. This book will serve as a fitting complement to our first effort, *Land of Promise*. By becoming a donor for this project, you can have the opportunity to leave a legacy for your future generations.

The following are our donation categories for the book:

Benefactor – \$5000 or more

Patron – \$1000

Supporter – \$500

Friend – \$360

Sponsor – \$180

You and your offspring, whose names you have provided, will be listed in the book on our **Legacy Sponsors Page**. For all categories you will also receive one copy of *A Joyful Harvest*. Additional copies may be purchased from our office.

List the names of your children, grandchildren and if you are fortunate to have them, your great-grandchildren on the form on the back of this page, and return it to our office; or send all the required information in an email to jhssa@shaw.ca. Please ensure that we have your information by December 31, 2006 in order to meet our publication deadline.

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Receipts will be issued for your donation, minus the cost of the book. For further information or for other sponsorship opportunities please contact the JHSSA office at 444-3171 or email to jhssa@shaw.ca.