



THE volunteer CONNECTION

General Aharon Davidi – The Real Story



The General Aharon Davidi we know as Sar-El's founder and chairman is a quiet-spoken, humble, grandfatherly man with white hair, 3 children, 11 grandchildren and 1 great grandchild. He has a twinkle in his eye, and a very open and gracious manner. His resume, however, is crammed with heroic military actions as a legendary Israeli paratroop commander, decisive leader, and forward-looking educator.

He was born in Israel in 1927, the son of a Ukrainian immigrant family. From the age of 15, he served with the Haganah and Palmach. In the 1948 war, he fought in the southern front with the Negev Brigade where he met Hassida, his future wife.

Pursuing his military career, he volunteered in 1953 for the untested paratroopers as a company commander. His unit was very active in retaliatory actions and daring missions during 1954. In 1955, he was decorated for valor for actions in Gaza. His service as a Lt. Colonel during the 1956 Suez situation is revered in the history books.

In the Sinai Campaign, Lieutenant-Colonel Aharon Davidi was a regimental commander and participant in the bloody battle of Mitla Pass. In 1965, Colonel Davidi was designated the IDF's first Ka'tz'ha'r, Senior Paratroop and Infantry Commander, and served in that capacity until 1968.

During the 1967 Six Day War, Davidi commanded a special unit focused on the capture of Sharm-el-Sheik. He then replaced Col. Eitan (Rafal), wounded in action, and brought the forces to the Suez Canal.

In 1970 Davidi returned to civilian status. He went to London for 3 years to earn his Masters and Ph.D. degrees from the University of London with a focus on the cultural problems of Chinese minorities. Starting in 1974, Davidi taught geography at Tel Aviv University.

In 1977, he moved to the Golan Heights and became Director of Community and Cultural Activities of the Golan and Jordan Valley. This is where, in the summer of 1982, in the midst of the "Peace for Galilee" Campaign, Brigadier General (ret.) Dr. Davidi founded Volunteers for Israel with an initial 650 volunteers. In the spring of 1983, the program was formalized as a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization called Sar-El, or The National Project for Volunteers for Israel. Over 100,000 volunteers from 35 countries have participated since 1982.

Today General Davidi, who lives in Ramat Gan, remains the active Chairman of Sar-El and is totally dedicated to maintaining Jewish continuity. His vision has been rewarded by a life well lived, and he is adored by the madrichot.

Confused by VFI, Sar-EL, and CVI?

So many organizations, much confusion. This article attempts to clarify the common objectives of VFI, CVI, Sar-El, and others who support Israel.

Volunteers for Israel (VFI) is a U.S.-based, nonprofit organization responsible for recruiting Americans for volunteer service in Israel. VFI's mission "is to connect Americans to Israel through volunteer service". This goal is achieved by partnering with military and civilian organizations that enable volunteers to work side-by-side with Israelis to promote solidarity and good will among Israelis, American Jews, and other friends of Israel." VFI's web site is www.vfi-usa.org.

Canadian Volunteers for Israel (CVI) has a similar mission from their headquarters in Toronto. Their web site is www.serve.com/CVI. Volontariat Civil (U.P.I.) provides a similar service in France. There are about twenty other worldwide contact points for the Sar-El program in Israel.

Sar-El is the Hebrew acronym for *Sheruit Le'Israel*, meaning "Service for Israel." As the National Project for Volunteers for Israel, Sar-El is a nonprofit organization based in Israel. Their newly revised goal statement is to contribute to the promotion of Jewish continuity, create a cultural and educational exchange between the Diaspora and Israel, and partner with non-Jewish supporters of Israel in a mutually beneficial experience. Sar-El headquarters is in Tel Aviv and their web site is www.sar-el.org.

“ There are no words to express how deeply this VFI experience affected us. ”

Debby Appel

VFI Offices in North America

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VFI Regional Alumni Meetings

PHILADELPHIA — A quarterly alumni meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, March 15, starting at 7:00 p.m., at the Klein JCC, at Red Lion Rd. and Jamison Ave. in Northeast Philadelphia. Our speaker is Lawrence Husick, Esq., an expert on terrorist tactics and counter strategies as applied by Israel and England. For information, call 610.617.4048.

The spring meeting is on Tuesday, May 16, and will feature a presentation on Jewish humor.

ILLINOIS — The Midwest regional alumni meetings are held the second Tuesday of every month, except April and October, at 8:00 p.m., at 8610 Niles Center Rd., Skokie, Ill. For information, call 847.677.3817.

SAN FRANCISCO — Reunion and alumni meeting are scheduled for February or March. For details, call 510.839.2900 or e-mail Warren Welch at vfi5000@hotmail.com.

LOS ANGELES — For the alumni meeting schedule, call 323.661.7898 or email Lou at lariay@aol.com

VFI Welcomes New Members

Sidney and Faye Bass — Virginia Beach, VA

Michael Beker — Silver Spring, MD

Daneille Rothman — Washington

Azriel Eisenberg — Lincolnwood, IL

Laurie Frazier — Manteca, CA

Jacob Fiddler — Skokie, IL

David Pitchon — Flushing, NY

Elise Sheppard — Houston, TX

Ashley Sokol — Scarsdale, NY

Jessica Polsky — Boca Raton, FL

VFI President's Comments

It is all about the "U"!



For the past 23 years, VFI, as an all-volunteer organization, continued to focus on its mission, "to connect people to Israel."

VFI has had many challenges. Our biggest challenge in 2006 is to reverse a long trend of declining numbers of volunteers. We are focusing our energies to confront this challenge.

The good news is that we have experienced a modest increase in our volunteers during 2005. I am particularly gratified that we have seen a four-fold increase in the number of young

people participating in our program.

We look to **YOU**, our former volunteers, for both financial and recruiting support.

YOU are our most effective recruiting tool. The majority of new volunteers come to the program because they heard about the program from someone like **YOU**. We need "U" to help us to help and strengthen Israel.

Please contact us, if "U" believe in our mission and wish to help.

To help VFI, call 866.514.1948, or email me at jaherz@vfi-usa.org.

— Josef Herz,
National President of VFI

VFI National Board Meeting



Fifteen board members and a few volunteers gathered in Maryland in December for a three-day facilitated workshop. Sar-El sent Israel Geva, its Managing Director, to work with us at the meeting. Members paid their own way and volunteered their time to address the critical issues facing the Volunteers for Israel organization. These included: (1) declining numbers of American volunteers (2) a severe lack of fundraising, and finally, (3) the lack of outreach and recruiting done by VFI.

This was a watershed meeting for VFI. Fortunately, everyone at the meeting agreed that VFI's mission, to connect American Jews and other friends of Israel with Israelis, is very important. The group focused its efforts on developing strategies to make that happen.

You'll be hearing more about our \$100K fundraising campaign and our intensified efforts to keep in contact with former volunteers. We'll be asking your help to recruit new volunteers.

Contact George Iversen, National Coordinator of recruiting, to discuss ways you can help with recruiting. George can be reached at: 973-761-0549 or george.iversen@verizon.net.

Contact Barry Stein, co-chair of the fund raising committee, to discuss ways you can help with fundraising. Barry can be reached at: 215-646-6381 or steinb@comcast.net.

—Joan Engel

In Memoriam for Saul G. Hornik



We sadly note the passing of Saul G. Hornik, a dedicated Board member and passionate supporter of VFI. Saul was, for 12 years, the Mayor of Marlboro, NJ.

Saul was a fine, caring soul and a wonderful friend to Israel. Once he met you and got to know you, he was a friend for life. In addition to raising large sums of money for Israel, he was also president of the Friends of Sar-El.

Saul's devotion to Israel stands out. He was honored in 1995 by General Davidi, and in 2004 by the Israeli Consulate, which recognized his contribution. The VFI family expresses its sorrow to his family at his passing.

Weekend Activities

Several quality weekend tours are scheduled on demand for volunteers. Yair's Tours includes a guide, lodging, pickup, and round-trip bus. The tours start Friday morning, end Saturday evening, and cost a bargain \$140 plus discounted site admissions.

The Jerusalem and Masada tour has its overnight in Jerusalem. The North of Israel tour has its overnight at the Sea of Galilee. The Negev and Bedouins tour has its overnight in Bedouin tents in the desert. For additional details, see <http://sar-el.org/touropps.html> and speak with Pamela.



Editor's Corner

The *Volunteer Connection* is dedicated to the rich experience inherent in volunteering in Israel. We are seeking your story. It will be read and your photos seen by untold members down through the ages in this newsletter. The deadline for the Spring Issue is April 1, 2006.

If you are not receiving e-mails from VFI updating you on activities, it is because we do not have your current e-mail address.

To correct this today, simply send an e-mail to info@vfi-usa.org.

SUBSCRIPTIONS ARE FREE UPON REQUEST to info@vfi-usa.org or toll free 866.514.1948.

—**Steve Plotkin**, Editor, steveplotkin@erols.com, 1340 Brighton Way, Newtown Square, PA 19073, 610.358.5366, Fax 610.361.8896.



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VFI is an independent affiliate of Sar-El, the National Project for Volunteers for Israel, which is a nonprofit, nonpolitical organization with headquarters in Tel Aviv (Yafo), Israel. Telephone: 011-972-3681-7442. Web site: www.sar-el.org.

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—Steve Plotkin, Editor, steveplotkin@erols.com

—Regina Stinger, Graphic Designer

We Serve Many Israeli Installations



At any time, several hundred international volunteers may be serving on over a dozen IDF bases, hospitals, and other sites. The IDF bases are mostly logistics centers for the army, navy and air force. They are scattered from the top to the bottom of Israel and each has a distinctive personality and work load.

Volunteers are sent where they are requested by the base commander. Although we do not get to choose our base, there is provision for requests but without guarantees.

Your presence as a volunteer is appreciated by the IDF as you improve the morale of the soldiers just by being there, talking with them and supporting them. Most work is performed along side or supervised by IDF members and may change frequently. Discussing life experiences and future plans with soldiers is just as important as the work we do.

Programs get underway about every three weeks on a Sunday or the following Monday as shown on the 2006 schedule on the back. The nominal participation is three weeks ending on the third Thursday. Volunteering for two weeks is also possible.

Be sure to see the web sites for frequent announcements of special programs and events.

Did you know the SAR-EL work program includes?

FREE
accommodations, plus

FREE
kosher meals, plus

FREE
work uniforms, plus

FREE
lectures, possibly guided trips,
and immense personal satisfaction.

Volunteer Program Schedules for 2006

Programs start only on the specific Sundays (or following Monday) shown below. Volunteers can join for two, three, or more weeks.

February 5 to February 23, February 19 to March 9

March 5 to March 23, March 26 to April 13

April 23 to May 11

May 14 to Jun 1, May 28 to June 15

May 21 to May 26

June 11 to Jun 29, June 25 to July 13

July 2 to 20 — International Youth Group

July 9 to July 27, July 9 to 21 — Family Group

July 23 to August 10 — International Youth Group

July 23 to August 10

August 6 to 24, August 20 to September 7

September 3 to 21

October 15 to November 2

November 5 to 23, November 26 to December 14

December 17 to Jan. 4, 2007, December 31 to Jan. 18, 2007

See the website for frequent special programs.

www.vfi-usa.org

Interesting Web Sites

www.vfi-usa.org —

Volunteers for Israel web site

www.sar-el.org — Sar-El web site

www.25waystohelpisrael.com — 25 Ways to help Israel

www.mideasttruth.com — Mideast Truth

www.jpost.com — Jerusalem Post

www.serve.com/CVI

— Canadian Volunteers for Israel web site

www.sarel.telarian.com — Blog with photos

VFI Officers and Board for 2006

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THE VOLUNTEER CONNECTION

WINTER 2006

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