

TOP NEWS IN BRIEF

U.S. Jew killed in Iraq

Cpl. Mark Evin became the first known U.S. Jewish military casualty of the war on Iraq. [Page 1]

Israeli attack kills 5

At least five Palestinians were killed in an Israeli attack in the Gaza Strip. Tuesday's missile attack, which killed some Hamas activists, also wounded scores of others. It was the first such attack since the war in Iraq began last month.

Tel Aviv closes down war room

Officials in Tel Aviv closed down an office that was set up to deal with possible Iraqi attacks on the coastal city.

The municipality cited budgetary constraints in making the move, the daily Ha'aretz reported.

Any subsequent emergencies will be handled by the regular municipal hotline.

The move, in a city that was targeted by Iraqi Scud missile attacks in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, reflects the general sentiment in Israel that an Iraqi attack at this stage of the war is unlikely.

But Israeli defense officials so far have refused to lower the level of national alert, saying they are waiting for a clearer picture to emerge from the U.S.-led war against Iraq.

Group: Coalition should try Iraqis

Iraqi war criminals should be tried by the U.S.-led coalition and not by an international court, a Jewish group says. In a letter to U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Simon Wiesenthal Center said the United States should establish a Nuremberg-style court.

Handing Iraqi leaders over to the United Nations or the International Court at The Hague would "only politicize the trial and provide a platform for those who opposed the war in the first place."

Insurance lawsuits filed

Lawsuits were filed to reclaim unpaid Holocaust-era insurance policies.

The lawsuit filed last week against the Italian insurer Assicurazioni Generali in a California court came after a New York judge said lawsuits could be filed on the matter, even as a commission established to settle claims dating from World War II goes forward.

WAR IN IRAQ

First known Jewish casualty talked of enlisting in the IDF

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — As a young boy, Mark Evin insisted on wearing a yarmulke to the Boy Scouts, and later talked of enlisting in the Israel Defense Force.

Now, even without his body, the family of the first known Jewish casualty of the war on Iraq is sitting shiva, the Jewish mourning period, at their home in Burlington, Vt.

On April 1, Mindy Evin got a call from her son, a Marine sniper scout, who was somewhere south of Baghdad.

"It was the first time I'd spoken to him since he was deployed" to Kuwait from Camp Pendleton, Calif., in February, she said.

"You can always tell his mood by his voice, and he sounded good," his mother added.

Two days later, Evin, 21, a corporal with the 3rd Battalion, 4th Regiment of the Marines' 1st Division, was killed in the town of Kut by Iraqi machine-gun fire.

"He was a macho kid with a gentle soul," his mother told JTA this week as she was preparing her house for the shiva.

"He was like a sabra," she added, using the term for a native-born Israeli.

Like most Israeli men, Mark seemed to know he was destined for military service from a young age.

"He was always interested in the military, ever since he was a child," recalled his maternal grandfather, Rabbi Max Wall, 87, of Burlington. "He had some kind of inborn feeling that he should serve his country; it was just a question of which uniform he should wear."

Evin and his grandfather grew very close over the years.

Wall, now rabbi emeritus of Ohavi Zedek Synagogue in Burlington, served as a chaplain with the 9th Infantry during World War II.

Wall, who was born in Poland, told his grandson stories of how he went to Belgium, France and Germany and worked with displaced persons.

"We had a great time together. He loved stories about World War II," Wall said. "He saw my chaplain uniform, and I gave him all my medals."

After meeting Israeli soldiers when he became a Marine, Evin's mother said, he talked of going to Israel one day and serving in the Israeli military.

"I am sure it mattered to him that he was doing something that is probably helping Israel right now," she said.

His parents separated when Evin was six, but his father, Michael, of Rockville, Md., returned and lived with his son from the ages of 8 to 12.

When Evin was born, "he looked like an angel," his father recalled.

"He was extremely beautiful, almost shockingly so. He had long, blond golden hair, which as an infant he wore down to his shoulders."

Though Evin did not grow up deeply religious, relatives said, the extended family celebrated Jewish holidays and Evin had his Bar Mitzvah at the Conservative synagogue his grandfather led.

Evin "always would say that his zayda was the chief rabbi of Vermont," Mindy Evin said.

Rabbi Joshua Chasan, who currently leads Ohavi Zedek, recalls that Evin attended Hebrew school in U.S. Army fatigues.

"There's no doubt about it, Mark did it his own way," Chasan said. "Vermont is a

MIDEAST FOCUS

Israeli: Abbas to fight terror

The newly appointed Palestinian Authority prime minister intends to fight terror and resume diplomacy, an Israeli intelligence official said.

Mahmoud Abbas, known as Abu Mazen, also plans to fight corruption within the Palestinian Authority, Maj. Gen. Aharon Ze'evi said Tuesday at a Knesset committee meeting.

But Ze'evi also said that Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat may undermine Abbas.

In addition, Ze'evi noted that Abbas, like Arafat, wants a Palestinian state in the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip and eastern Jerusalem, and he insists that Palestinian refugees and their descendants should have the "right of return" to their former homes in Israel.

Israel-Europe ties a concern

Germany's foreign minister said he is deeply disturbed by the state of Israel-Europe ties.

Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer, who met Tuesday with Israeli President Moshe Katsav in Jerusalem, called for steps to improve relations, including visits by Israeli officials to Europe.

Fischer also called on Israel to boost Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Mahmoud Abbas' position by easing restrictions on Palestinian civilians.

Fischer is holding talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders during his visit to the region.

Israeli Arab named to court

An Israeli Arab was named an acting Supreme Court justice.

Observers believe that if Salim Joubran's trial period until the end of the year is successful, he will be appointed to a permanent post on the court.

Joubran's appointment fulfills a promise Yosef Lapid made when he became justice minister earlier this year.



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pretty liberal community, and this kid went into the Marine Corps."

When Evnin joined the Boy Scouts as a young boy, his mother said, he insisted on wearing a yarmulke, even though he was not religiously observant.

When a fellow scout said the blond-haired, blue-eyed Evnin did not look Jewish, his mother recalled, "He turned around and said, 'You don't look Christian!'"

As he grew older Evnin developed a wonderfully sarcastic sense of humor, his mother said, and loved "The Simpsons," "Seinfeld" and the British claymation characters "Wallace and Gromit."

Evnin became active in sports at South Burlington High School, playing lacrosse and football. He also liked snow boarding and cross-country skiing.

He also spent a good deal of time at the school's computer imaging lab.

Evnin graduated in 1999 before attending basic training at Camp Lejeune, N.C.

"Before he was deployed, he and his Marine buddies were reading the Harry Potter books," Mindy Evnin said. "I love that they were reading all this sweet stuff, because they look like such killers."

His father and others said it was the Marines who gave Evnin a sense of direction in life.

"He metamorphosized from a gentle, loving kind of child to a hard, serious, focused man," his father said.

His family also called him a natural leader. Chasan saw that side of the young man last summer when his 13-year-old cousin, Sarah Antonoff, died of a brain tumor.

When the extended family gathered for shiva, "Mark had really come into his own. He helped the little kids be at ease, playing with them," Chasan said.

He apparently took those qualities into the Marines.

His crucial role, according to San Francisco Chronicle reporter John Koopman, who rode with Evnin, was to spot Iraqi snipers and to drive a U.S. sharpshooter, a sergeant major and Koopman toward Baghdad.

It was from Koopman's satellite phone that Evnin made his last call to his mother.

At 1 p.m. on April 3, the 800 to 900 soldiers in their convoy got into a firefight with Iraqi soldiers.

Koopman told The Burlington Free Press that Evnin was shooting back after coming under fire when he was hit, apparently in the abdomen.

His wounds did not appear life-threatening, and the two even joked about how Evnin would get sponge baths from the nurses, Koopman said.

But he died while being evacuated by helicopter.

"It sounded like Mark didn't know he was dying, which I was glad for," Mindy Evnin said.

Two days before Evnin died, Rabbi Irving Elson, a chaplain with coalition forces, had contacted the family for information in hopes of bringing Evnin matzah for Passover, his mother said.

But instead of preparing for the holiday, the family decided to set Wednesday as the first day of shiva.

Evnin's body was returned to Dover Air Force Base in Delaware this week, but Mindy Evnin said she couldn't wait for a funeral to start the shiva.

"It's taken so long for me to have a body," she said.

When Evnin is buried, the funeral at Ohavi Zedek will be conducted with full military honors. He will be interred at the Hebrew Holy Society Cemetery in Burlington with a military headstone.

That's what "he would have wanted," Mindy Evnin said. □

Reform inaugurate writing prize

NEW YORK — The Reform movement will present a new prize in Jewish literature.

The prize, including an award of \$5,000, will be presented to a promising Jewish fiction writer.

The Reform Judaism Prize for Jewish Fiction will be presented for the first time in November.

The application deadline for the prize is June 15; more information is available at www.uahc.org/rjprize. □

JEWISH WORLD

Groups hail cross-burning ruling

Several Jewish groups hailed Monday's Supreme Court decision upholding the constitutionality of a law against cross burning.

"Today's decision confirms what we have argued repeatedly, that threats are not constitutionally protected free speech," said Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League.

The ADL filed an amicus brief on the case with several other Jewish organizations, including the American Jewish Committee, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, the National Council of Jewish Women and Hadassah.

The brief argued that cross-burning statutes do not violate free speech because cross burning is a symbol of intimidation and instills fear.

Conservative school recognized

An Israeli graduate school affiliated with the Conservative movement received accreditation.

The move regarding the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem is being seen as a victory for the Conservative movement in Israel, where it is struggling for equal footing with the Orthodox establishment.

Kansas cemetery vandalized

A Jewish cemetery in Wichita, Kan., was vandalized over the weekend.

More than 40 headstones at the Hebrew Cemetery were knocked down or destroyed Sunday night or early Monday, according to Rabbi Pincus Aloff of the Wichita Hebrew Congregation. The desecration followed by several hours an early interfaith commemoration of Holocaust Memorial Day, which occurs later this month.

Brazilian Jews fight missionaries

Brazilian Jews recently formed an anti-missionary group.

The main goal of Judeus Pelo Judaismo is to fight the increasing activity of Christian missionaries who want to convert Jews in the South American country.

According to Sao Paulo-based activist Jose Papo, who is the founder of the Jewish group, a Web page soon will be available, and the group will distribute information on how it plans to react.

German fined for Holocaust denial

A lawyer was fined for denying in a German court that Jews died in Auschwitz.

On Monday, Jurgen Rieger was fined the equivalent of more than \$3,000 for trying to submit evidence denying the Holocaust in a 1996 defense of a neo-Nazi. Lawyers for Rieger said they would appeal the ruling.

WAR IN IRAQ

Jewish groups help Iraqi Jew flee country, gain refuge abroad

By Rachel Pomerance

NEW YORK (JTA) — Imagine Iraq on the verge of war, where Jews are seen as collaborators with the U.S.-led invasion.

Now imagine the plight of a Jew planning his escape.

Iraq places severe restrictions on citizens who want to leave the country — and the few remaining Jews are not permitted to leave, according to the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.

The kingdom's ruthless "deterrence" policies are well-known: CBS News' Barbara Walters recently interviewed an Iraqi expatriate who said she had seen, in an Iraqi jail, a torture device for live humans akin to a meat grinder. But for "Jacob" — not his real name — a shy man in his mid-50s who has spent a lifetime in Baghdad keeping quiet about his Jewish identity, staying was riskier than leaving.

Jacob's recent retirement as a government engineer meant two things:

- He could now obtain a passport, a privilege previously forbidden because of the nature of his work.

- He may, however, have outlived his usefulness to the regime, he told the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

Given the history of anti-Semitism in Iraq, and the widely held view in the Arab world that the war is being waged at Israel's behest, Jacob thought he might be in danger when war broke out, a HIAS source said.

With Iraq distracted by the buildup of U.S. troops along its borders, Jacob crossed the frontier just days before America began raining bombs on the country.

His wish was to join his sister and her family, who fled Iraq two years ago for a Western European country.

The Jewish groups who spoke to JTA did so on condition that details that might endanger Jacob or his family would not be revealed.

Copying their escape route through a neighboring country, Jacob posed as a non-Jewish Iraqi and lived with a Christian Arab family once outside Iraq.

He immediately informed his sister of his whereabouts, and she relayed the information to HIAS. A week later, an undercover HIAS official met Jacob in his country of refuge and put him on a flight to Europe, where he now waits in an apartment secured by HIAS and JDC.

HIAS is seeking special refugee status for Jacob from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees so that he can reach his hoped-for destination.

Jacob could get the special refugee status within a week, but it might take him several months to actually move, as his country of destination has a lengthy procedure for processing refugees, according to HIAS.

In the meantime, the JDC is supplying Jacob with food and other necessities.

Jacob has updated Jewish agencies about the location of the remaining 35 Jews in Iraq, and HIAS and JDC are concerned for their security.

Many of the remaining Jews are elderly and live in or near Baghdad's synagogue to protect the Torah and other Jewish artifacts. The agencies are monitoring the Jews' situation, but the chaos of war has prevented them from taking the Jews out of Iraq.

However, the agencies have notified U.S. officials of the Jewish community's location so it can be protected during the war — and ultimately so that the Jews, all of whom apparently want to leave Iraq, can be removed. □

Bnei Menashe to have seder

JERUSALEM (JTA) — A group in India that says it is descended from a lost tribe of Israel is receiving Passover provisions from Israel. The Amishav organization has sent matzah and kosher-for-Passover wine to the Bnei Menashe in northeastern India. An Amishav official will conduct a Passover seder for the group. □

Population survey delayed again as UJC appoints new review panel

By Joe Berkofsky

NEW YORK (JTA) — The release of the latest national Jewish population study, already beset by technical woes and delays, will be postponed once again pending an independent review, according to its sponsors.

The United Jewish Communities, which is bankrolling the \$6 million study of American Jewry that has been billed as the most comprehensive ever, said it has appointed an independent panel to review the study.

The National Jewish Population Survey 2000-2001, which was originally scheduled for release last November, is now not expected to be made public for at least another four to six weeks.

"We wanted to make sure the data [were] in good shape and that we do whatever we could" to ensure its validity, said Bernard Shapiro, who led an earlier internal UJC inquiry into problems plaguing the study.

Heading the new review will be Mark Schulman, president of the polling and research firm Schulman, Ronca & Bucuvalas Inc.

Shapiro and UJC officials said independent reviews were "not uncommon" in major demographic studies such as the U.S. Census.

The decision to appoint another review was criticized by some of the original experts involved with the study, one of whom called it a "strange" move.

Anticipation has built around the NJPS ever since the previous study in 1990 found that 52 percent of Jews married in the previous five years had married non-Jews. Many observers were waiting to see how the intermarriage numbers changed.

In the years since, many Jewish institutions have launched efforts to reach out to the intermarried, while others focused on strengthening the identity of affiliated Jews.

The new survey included many questions related to identity and affiliation.

Last October, the central federation body released some population statistics from the latest NJPS, then pulled the full study from its annual General Assembly in November amid reports of technical problems that may have affected the population figures.

According to the initial findings, there were 5.2 million Jews in the United States, down 5 percent from the 1990 NJPS, due largely to a rising median age and falling birth rates.

Between the release of those findings and the scheduled release of the full report, the UJC revealed that the firm Roper Audits & Surveys Worldwide, which conducted the study's field research, lost codes used to screen many of the 175,000 people telephoned for the survey to determine if they qualified to be among the 4,500 Jews ultimately surveyed.

That and other glitches meant the overall population was likely undercounted by 1 percent, while several subgroups such as non-Jews living with Jews were overestimated, those involved with the study said.

After these problems surfaced, the UJC named Shapiro, vice chancellor of McGill University in Montreal, to lead an internal inquiry into what went wrong.

In January, Shapiro and a six-member investigative panel issued their findings, castigating Roper ASW for the technical problems and citing "a range of serious issues of conception, of data collection and of analysis" in the project. At the time, Shapiro

said none of the problems appeared serious enough to block the study and that it would likely be made public around Passover.

This week, however, Shapiro said he and UJC decided to appoint a new committee of demographic experts to conduct an independent review of "the technical aspects of the project, the execution of the project, what was actually done and how."

The review, which he said was to "give the NJPS one more look," will include examining the study's statistical sample, the weights used to calibrate the results and a comparison of the data with similar studies.

Shapiro said he was never brought on to the project to conduct such technical work.

He said the technical advisers originally involved with the study were "not appropriate" choices to conduct a final, independent review because they were already involved with NJPS.

Ironically, Schulman, who will lead the new review, heads the firm that was among the losing bidders for the contract to conduct the latest NJPS.

Other members of the panel include Stanley Presser of the University of Maryland, Eugene Ericksen of Temple University and Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center.

For his part, Schulman said his objective is "not to point fingers" but to determine if "the estimates are as good as they can be. Our committee is just a fresh pair of eyes."

The review will also explore the "strengths and limitations" of the NJPS data and make recommendations about the methods used to gather the data for future studies, said Schulman, who is president of the American Association of Public Opinion Research.

Schulman said he was not sure how long the review would last, but said, "It's not weeks, it's months, but no more than that. I do think we can bring this process to a closure."

But some members of the National Technical Advisory Committee, a volunteer panel of experts the UJC had appointed to consult on the decennial Jewish study and other federation research, questioned why the organization was bringing in yet another committee.

One such member, Egon Mayer, who was one of several who opposed delaying the study in the first place, said his panel had already analyzed the NJPS data, making yet another review superfluous and "strange."

By redoing the technical advisory committee's work, the review panel "will undermine the credibility of the people who did this work and of the data itself," said Mayer, who is also director of the North American Jewish Data Bank at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

Vivien Klaff, who co-chairs the NJPS advisory panel and who participated in the internal inquiry, also criticized the decision to delay the project again.

While the decision to bring in an outside review panel was not inappropriate, Klaff said, NJPS has already "gone through a number of validity checks" and "very little has been found which was out of the ordinary."

The longer wait "just adds another level of aggravation and tension," he said.

But Lorraine Blass, a senior planner for UJC who has worked on the population study, said the independent review was necessary in order to clear up any questions lingering about NJPS.

"We are fully committed to having a fully transparent report that will address all of these issues that have come up in the last couple of months, including missing data," Blass said. □