

INTERVIEW WITH MR MENACHEM PINKHOFF  
by Haim Avdi, The Hebrew University  
INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY JEWRY  
1960 - 05 - 23

Q. - I suggest we review the history of the Underground Movement of the Palestine Pioneers, starting from the summer of 1942.

A. - Before we start I would like to mention that when discussing the Underground Movement of the Palestine Pioneers, the smuggling of our members to Spain is only one subject among many others. Very little has been published about it so far: in the book published by the "Kibutz Arzi" about the Ghetto war and in the Underground Fighters book. But now to the point:

We started our organisation on the 15th of August 1942. That day we illegally sent in a single operation 60 young people living in the Youth Aliyah home into hiding. Till then the Palestine Pioneers in Holland were not engaged in such activities. Although among the people who tried to go into hiding individually there were also some of our members, they did this on their own. Till the summer of 1942 the "Hechalutz" did not encourage this course of action, because the expenses involved in the saving of individuals were too big to offer a solution for the community as a whole. We were also afraid that this might disintegrate the social life of the Palestine Pioneers.

note A1 : Q. On which date the Germans required the Loosdrecht farm to be disbanded? Where all the people hidden the same date or was this carried out gradually?

A. This question concerns a subject, which I did not describe in detail in this testimony. At the end of June 1942 I understood, that the German authorities decided to start to transfer all the Jews in Holland to the transit camp in Westerbork. As I considered this to be the first step of an overall deportation to the extermination camps I thought about ways how to escape from it. In the middle of July a plan was drawn up and at the same time we came into contact with Joop Westerweel, of blessed memory, and his friends. The first link with these non-Jewish friends was a Jewish neighbour of mine by name of Mirjam Waterman, today my wife.

I confided my plan also to one of the members of the supervisory council of our establishment, Mrs. Erika Blueth (today a Herzlia resident). She was working for the "Joodse Raad" in Amsterdam for the "Aussenstelle Expositur", the department in charge of the contact with the SS. I asked her to keep her eyes open and to inform us immediately by phone, using a secret codeword, when "call-up's for presenting yourself for transport" would be issued for the members of our educational farms. We received the warning on the 15th of August 1942. This was a bit earlier than expected and actually we had not yet found hiding places for everybody. Still we immediately started the evacuation of the establishment on Thursday night and by early morning on Sunday it was empty. We were careful that during this time no news about our disappearance got around to the neighbouring villages.

We should remember, that the attitude of the "Hechalutz" - including the German movement - towards individual rescue attempts was a very special one and this should be recorded. Already in 1941 people started individually to try to escape to Switzerland. I remember e.g. that a certain group of members suddenly disappeared, who happened to be of Polish origin. They proved by this that their instinct to judge the real situation correctly was very well developed.

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Shushu observed in 1941, that the rats were leaving the ship. He did not mean to denigrate, but to state what people with a sound instinct feel in the moment of danger. However these were individual actions and you can hear about them from Alfred Frank, a lawyer or from Oscar Zangen, both living today in Haifa, who escaped to Switzerland.

The young people from the establishment in Loosdrecht were hidden - and this was the first organised illegal action of the "Halutz" movement in Holland. It was carried out in cooperation with a group of Christians like Joop Westerweel. The small group of members dealing with this action met from time to time. While preparing the collective going into hiding (from about the 15th of July, till the 15th of August 1942) we still considered going undercover as a solution, which might be valid till the end of the war.

However the practical experience during the first weeks of hiding showed us that going into hiding was a dubious matter and a temporary one. This was also the way it was presented to part of the Non-Jews who were prepared to take in people, but were afraid to agree to long term hiding, even if it was technically possible. Once it was clear that hiding was temporary, we understood that it would become a Sisiphus job to provide each time new hiding places for so many people. As a matter of fact in the fall of 1942 we had to find many more places of hiding for the people from other establishments, where young people were being prepared for emigration to Palestine. That led us to look for ways to smuggle people abroad.

We suffered two outstanding defeats during these first months :

1) We tried to make contact with existing professional smugglers, of which we were told, that they were prepared to smuggle people to Switzerland for considerable sums of money. Joop heard of an address and received information. We contacted these people in a coffee house in Amsterdam. The contact was far removed from the source - it were Jews, who had been smuggled themselves and they made the contact for us. As we were short of funds we managed to arrange that each Jew, who had means, would pay for himself and for a young person without means. Through lack of experience and believing that we were on the right track, we chose the best among the children, among them my brother. It turned out later that after passing the Belgian border they were led straight into the arms of the Gestapo. Only one girl returned. All the others were taken to Birkenau, the extermination camp of Auschwitz.

note A2 : Q. How did you know that the escape was a defeat ?

A. One of the arrested people managed to smuggle a note out of prison in Brussels, addressed to the school of Joop Westerweel in Rotterdam. By chance the note was received while the directive council of our underground group was meeting - and we were stunned.

This blow taught us the lesson not to trust any organisation, not entirely in our own hands. That is why we sent Shushu abroad.

Q. - Did Shushu go abroad only at this stage ?

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A. - No, he went abroad earlier, may be even in September 1942. I remember a meeting with Joop, during which the division of tasks and assignments between Shushu and me was discussed. Joop suggested somehow, that I should deal with abroad, but we decided to have Shushu do that, because he looked more Jewish, than I did and his heavy German accent, when speaking Dutch, would give him away immediately in Holland.

From his first trip abroad Shushu brought along "Marching orders" (Marschbefehle). On this occasion we saw for the first time German military and para-military documents required for labourers engaged in the construction of the "Atlantikwall" along the sea coast of Belgium and France. The technicalities of our smuggling operations were linked somehow to the loopholes in the system of travel permits for those labourers. This is however a subject on its own and will be dealt with in a different paper.

note A3 Q. Can you perhaps remember how Shushu obtained the "Marschbefehle"?

A. He brought them back from his first trip. I do not remember who gave it to him.

I remember that the two first journeys to the south were linked to starting this project. During Joops first journey he met a smuggler on the Belgian side of the border, receiving from him instructions how to cross the border secretly. Shushu made his first trip to Belgium and France, if my memory serves me right, after Joop returned and he put into practice the lessons Joop had learned. Once in Belgium and France he contacted the illegal organisations of the local "Hechalutz" (Palestine Pioneers) in Belgium and France. He brought back copies of German "marching orders" and explained their importance and how we might be able to make good use of them.

In the same period and also looking for escaperoutes to the south we came into contact with Karel Kaufman, a Dutch Jew, who later turned out to be a dangerous spy for the Germans.

note A4 : Q. What papers did Kaufman supply to Shushu ?

A. I do not remember exactly in which ways Kaufman helped him. Perhaps one can ask Joops widow about it. (added by hand: Amongst others he helped with "Marschbefehle"; crossing the Dutch Belgian border)

When Joop Westerweel was caught in the beginning of 1944 and fell into the hands of the Gestapo, he was confronted with a criminal file against him, containing serious accusations regarding acts he never had committed, like murdering a German policeman and links with the communist underground. The information was supplied by Karel Kaufman.

Q. What happened in the end with Kaufman ?

A. I do not know what happened to him. I only know, that before the war he was a well known Jewish student.

Shushu met in France members of another Dutch Jewish organisation for immigration to Palestine, more linked with the General Zionist movement, especially "Hevrat Olim".

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note A5 : Q. What type of a movement was "Hevrat Ovdim" ? Where was it founded ? Was something published about it ?

A. They all had been members of the "Joodse Jeugd Federatie" (Federation of Jewish Youth"), of which I too have been a member. I believe not much has been written about this movement and that is a pity. It included some important personalities. If you are interested to do something in this field you should contact Dr. Melkman, who is in charge of the department for cultural activities of the Education Ministry. He was a member of this organisation and I believe he is interested that it should be properly documented. Also Dr. Yaacov Arnon (Translators note: previously his name was Jaap van Amerongen), Director general of the Ministry of Finance used to be an active member of this movement.

Q. What kind of an organisation was this "Halutz" movement ?

A. To this "Halutz" movement belonged the Dutch founders of Kibutz "Huliot". (Translators note: today Kibutz "Sde Nchemia")

Shushu met Arnon Kohan, who introduced him to his French contacts and helped him with information and the correct forms for travel to southern France.

note A6 : Q. Where did Shushu meet Arnon Kohan ? With whom did Arnon Kohan bring him into contact ? Did he immigrate to Israel ?

A. I do not remember exactly. I believe that in the testimony of Shraga Angel, living in Yokneam, this is mentioned. He should know about this and I suggest strongly you should talk with him, because he will be able to shed light on many details of the early period of the escape to France. I am personally also very interested that he should refresh my memory on this point. Please let me have when the time comes the results of your research.

There was a "scale of difficulties" for the different borders. The most difficult border to cross was the Dutch-Belgian one. The Nazi occupation in Holland was the severest, being both a military and a civilian administration, penetrating into the smallest corners of civilian life. The Dutch Belgian border was much more severely watched, than the Belgian French frontier and just as exacting as the patrolling of the border between a Nazi occupied country and a neutral territory, like Spain.

I crossed the borders many a time and when I reached Belgium and France coming from Holland I breathed more freely and I felt with each step, that the danger was much smaller in Belgium, than in Holland and in France still smaller than in Belgium. This was also due to the fact that civilian life in Holland was much more strictly organised and regulated than in France and the German occupier simply put the existing civilian framework to good use.

Therefore the biggest hurdle in organising the escape was how to take the people out of Holland. In the first stage we used the marching orders; documents, which were issued by the organisation of contractors working for the Germans, to allow their labourers to travel for home leave and back. These documents allowed to pass the Belgian French border without special problems, but not the Dutch border.

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That is why, we initially took the young people across the border "the green way", which means by way of the fields without papers. The system was to travel with the escapees carrying faked Dutch papers to the railway station nearest to the border and from there we walked along winding paths to passage points, we learned from professional smugglers. We passed the border on foot and accompanied our wards to the nearest Belgian railway station and from there we directed them to Antwerpen. I did this work together with other members of the group.

In Antwerpen we passed the travellers on to the next link in Belgium, which was carried out mainly by Kurt Reilinger. With him worked Willy, whom I met later in Bergen Belsen and who died there. We met once a fortnight in a coffee house in Antwerpen. I passed the young people on to them and returned to Holland the same way or by another route which was shorter, but more dangerous.

At that time I used three routes:

1) Budel - this place was found by Joop Westerweel himself, who was also engaged in this smuggling operation. He continued to use this route even when he did have proper papers. Somehow I didn't have a good feeling and after passing a few times by this way, I found another crossing point.

2) Ginneken - this was in my eyes a better choice. I used to ride on bicycle to the railway station in Breda, taking every time two people with me. Walking next to my bicycle I reached a spot, some kilometers from the border. From there a small path started to very near the border. At this stage I went ahead, followed at a distance of about 50 meters each by my companions, till we reached a small smugglers den near the border. Usually we came here during the lunch break of the border police and watched carefully that no patrol was about. We got experience in carefully observing what happened around us. I used to leave my bicycle in this house and accompany my people on foot into Belgium to the nearest busstop and then return myself to Holland.

The last time I passed this place, three people were with me. The second person did not keep track of the person in front of him and he did not keep to the path. The third person followed him and they walked straight into the hands of the Gestapo. The two of us arrived safely at the smugglers den and there we received news that our friends had been caught and that they had given away secrets. The Germans strengthened the guard at the border and we had to wait till after dark to cross the border. I abandoned this bordercrossing when it became clear, that the Germans had intensified their vigilance.

Once, returning to Holland at this spot, I was stopped by Dutch border guards. However I could give them good reasons for being there and they released me immediately. I do not want to go into details and tell you about all kind of strange and particularly dangerous situations we went through - because this is certainly not your intention.

3) The westernmost spot at the border of Brabant with Belgium at Putten, between Antwerpen and Rotterdam in a wooded country.

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One of our members who helped at the time with the bordercrossing was Heinz Frankel, who is living today in the USA. He did not look Jewish and spoke with a clean German-Austrian accent, which he used brazenly. He was caught in Holland, while escorting a large group of people carrying papers of Dutch labourers returning to their work for German military authorities in France. I was among the organisers of this group, which also included two German deserters.

We could not find out to which prison Heinz was taken after he was caught and we tried everything with the help of an advocate. When I was arrested myself and transferred to the penitential compound in Westerbork I found myself face to face with him. Influential people in the camp managed to have me sent to Bergen Belsen instead of to Auschwitz and I could choose two people to accompany me and I chose Heinz. (This is a story by itself, to be told on its own). We were together in Bergen Belsen till the camp was evacuated. We were in a train, which was liberated in Troebitz. Heinz left the train and hid in a wood. He was saved and we met again after our return to Holland.

Q. Do you remember the names of your companions, involved in the organisation of passing the Belgian border ?

A. I cannot remember all of them. Among them were Zippy and Hans Floersheim, David Neis and others. Part of the names are mentioned in the testimonies collected by "Beth Lohamei Haghettaot".

Q. Only in the first stage you needed the "green route" to smuggle people out of Holland. How did you take people out later ?

A. During the second stage it was possible to pass the Dutch Belgian border using forged papers. I cannot say exactly since when, but I believe it was somewhere in the fall of 1943. It is also possible that the two stages did overlap for a certain period of time, according to circumstances. The refinement of this technique is due to a person, not a member of our organisation whom I met in Paris. We had gone to school together and he was called Abraham Hildesheimer. (translators note: Mirjam Pinkhof thinks, that the correct name is Hildesheim)

note A7 : Q. Please give more details about your meeting with Abraham Hildesheimer in Paris. When took this meeting place ? How did you get there ? Did you travel with the special purpose to make new connections ? How did you meet ? How did Hildesheimer know about this new technique ? What happened to him before your meeting and after ?

A. Abraham Hildesheimer. I met him once or twice and we exchanged experiences. He wanted to know about a certain Jew in Holland, who was in contact with the German authorities and it was not clear whether he was a traitor or not. On the other hand he helped me giving me additional explanations regarding how to obtain the papers to cross the border, as I described already. A. Hildesheimer was not a Palestine Pioneer and was not a member of our organisation. I do not know where he is today, perhaps he is in Holland. This can be checked, but I do not consider this point very important.

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It was not possible to forge the papers, required for Dutch labourers crossing the Dutch border, because they were printed on watermarked paper, similar to banknotes. These papers were issued by a special office of the "Kommandantur" (the office of the Commanding Officer of the German army) in Paris. The labourers would present themselves to this department with marching orders on behalf of their employers and stamped by the local military authorities in order to receive the special permit for crossing the Dutch border, which was then attached to the other papers.

Our procedure was as follows: We prepared in Holland each time for 6 people forged identity cards. We could use for this purpose a stock of documents, not valid any more in Holland, but this fact was not yet known in France. I folded them several times till they were small enough to be hidden between the bottom of my butter container and its aluminium outer cover. In Paris members of our organisation would add marching orders from different employers. They would type the marching orders themselves on German forms.

note A8 : Q. From where did you obtain the forms for "marching orders" of the contractors ?

A. These forms were important, the whole "show" was based on them. As I explained these forms were emitted by the employer and they were validated by the local German military office. The most important feature was therefore the famous military validating stamp with the German eagle. These forms were not standardised and at the beginning some of them were stencilled. To obtain the proper stamp was more difficult, but we managed to obtain it as well.

Part of such a marching order was a request to the German Commanding Officer in France to allow the holder to travel to Holland and back. Our Paris members would stamp the papers with German seals of office.

note A9 : Q. Perhaps can you remember how the stamps were obtained ? Through which of the French members in Paris ?

A. Regarding the stamps in France, please contact again our member Yael Burshtein, who is certainly the most knowledgeable in this field. She really had a set of German stamps. This also helped me once, when the German field police checked the stamps on my papers with a magnifying glass. I myself drew forged stamps on Dutch documents.

After all this I would take marching orders for myself and 5-6 other people to the department issuing the home leave permits, according to the forged identity cards, we had prepared in Holland.

I told them that my colleagues had asked me to arrange for the papers, while they were sightseeing in Paris. The danger of this method was, that the office could phone to the employer for confirmation, that he had indeed issued these particular home leave requests. I knew beforehand that preparing the documents would take time and I used to leave the documents at the office and return for them in the afternoon, a short time before my train to Holland was due to leave.

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Sometimes it happened that the right forms were not available at the office and the clerk had to type them herself - or she would give me empty forms and once she praised me that I had brought clean identity cards, while others brought her, she said, crumpled and worn out ones. She of course did not know, that my identity cards were forged and that the ink on them was brighter.

note A10 : Q. The matter of the empty forms you received from the clerk is not clear : Did you receive blank stamped forms and did she leave you to fill them out yourself ?

A. This is a detail pertaining to the organisation of German military offices and it is as follows: At a certain stage we took the original forms (see note A8) to the office of the Commanding Officer in Paris. There they would type the details on standard forms, which would be filed in that office. Then they would issue the bordercrossing permits. At a later stage they streamlined the set up and asked the employers to fill out the standardised forms, which beforehand were only typed in the office of the Commanding Officer. The case I mentioned happened, when I did not know yet about the reorganisation and still arrived without the standard forms. However the chief clerk did not suspect me at all and she only complained that because of this "irregular behaviour" I am causing her superfluous work and on that occasion, without me asking for them gave me a big batch of standard forms. Afterwards Yael Burshtein simply filled out directly these standard forms on our typewriter.

So I received the permits to cross the Dutch border and I would again fold them many times and return by night train to Holland. In Holland we provided these papers to our people pretending that they were just finishing their home leave and returning to their place of work in France. Now the crossing of the border did not present particular difficulties any more, although it remained always dangerous to cross the Belgian-Dutch border in direction of Holland.

It happened to me several times, that I had to pass a strict examination by high officers of the German border police. In my bag I had the pile of forged documents. I was saved by the fact that my own papers were excellent and that I seemed to be unconcerned and gave matter of fact answers to all of their questions.

Q. Which members were dealing with the typing of the marching orders and were responsible of the job ?

A. They were living in the Hotel de Rose in Montmartre and some other hotels and the responsible person for the whole operation was Kurt Reilinger. His closest collaborator was Yael Burshtein. She was arrested and had later very difficult experiences and was tortured by the Germans. Today she is in good condition and will be able to supply many details about their activities. Her present address is Ramat Remez 116, or you can contact her in the local dispensary of the Sick Fund, where she is working. Other assistants: Willy and Windmuller.

Q. Did your external appearance not hinder you in your activities ?

A. No, it did not. What helped me were self confidence and audacity I acquired by being in danger all the time.



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Q. How many people were smuggled this way from Holland to France ?

A. I know that 70 people reached Palestine still before the end of the second world war. I suggest that you ask Lodi Cohen in Kibutz Huliot, he will be able to tell you much and so does his wife. You may also ask Lore Suesskind in Kfar Szold.

The number of people who remained as labourers, working in France itself, was also 50 -70. Therefore I estimate that the number of people smuggled into France was somewhere between 120 and 150. Perhaps you can ask Yael Burshtein about this number.

My main work within this illegal organisation was in Holland itself. I took part in smuggling people to France only once a fortnight. This work was accomplished under enormous strain and it was very dangerous and I could not carry it out more than once in two weeks.

note A11 : Q. If you visited the German office in Paris once a fortnight, were you not afraid they would become suspicious ?

A. It is true that this was a serious danger. Obviously they knew me and they thought I was an employee of the contractor group, dealing with administrative matters. In my papers figured instead of the words "home leave" something like "journey in the performance of his professional duties"

It was not easy to provide for our people in France financially, there were travel, food and living expenses. It happened several times that our people were called to Toulouse in order to cross over to Spain and the plan did not work out. Then they had to return to the north to different places and all this costs money. They could do without money for food during the trip, thanks to papers stamped with a special German seal, entitling the traveller to a free trip and to provisions from the German army canteen.

The use of forged papers reached the point, where Kurt Reilinger, as he told me in Paris, travelled with a group of our people to Vichy and openly crossed the demarcation line between occupied and unoccupied France. This too by virtue of papers stamped with the same military seal. In their train travelled a group of real labourers, who did not have the same papers. The police arrested them, because they did not have their papers stamped with the seal our forged papers had and the false impression was created that only our forged paper seals were the correct ones...

note A12 : Q. How did you obtain the special seal, you mention, entitling you to free journey and use of the German army canteen ?

A. See answer in note A9. It is true, that this was a special seal and sometimes it caused us trouble, because we were not really German soldiers in uniform, but only civil workers employed by the security forces. According to the letter of the law only soldiers could travel using the special seal, allowing free journey. The lower ranks of the military police normally did not know these details of the law, but the officers did very well. The permit to allow the army canteens did not cause any difficulties in France. I repeat: the difficulties about validity of stamps were much smaller in France, than near to the Dutch border, even in matters of the German army the French relaxed ways (laissez faire) left their mark.

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Q. When were you arrested ?

A. On the 22nd of April 1944.

And one more detail about the false forms we were using: We also received them by means of a counterfeit request to the military printing shop, who produced them: so we received a number of forms, which did have already the required seal.

Q. Where did you live during your stay in Paris ?  
What type of papers did you have ?

A. I was living in a military hostel without payment, with the help of a billeting order issued by the military office to which I went to obtain the bordercrossing permits. In my papers I was a young military engineer, working for the airforce. This gave me the equivalence of a certain military rank and therefore I could, e.g., eat without having to pay in expensive restaurants together with Kurt Reiling. We were the only people in civilian clothing, amongst hundreds of German officers.

Q. How many members of the "Hechalutz" were taken care of by the underground organisation ?

A. About 150 members were smuggled into France, among the about 250 members hidden in Holland. It was obviously lightening the burden for those who had to stay in Holland, that so many others were taken out to France.

Q. When did the option of escape to Spain come up for the first time

A. From the beginning. Joop and Shushu were looking in principle for possibilities to carry out this operation all the time.

note A13 : Q. Was the Spanish option at the beginning a theoretical desire only, or did you have practical proposals to carry it out ?

A. There were already at the beginning rumours about practical possibilities.

Q. Did Joop have links with Spanish republicans ?

A. No. He did not. Spanish republicans were present only in France. I remember that I travelled once in a train together with a member of the SS and his Spanish fiancée, who had fled to France because of the regime of Franco. They spoke all the way French amongst them selves. He was not a German, but a member of the Belgian Dutch speaking Flamangists, who were very extreme in their racial ideology.

Quite a few of them volunteered for the SS and were very active and fanatic. This SS man told me that he was taking his girl home. He was, in spite of his loyalty to Nazi theory, full of resentment that the race laws didnot allow him to marry the girl. These laws forbade sexual intercourse between southern races, like people of Spanish origin, and members of the SS belonging to nordic races, like the Dutch or the Germans. I helped this Nazi to take his fiancée to the Belgian border. During the trip he bragged having taken part in massacres of Jews in Poland and in Ukraine.

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Q. What were your financial resources ?

A. In Holland I took part in obtaining funds, in France Kurt Reilinger was responsible. He took care of my necessary expenses there.

Joop Westerwoel told me once to take a large sum in Belgian francs to Belgium. Joop had connections in Belgium, which he established during his first journey to that country towards the end of 1942. He met in Antwerpen a professional smuggler by name of Le Lievre, who owned a dubious little coffee house. Joop developed close links with him and received from him his Belgian identity card and he also put this same name on his forged Dutch identity papers. When Joop was caught in 1944 it turned out that he was not only accused of the material Kaufman had assembled against him, but that there was also a file against Le Lievre for murder. Joop wrote from prison, that for this reason he immediately abandoned his fake identity and admitted to his real name - in spite of the accusations brought against him.

Le Lievre himself was caught when he travelled with two of our members to the south of France at a time when our organisation there was not yet developed. He was arrested and sent to a German concentration camp of the type of Buchenwald and he died there.

note A14 : Q. When was Le Fievre caught ?

A. I think already in the beginning of 1943. He was caught accompanying two members of our group. Possibly Shraga Angel might know.

I remember that we continued all the time to assist his wife, who continued to run their coffee house and we continued to use their place to stay overnight for our members, all the time Antwerpen was a link on the transfer route to France.

We had also connections in Brussels. These were Jews, who provided us with information and with hiding places.

Q. Was there also an underground movement in Belgium ?

A. Certainly. They also had very good connections with the underground movement in France.

Q. In your opinion, what drove Joop to do all he did ?

A. He did, what he did, as a human person and as a protest against Nazi inhumanity. He was attracted particularly to our group, because of our pioneering spirit. He criticised Jewish nationalism and therefore he initially was opposed to our Zionism, but gradually during the years 1942-1944 he started to understand and in his heart became a supporter of Zionism. This was expressed in the speech he made to a group of our members he came to see off at the foot of the Pyrenees, before they crossed over to Spain. Lodi Cohen will be able to give you more details. He can also give you all the details about their conversations in Spain.

Signed : Menachem Pinkhof on the 8th of July 1961

Translators' note : The questions of notes A are from the letter written by Haim Avni of the Hebrew University, Institute of contemporary Jewry, on the 4th of October 1960.

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ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS

Translators note : The questions and answers that follows were asked in the letter to Menahem Pinkhof of 4th October 1960 and are based on the comparison of his testimony with others.

Note B1 : Q. The book "Letters from the Ghettos" page 94 (letters from Adina to Pino Ginzburg) mentions that Shushu made his first trip at the beginning of October. What happened between the 15th of August 1942 and the middle of October ? Is the translation of the book faithful to the original foreign language text ?

A. In this period Shushu was active within Holland. He was dealing mainly with widening the framework of our organisation to include all members of the "Hechalutz" movement, who wanted to hide. See correction 3A (?). I have no opinion about the faithfulness of the hebrew translation, not having seen the originals. Adina may be able to help you.

Note B2 : Q. According to "Letters from the Ghettos" and the testimony of Adina Shushu returned from his second journey to France in the middle of December 1942. According to the testimonies of Kurt Benjamin and Kurt Ehrlich Shushu helped them to cross from Belgium to Tour in France. According to the testimony of Moshe Ostrer he and 3 companions waited for Shushu in Belgium on the 20 of January 1943. He did not arrive and only 3 days later Joop came to pick them up. From all this it is clear that upon Shushu's return the smuggling network was set up. How was it organised ? Did other groups, apart from the 6 persons mentioned above, pass ?

A. These are details, difficult to remember exactly. It seems worthwhile to invest efforts to reconstruct the facts.

Note B3 : Q. According to the testimony of Kurt Benjamin when it was proposed to him to escape to France, the declared scope was to try to join the allied forces in North Africa. Is it correct, that he was amongst the first group of people saved ? When Shushu took leave from Adina in Lyon on 11 December 1942 possibilities of passing illegally into Switzerland was mentioned only. When and how did the North African plan come up ? Who proposed it ? Was it discussed ?

A. I think one has to be careful in judging the answers in these testimonies. It was one of the many dreams or rumours and the chance to succeed arriving in France or Switzerland seemed so remote, that the discussion about what to do afterwards was premature. In the first place the one and only practical goal was to take people out of the occupied territories.

Note B4 : Q. How much did Shushu's death disrupt the efforts to save people ? How did his death influence the connections which were formed ?

A. Undoubtedly Shushu's death caused a serious disturbance in continuing the work and in the development of new connections.

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Note B5 : Q. When were the connections in France taken up again ? With whom ? By whom ?

A. After Shushu's death it was decided to ask Kurt Reilinger to play an active part. This member of our movement had an important personality and we could expect from him a contribution to the work - and by the way he was half Jewish. Till then he was still working with a peasant as a part of his training. He agreed to accept the task only after expressing many doubts. He and Willy with the help of Joop and those of our members, who remained stuck in different places, started to return to all the connections of Shushu.

Note B6 : Q. Was there a period of lack of activity ? For how long ?

A. The activity was more or less continuous according to the circumstances. This because of the need to fight to find escape routes as quickly as possible. It is interesting to find out what caused you to ask this question and when I understand its reason I may be able to give a better answer.

Note B7 : Q. Was Kurt Hanemann among the youth counsellors in Loosdrecht ? If not, what was his background ? When and where did his activity start and what were his responsibilities ?

A. Kurt Hanemann was a very outstanding member of the "Hechalutz", he excelled by his pure and honest character and his big knowledge, also of Ivriith. He looked very Jewish. As long as he could move as a Jew wearing a star he helped very much and with great dedication to direct members to hidingplaces and dealing with all the organisational worries. Being a dedicated person with sound judgement he was very useful. Later he had to give up all this activity and live in hiding. The place where he was hiding with other members of the movement was discovered by the Gestapo and a number of our members were sent straight to Auschwitz.

I believe his activity was mainly during the autumn months of 1942, he was not linked to Loosdrecht. I believe he was at the time in the labour village "Werkdorp Wieringermeer". Kurt Hanemann's spiritual point of view made him reject the personal desire for survival under the pressure of events: the big tragedy around him kept him from an egoistic fight for survival and set an example for other members.

That is how he lives in the memory of many companions. In a certain sense he should as far as that is concerned be remembered together with Shushu, who also was so strongly imbued by the tragedy of our people, that he didnot have a strong will for personal survival. This was one of the reasons for Shushu's death, cutting his veins while in prison. On the other hand Shushu was much more brilliant and active than Hanemann.

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note B8 : Q. What do you know about the activity of Aat Linnewiel within your organisation ? Did his activity change something in the technique of the escape ?

A. Up to the time I was arrested he didnot play an important part. In this respect I want to make 2 general remarks:

1) One should in the research and the investigation of this episode distinguish well between the activity of centrally placed members, who excelled in their initial initiative and in their dedication to fulfil unknown embassies and by virtue of this exerted a moral influence on rank and file members on the one hand and on the other hand a number of members, who in a later stage knew how to travel and to help the organisation in auxiliary tasks and using the forged documents technique, which by that time was already firmly established.

2) The climate of the underground activities changed considerably all over Western Europe with the allied invasion in June 1944. The general trend of the progress of the war became so clear, that especially the non-German populations, who did not cooperate too much with the underground movements, became much more cooperative, than before, especially for fear of their good name after the war.

This and similar reasons caused the illegal work during the last year of the war to be practiced by much wider circles. It became fashionable. A contributing factor was the economic disintegration within the occupied territories. On the other hand also for our organisation the dangers became smaller and a greater number of our members could be mobile again and "be active".

I have no particular information about that period, having been myself in Bergen Belsen during that time.

note B9 : Q. In the archives of the French resistance I found a list of addresses, which you used for your purposes, please detail what each of them had to offer:

A. Tolstraat Amsterdam The address of a flat, which served for some time as a meeting place for members of the "Hoehalutz" in Amsterdam. As a matter of fact this was not an illegal address. This was a Jewish address, at which we concentrated many underground activities. In many cases it was the meeting point from where members were accompanied to hide-out addresses.

Witsenkade. Same as above. In this place Sara Pinto, of blessed memory, kept house and there always was something to eat, which was very important. Sara died last year in Kibutz Gal-Ed from cancer.

Thomsenlaan, Haarlem. This was the address of Frans Gerritsen, a Dutchman, who was very active in the organisation, but not for the escaperroute to the south, but mainly within Holland.

About the other addresses in France our member Yael should be able to give you details.

signed Menahem Pinkhof 8th of July 1961.