

# HABRICHA

**Europe Exodus 1945 - 1948**



# ***Foreword***

They smuggle, forge and bribe. They cross borders illegally; they hug and support one another. They regulate the migration of more than 250,000 Jewish Holocaust survivors over the routes of the European continent, operating the biggest illegal emigration movement ever – Habricha.

The survivors seek to escape from Europe, that for them has become "the big cemetery of the Jewish people", searching for a way to get to Palestine – Eretz Yisrael. They have to cross the continent and to reach the Mediterranean ports, where they finally board the ships that will carry them to Eretz Yisrael.

In the course of three years (1945-1948), from the termination of the war up until the establishment of the Israeli state, Habricha's mission is to organize this migration all over Europe. From the Mediterranean ports refugees are led across stormy seas by a second illegal movement - the Ha'haapala. Both organizations are operated by emissaries from Eretz Yisrael, sent by the "Mossad Le'Alyia Bet" of the Hagana.

*Habricha activists planning an escape route*



# ***The war is ending***

Europe, 1945. The war is nearing its end. Destruction is rampant. Displaced persons are wandering desperately, while celebrations are being held in city squares as war refugees return to their homes. But the Jewish survivors have no homes to return to. Upon their homecoming they find their home towns devoid of Jewish life, their families erased and their homes destroyed or taken. They are confronted with loneliness and hostility.

A Jewish Soviet officer, one of the liberators of the Auschwitz Death Camp, tells a survivor:

*"Don't go to the East – there they don't like us. Don't go to the West – there they don't like us either. Actually, they don't like us anywhere..."*

*Paris, 1945. The surrender of Nazi soldiers*



Paris nach der Übergabe: der lang unterdrückte Haß der Bevölkerung gegen das Besatzungsregime gegen die letzten deutschen Soldaten der Pariser Garnison, die der Résistance und d



*Lodge, Poland. The ruins of the Jewish Ghetto*

# ***Beginning to organize***

The Jewish survivors want to recover, to renew their lives, to build families. Survivor activists, mostly veterans of the Zionist youth movements and partisans coming out of the woods, are beginning to organize locally. Many refugees are gathered in "kibbutzim"-community homes and refugee camps - run by the survivors themselves, providing food, shelter and security, giving a sense of belonging.

*Youth movement activists  
preparing to serve bread*



Many refugees are eager to establish a safe homeland in Eretz Yisrael. The activists start to seek a way to aid survivors escape from Europe.

*Warsaw, Poland.  
On the ruins of the Ghetto*



# ***The emissaries from Eretz Yisrael***

In the fall of 1945, Ha'Mossad Le'Aliyah Bet sends Israeli emissaries (Shlichim) to Europe. Working under cover, they soon deploy the network of Habricha all over Europe, working under risky and uncertain conditions, while manipulating their way through bureaucratic loopholes and security weaknesses.

The commanders of Habricha confront problems and solve them. Habricha provides the refugees with false documents, food and shelter, transporting them from town to town and from country to country. They cross borders illegally at night, in rain and in snow. They climb over the high passages of the Alps and the Tetra Mountains on foot, carrying the children and the elderly on their backs. If they get caught, the refugees are sent back, but the leaders are imprisoned and there are those who would never return.

Habricha made it a rule that the refugees don't pay for their journey and the emissaries and other activists work on a no salary expense paid basis. These conditions require high moral standards for undercover organization workers who must bribe their way in order to lead the refugees to freedom.



# ***The commanders***

**The head of Ha'Mossad Le'Aliyah Bet :**

*Shaul Avigur*



**Chief commanders of Habricha in Europe 1945 – 1948 :**

*Yechiel Duvdevani*

*Mordechai Surkis*

*Efraim Dekel*

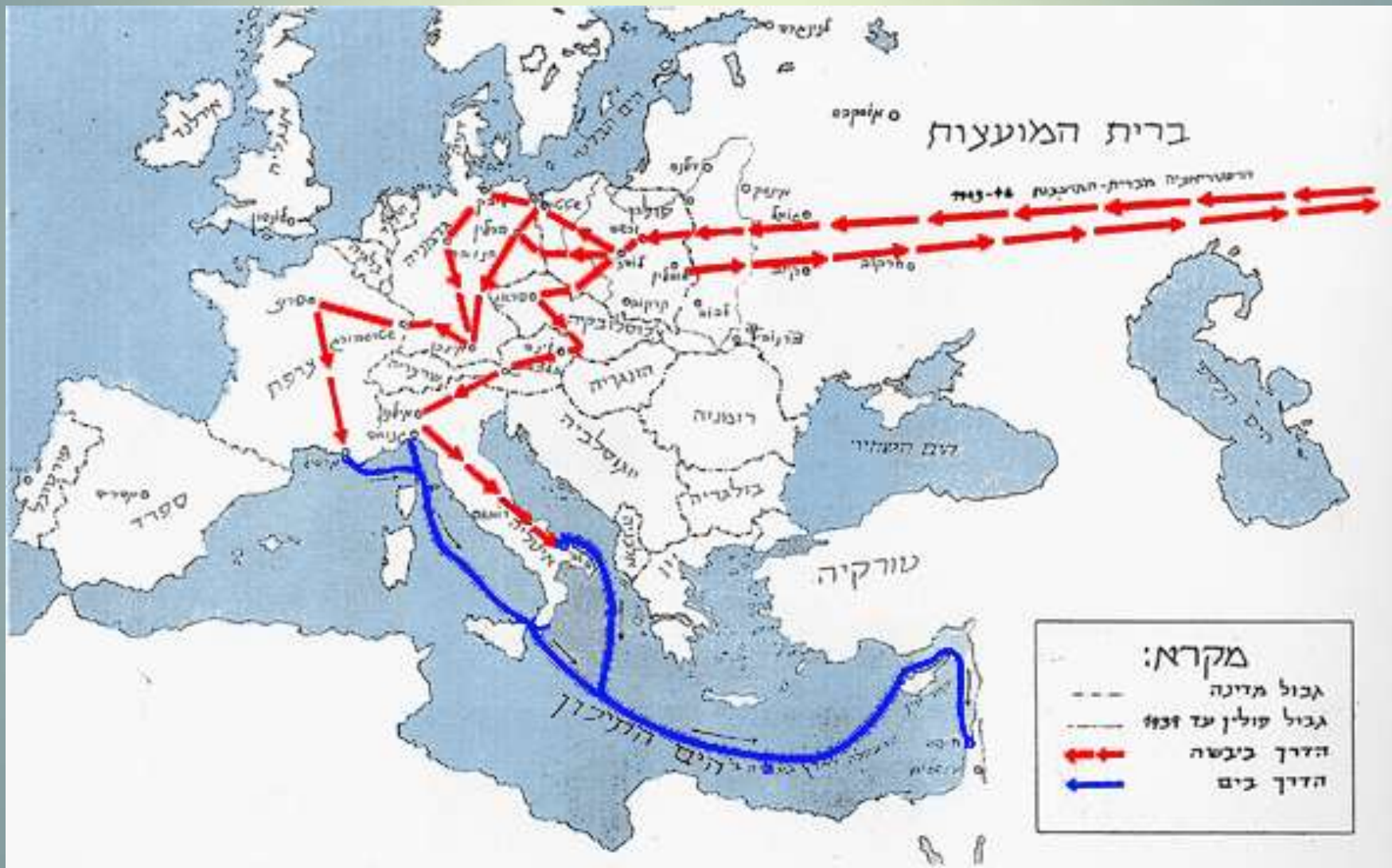
*Meir Sapir*



*Zvi Netzer, and emissary from Eretz Yisrael (standing in the middle, with a moustach) with a group of local activists in Poland*



# The main routes of Habricha and Ha'Haapala



Main routes of Habricha and Ha'Haapala      מסת דרכי הפעולה העיקריות של הבריחה

*On their way...*



# ***The Jewish Brigade***

An important contribution comes from the soldiers of the British Army Jewish Brigade - Jews from Eretz Yisrael, mostly members of the Hagana, who volunteered to serve in the British Army in its war against Nazi Germany.

The encounter of the refugees with the Jewish “heroes”, carrying a Star of David on their uniforms, so similar - yet so very different - from the yellow star they had to wear during the war, is an awe inspiring experience.

The Brigade’s soldiers recruit British army trucks to secretly transport refugees to Italy. They help run programs in the refugee camps, offering professional training, teaching Hebrew and preparing the refugees for their immigration to Eretz Yisrael.

*Jewish Brigade soldiers with Habricha trucks*



*Jewish Brigade soldiers with young survivors*

# ***The role of the JDC***

The “Joint” or JDC (American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee), is a Jewish relief organization, financed by Jews living in the United States. It enjoys strong financial backing and a semi-official status as it has some connection to the allied forces. In that capacity it can't be involved in any political activity.

Nevertheless, the director of JDC's overseas operations, Dr. Joseph Schwartz, signs a confidential agreement with the commander of the “Mossad Le'Alyia Bet” Shaul Avigur, ensuring the JDC's financial support to Habricha. This is done in violation of the British White Paper of 1939 prohibiting almost entirely the immigration of Jews - holocaust refugees included - to Palestine.

The JDC covers the expenses of Habricha operations, thereby contributing enormously to its success.

*A party held by the JDC in a displaced persons camp*



*A group of refugees with a JDC jeep near the Czech border*



# ***The forged papers***

The refugees: survivors of death camps, partisans coming out of the forests and refugees emerging from underground shelters have no papers, no certificates. Habricha activists are operating under cover, using false identities. All of them must carry appropriate identity documents in order to travel on the roads and cross borders. Habricha starts operating advanced forging laboratories, supplying survivors and envoys alike with false suitable identities.

Abba Geffen, a survivor who became the head of Habricha in Salzburg, reports:

*"from a Pole I was turned into a "Greek", and was taught to say "kalimera" and "klispera". Then I became an Austrian refugee born in the British occupation zone, and only when I arrived to Salzburg was I finally turned back to who I really was: a Jewish refugee from Poland. For all these false identities I was supplied with appropriate certificates".*

3 ID's of the same person,  
 Habricha commander Efraim  
 Dekel (Crasner),  
 carrying 3 different names

Name **LASNIK ARIE**

Rank Secretary

Date of Birth 23.11.1914

Height 1,68

70

Brown

Signature of Holder

COMMITTEE FOR ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEE AGENCY  
 Sc Habricha  
 COMMITTEE FOR ASSISTANCE TO REFUGEE AGENCY  
 Salzburg Austria

41 23394/4

Vor- und Zuname: **Max Brady**

Ort und Tag

Staatsbürgerschaft: Österreich

Name  
 Name  
 Nom  
 Фамилия

Vorname  
 Christian name  
 Прізвище

Geburtsort  
 Date of birth  
 Date de naissance  
 Дата народження

Geburtsort  
 Date of birth  
 Date de naissance  
 Дата народження

Staatangehörigkeit  
 nationality  
 Нация

Beruf  
 Occupation  
 Profession  
 Професія

Gegenw. Wohn- u. Aufenthaltsort  
 present place of residence and address  
 résidence permanente ou séjour  
 Мешкання постійне

Wohnsitz am 1. 9. 1939  
 domicile le 1. 9. 1939  
 Мешкання 1. 9. 1939

Größe und Gestalt  
 height and figure  
 hauteur et taille  
 Ріст

Farbe der Augen  
 Colour of the eye  
 Couleur des yeux  
 Колір очей

Unveränderl. Kennzeichen  
 invariable distinguishing marks  
 marques permanentes  
 Нерозмінні ознаки тіла

Veränderliche Kennzeichen  
 variable distinguishing marks  
 marques variables  
 Змінні ознаки тіла

Bemerkungen  
 Remarks  
 Remarques  
 Зауваження

**Grasner**

**Efraim**

15. Februar 1903

Lititz / Polen

staatenlos

kfm. Angestellter

Wolftratshausen

Lititz / Polen

167 cm stark

grau

fehlen

fehlen

lzburg

2.1947

COMMISSION DE RECEPTION DES REFUGIES  
 Lititz / Pologne

Photographie / photo (front view) / photograph (front view)  
 Photographie / photo (back view) / photograph (back view)

Linker / Zeigefinger  
 left forefinger  
 index finger  
 Do not stamp on this finger

Rechts / Mittelfinger  
 right middle finger  
 middle finger  
 Do not stamp on this finger

Größe / Height / Taille / Рост

167 cm stark

Farbe der Augen / Colour of the eye / Couleur des yeux / Колір очей

grau

Unveränderliche Kennzeichen / Invariable distinguishing marks / Marques permanentes / Нерозмінні ознаки тіла

fehlen

Veränderliche Kennzeichen / Variable distinguishing marks / Marques variables / Змінні ознаки тіла

fehlen

Bemerkungen / Remarks / Remarques / Зауваження

DER LANDRAT  
 DES LANDEKREISES WOLFRATSHAUSEN  
 (Assesora de Distrito)

15. Okt. 1946

Wolfratshausen

Willy Illene

(Unterschrift des Landrats Willy Illene)

# ***Rescuing the children***

The need to save the children who survive the Holocaust becomes an urgent and dramatic problem. The war has left thousands of orphans and children separated from their families, children who witnessed the murdering of their parents, others who suffered torture and starvation, illness and fears.

There are thousands of children who have received no education and have not received any adult care for years. Many children were hidden in monasteries or handed over to Christian families who are now refusing to release them. Habricha finds those children and takes care of them.

Two years after the war's end, in July 1947, there are 30,000 children awaiting the journey to Eretz Yisrael. They are gathered in 130 children homes in 13 different countries, and there are many more uncounted for.



*Florence, Italy. A jewish Brigade soldier leading a group of child refugees*

*A group of child refugees on their way*



*Child survivors from Poland, on their way to a displaced persons camp in the American occupied zone*

From the book:

Dekel, E. (1963). Sridey kherev: hatzalat yeladim bishnot hashoa uleakhareiha [war survivors: the rescue of children during the holocaust and in the years following it]. Tel aviv : Misrad Habitakhon [Ministry of Defence]. pp. 17-18

- Hundreds of children remain in the camps in Germany and Austria, most of whom from the death march in the Tyrol Mountains
- Nearly 100 children are found in Auschwitz
- Partisan children are coming out of the woods
- Approximately 500 children are found alive in Buchenwald camp
- Approximately 8,000 children in Hungary are waiting for Aliyah
- Hundreds of children surviving in Transdeniestria are expected to be returned to Russia
- Over 10,000 children are still with their rescuers in monasteries and churches
- 6 children were murdered by Poles near the Czechoslovakian border
- News from 22.3.1945 report: *“from one million Jewish children who lived in Poland before the war, survived only around 5,000-6,000 ...”*

*Schauenstein, Germany, 1946. A school for child survivors*



*The home for child survivors in Langbilau, Klecko*

# ***The Anti-Semitism in Europe***

The Repatriation Agreement signed in 1946 between the Soviet Union and Poland allows for the return of about 200,000 Jews, who have fled to the USSR during the war. Upon their return to Poland, Anti-Semitic incidents become an everyday matter. Jews are met with hatred and violence, thrown out of rapid trains or murdered by their Polish neighbors who took over their houses.

In the Kielce Pogrom in the summer of 1946, members of a Polish Fascist Movement kill and wound Jewish Kibbutz members. This becomes a turning point in the escape movement. The escape from Poland turns into an overpowering and unstoppable flood.

The temporary camp in Nahod, a check point on the Czech-Polish border, is crowded with refugees. Conditions are harsh. After long days on the road, tired and freezing, people still cooperate, follow instructions and wait patiently to continue their journey.

# THE PALESTINE POST

JERUSALEM  
SUNDAY, JULY 7, 1946

## 37 KILLED IN POLISH POGROM

WARSAW, Saturday. — A tale told by a frightened nine-year-old Polish boy Hendrik Blasczyk is revealed to have started a pogrom in Kielce where, according to the Polish press, 37 Jews were killed and 42 injured. Sixty-two arrests were made.

According to the information, the boy said that he had been held a prisoner in a Jewish house, and had escaped before plans to murder him were carried out. He also declared that he had seen the bodies of 15 murdered children, a rumour which spread rapid

Under questioning, the boy admitted that the story was not true, adding that he was actually confined two days by a Pole named Antony Pasowski, who told him to say he had been held by Jews.

When he learned later what role he had played, he shrugged his shoulders.

**Thirty-six bodies — the majority horribly mutilated, some being unrecognizable — are now lying in the morgue at Kielce. Another 42 Jews were wounded.**

Two soldiers and two Polish civilians were also killed and a great number were wounded. Some Poles wearing uniforms, who entered the Jewish quarters under the pretext of protecting the inhabitants, and then helped in the massacre, were not arrested.

(UP & A.F.P.)



*Kielce, Poland, 1946  
The funeral of the pogrom's victims*



# ***The Displaced Persons Camps***

With no open routes to the Mediterranean ports, Habricha finds the way to the U.N. Displaced Persons Camps in Germany and Austria. Ironically, Germany becomes a land of asylum. The Refugees are placed by the U.S. army in military camps and deserted hospitals. Jewish American soldiers do their best to assist their refugee brethren.

The stay in the camp is long, the overcrowding is terrible and the uncertainty is enormous. Nevertheless the children are beginning to calm down. As there are no Polish people around, they take the crosses off their necks, start laughing and playing. The children's attendants create a warm and caring educational environment.



*Vienna, Austria.  
Children dining in Rothschild DP Camp*

*In transit stations and Displace Persons Camps*



# ***The political aspect***

In Eastern Europe governments begin to stabilize and the borders are expected to close. The British Government pressures European governments to disallow the emigration of the Jews.

Displaced Persons Camps in Germany are exceptionally crowded. 250,000 refugees wait under very difficult conditions. Two years after the war, the world can no longer ignore the disturbing photographs that are being published, and Habricha knows how to exploit their impact. There can be only one solution for the Jewish refugees: to let them establish a State of their own.

Ben Gurion is aware of the power inherent in the situation of the refugees, who *"have no future anywhere but in the land of Israel"*, for the recruiting of international support for Zionist aspirations. President Truman appoints a Joint Anglo-American Committee to initiate a viable solution for Jewish displaced persons.



*A mother carrying a baby at an unidentified gathering station*

# THE PALESTINE POST

JERUSALEM  
FRIDAY, JULY 12, 1946

## ANOTHER POLISH POGROM

**WARSAW, Thursday (Reuter).** — Another pogrom has broken out in Poland, this time at Czestachowa.

The Bishop of Czestachowa has condemned the outbreak in an address to the citizens. He has asked the population to counter-attack all attempts to provoke anti-Jewish riots and adds:

**All allegations of ritual murder are lies. No Jew in Poland has ever harmed a Christian on religious or ritual grounds. No case of kidnapping of Christian children by Jews is known to us.**

All but one of the 12 defendants accused of complicity in the recent pogrom at Kielce in which 45 Jews were murdered, have pleaded guilty.

The prosecution alleges that at the height of the outburst some 7,000 persons crowded houses inhabited by Jews.

Twenty foreign journalists are attending the trial.

The U.S. Ambassador, Mr. A. B. Lane, said in an interview today that the American military authorities were gravely concerned at the new mass exodus of Jews to the American Zone of Germany since the Kielce pogrom.

Mr. Lane said that the Military Attache in Warsaw was able to handle only a thousand applications monthly, but seven thousands Jews were entering the American Zone illegally

### ONLY CHANCE

**NEW YORK, Saturday (U.P.)**

—Addressing a memorial meeting under the auspices of the American Federation for Polish Jews, where a tribute was paid to the 41 victims of last week's pogrom at Kielce, Mr. Herbert Lehman, former UNRRA chief, said:

"As long as Jews remain in Poland they must be sure of full protection and the restoration of their rights," but large-scale immigration into Palestine must be permitted immediately as the only chance for security and peace for much of European Jewry.

# ***The end***

During the years 1945-1948 Habricha had 50 centers in 10 different European countries. They were operated by 150 representatives from Eretz Yisrael and 350 Holocaust survivor activists who volunteered to help. The names of many are still unknown, but their huge contribution is cherished.

From the 300,000 refugees who travelled Habricha routes, about 120,000 managed to make their way to the port cities in France and Italy, and began the second step of the illegal immigration to Israel, the Ha'apala on ships. For some of them the way will stretch out, their ships will be captured by British patrol boats and they will be deported to temporary camps, mostly to Cyprus. Others will remain in Displaced Persons' Camps until 1948. With the establishment of the State of Israel, those whose ultimate goal is immigration to Israel will be brought by the new government of the independent State of Israel.

The role of Habricha has been fulfilled!



*The role of the Bricha has been fulfilled!*

# ***Habricha Legacy Association***



The story of the Bricha is not well known, and does not get the commemoration it deserves. We, “Habricha Legacy Association”, seek to give this chapter its justified place in the collective Israeli memory and to raise the awareness to the role of Habricha Organization to the redemption of the Holocaust survivors and their immigration to Israel and to the establishment of the Jewish state of Israel.

We invite everybody related to Habricha – activists and survivors alike, their relatives or anybody who finds interest in this subject to join the association.

## ***For further information and contributions please refer to:***

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