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- [Asian Arts Museum](#)
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- [Bomb Attempt Times Square](#)
- [Books](#)
- [Budget Crisis](#)
- [Cabaret](#)
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- [Chevron Ecuadoran Judicial Scandal](#)
- [Crime](#)
- [Cuba](#)
- [Dance](#)
- [Dining](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Energy Supply](#)
- [Fashion](#)
- [Field Poll](#)
- [Film](#)
- [Fine Foods with Courtney Townsend](#)
- [Front Page](#)
- [Gays Slain In Tel Aviv](#)
- [Gaza](#)
- [Give Yourself A Break](#)

- [Global Warming](#)
- [Health Care](#)
- [Holocaust](#)
- [Home Page](#)
- [Images of San Francisco with Ellen Schumer](#)
- [Iran](#)
- [Israel-Mideast](#)
- [Judith Kahn](#)
- [Lectures](#)
- [Marriage Equality](#)
- [Michael Jackson](#)
- [Music](#)
- [On Scene With Bill Wilson](#)
- [Opera](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Pakistan](#)
- [Pat Murphy Interviewed - Videos](#)
- [Politics - Local](#)
- [Politics - World](#)
- [Presidential Decision 2008](#)
- [Presidential Transition](#)
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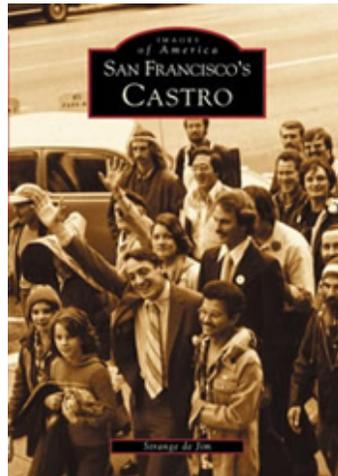


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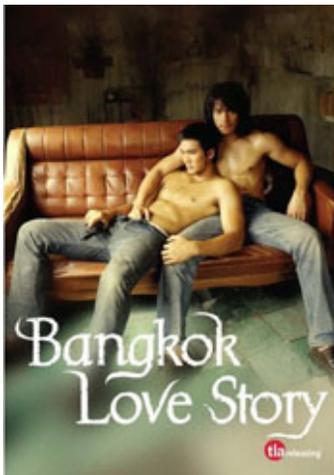
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- [SAN FRANCISCO CELEBRATES BIKE TO WORK DAY MAY 13 - ANNUAL RIDE COMES AS CITY INCREASES CYCLING INFRASTRUCTURE](#)
- [CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL OAKLAND URGES INDIAN AMERICANS TO GET TESTED FOR RARE INHERITED BLOOD DISORDER - CALLED THALASSEMIA WHICH ESPECIALLY IMPACTS NORTHERN INDIANS WHO ARE PUNJABI, OR GUJARATI, OR SINDHI](#)
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- [STRANGE de JIM'S ZINGERS COLLECTION MAY 11, 2010](#)



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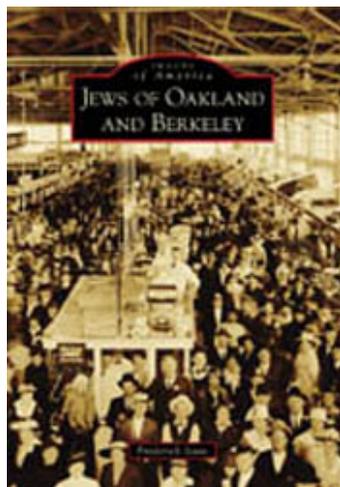
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**BY FREDERICK ISSAC**

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**THE TRUE STORY OF HOW ISRAEL CAPTURED ADOLF EICHMANN**

8 May 2010

**Fifty years after Adolf Eichmann's capture and transfer to Israel for trial, his abductors dispel some myths about the operation and tell how they felt when the top Nazi was in their hands.**

**By Avner Avrahami**  
[Haaretz](#)

On the evening of Wednesday, May 11, 1960, Ricardo Klement was late arriving home to the San Fernando suburb of Buenos Aires. Advance observations had shown that the lanky, bespectacled man descended from the number 203 bus at 7:40 P.M. and then, aided by a flashlight, walked about 100 meters along the dark road before turning left onto a dirt path (designated as Garibaldi Street in the municipal master plan). He entered a solitary house, where his wife and family awaited him. The remote neighborhood in which Klement lived had not yet been hooked up to the power grid, and in the small house a few Lux oil lamps emitted a faint light.

The seven men in two black American cars with big tail fins who were waiting for Klement that evening grew increasingly tense. They were determined to put an end to his meticulous routine – and to his life, if necessary. For they were certain that Ricardo Klement was actually S.S. officer Adolf Eichmann, one of the planners of the “Final Solution,” the organizer of the transports that had carried millions of Jews to death camps in Europe. They were aflame with desire to capture him.



Three of Eichmann's captors (from left):  
Avraham Shalom, Rafi Eitan  
and Yaakov Gat.

*Photo By Reli Avrahami*

The minutes passed. The seven men in the ambush, six of them from the Shin Bet security service (not the Mossad) and a physician, began to think that maybe their timing was off. Three of them were in a Chevrolet parked on the main road, with a view of the bus stop. They were Avraham Shalom (at the time deputy head of the Shin Bet operations unit), Yaakov Gat (a Paris-based field operative) and an anesthesiologist (to drug Eichmann, if necessary). Their task was to identify him, blind him with lights and help in the escape. Four others waited in a Buick that had supposedly broken down on the dirt path by the isolated house. Their mission was to nab Eichmann and get him to a safe house (one of three that were available).

The abduction team consisted of Rafi Eitan, the operation's commander (who headed the Shin Bet operations unit); Zvi Aharoni, an interrogation expert, who was sitting behind the wheel of the car, next to Eitan (Aharoni was the Shin Bet's chief interrogator and had tracked down and identified Eichmann); the burly Peter Zvi Malkin, who was to make the initial assault on Eichmann; and Moshe Tavor, the “technician,” another hefty fellow, who was to help bring the target under control. Malkin and Tavor stood next to the car's open hood and awaited a signal.

Everything was ready, but where was Eichmann? The bus they had watched for had arrived on time, but had not stopped. The dark road remained totally deserted. Every minute, the risk grew that they would arouse curiosity by their presence here. At 8:04 P.M., as the frustration level mounted and someone from the Chevrolet had already gone over to the Buick to ask Rafi Eitan (in the absence of a walkie-talkie) what to do, the lights of another bus suddenly sliced through the black night and someone got off and started to walk in their direction. "It's him," said Avraham Shalom, who was at the wheel of the Chevrolet.

Shalom: "I see Eichmann walking with a red and white flashlight and I turn on the car lights and he turns left toward the house." He counted 30 seconds on his watch before his buddies in the Buick revved the engine and sped off with their catch.

### **Survivors and commandos**

Fifty years later, those of Eichmann's captors who are still alive are in their eighties or above. At the time, they were 30-something. Two of them, Peter Zvi Malkin and Moshe Tavor, are no longer alive and a third, Zvi Aharoni, lives in England and has difficulty talking. We met with the three others; only the anesthesiologist remains anonymous.

"He wants to stay a doctor who puts people to sleep and not a doctor who's put to sleep," Avraham Shalom says. The top man, Rafi Eitan, now 84, is always fit as a fiddle. Stubby, bespectacled, hard-of-hearing, a veteran of the Pensioners Party and business affairs, Eitan is the very epitome of the contrast between the public's image of a secret agent and the real thing. He was happy to chat a little about old times, proffer advice and crystallize insights in the minds of those sitting opposite him. His deputy at the time, Avraham Shalom, 82 (who was chief of the Shin Bet at the time of the Bus 300 cover-up affair and was forced to resign), and Yaakov Gat, a discreet field agent, prefer to live out their retirement in their well-ordered homes in north Tel Aviv. Talking to journalists is not their thing, but when Rafi Eitan gives the green light, they agree. They're even willing to have their pictures taken.

Zvi Aharoni was and remains a loner. He has lived in England since 1988 and has speech problems caused by an illness. His son Amram, a Tel Aviv businessman, helps us communicate with him. His views are still

as rock-solid as they were then, and his rage at the way the collective memory of the Eichmann operation was fashioned has not yet abated. His complaints are addressed mainly to his former commander, Isser Harel, the longtime head of the Mossad espionage agency, who died in 2004. Nor has he forgiven his colleague Peter Zvi Malkin for the version of the events he recounted in his book “Eichmann in My Hands” (by Peter Z. Malkin and Harry Stein, 1990).

Aharoni (speaking by telephone from England): “All the tales according to which [Malkin] held intimate conversations with Eichmann and drank wine with him are the fruit of his imagination. It’s too bad Bascomb didn’t bother to check his facts properly...” (referring to Neal Bascomb’s 2009 book, “Hunting Eichmann.”)

Be that as it may, they were six, not counting the physician: Holocaust survivors and Palmach commandos – Mapai party self-confidence tempered with diaspora savvy. One of them, Moshe Tavor, executed a few Nazis as a soldier in the British Army, after joining the Avengers organization, which hunted Nazis at the end of the war. To bring in Eichmann was a mission they all fervently desired. For that alone, they thought, it was worth establishing a state.

### **Case closed, case reopened**

The information that Eichmann was alive and living in the Olivos quarter of Buenos Aires reached Israel in September 1957 from Fritz Bauer, the attorney general of the state of Hesse in what was then West Germany. Bauer, a Jew, did not trust the law enforcement authorities in his country to bring Nazis to justice. He told Felix Shinar, the Israeli official in charge of implementing the reparations treaty with Germany, that he possessed reliable information to the effect that a man who went by the name of Ricardo Klement was actually Adolf Eichmann.

Bauer relied on the testimony of a blind old man, Lothar Hermann, who was half-Jewish. He had been incarcerated in Dachau concentration camp in 1936 and immigrated to Argentina after Kristallnacht in 1938. One day, Hermann’s daughter, Sylvia, had hosted in the family home in the Olivos neighborhood a young man who made no secret of what he thought about Jews and what should be done with them. His name was Nick (Nicholas, or Klaus) Eichmann, which was also the name of the firstborn son of the wanted former S.S. officer. Lothar Hermann grew suspicious, and his testimony, which reached the head of the Mossad at the time, Isser Harel, began to be investigated.

In November 1957, Shaul Darom, a Mossad operative, met with Bauer in Frankfurt.

Following their meeting, Emanuel Talmor, another Mossad operative, was sent to Argentina in January 1958 to find out who lived at 4261 Chacabuco Street, which was the address provided by the German attorney general. Talmor reported that it was unlikely that a senior Nazi like Eichmann would be living in such a shabby home.

Harel was inclined to accept Talmor’s finding, but under pressure from Bauer sent a second emissary, a police officer named Ephraim Hofstetter-Elrom (who was murdered years later by terrorists in Istanbul and for whom Kibbutz El-Rom in the Golan Heights is named). Hofstetter, who was in Argentina for an Interpol conference, was asked to meet with Lothar Hermann – who was now living in the north of the country – and gauge his reliability. Hofstetter persuaded Hermann to go to Buenos Aires with his daughter, Sylvia, in order to cement the suspicions about the true identity of Ricardo Klement. But the results were inconclusive; Harel decided to close the case. That, at least, is what Zvi Aharoni and Neal Bascomb claim. Harel, they say, did not want to employ agents to check out a “false lead,” preferring to concentrate on more burning issues, such as torpedoing the activity of German scientists in Egypt.

In December 1959, Fritz Bauer, disappointed in Israel’s handling of the case, traveled to Jerusalem in person in order to convey the material in his possession to the attorney general, Haim Cohn (later a Supreme Court

justice). By now, Bauer also had an additional, secret, source: a former S.S. officer. The German attorney general's iron determination sent shockwaves through the Israeli establishment. When Bauer arrived, Isser Harel was summoned to an urgent meeting in Jerusalem. In his book "The House on Garibaldi Street," Harel does not mention that he brought another person to the meeting. Zvi Aharoni, though, attests to being present. The meeting was tense, Bascomb relates, and at its conclusion the Eichmann case was reopened.

Aharoni: "I am the only person still alive who was personally present at that meeting between Bauer, Haim Cohn and Isser [Harel], and I confirm its content as described by Bascomb. Isser wanted to close the case, and it was only under the pressure of Fritz Bauer, aided by Haim Cohn, that Isser was made to go back to the affair." Yaakov Gat, who knew the people involved, has his doubts: "Only Ben-Gurion could have forced Isser to renew the investigation. Of course it was Bauer who put on the pressure, but in my opinion American Jewry pressed Ben-Gurion to have Israel take vengeance in the name of the Jewish people, and that was the true source of the pressure on Isser."

After the case was reopened, Aharoni, who was the chief interrogator in the Shin Bet, was sent to Argentina. He set out on March 1, 1960, with the knowledge that "maybe" was no longer an option, only "yes" or "no."

Aharoni wasted no time. Six days after arriving in Buenos Aires, he discovered with the aid of Jewish volunteers that the Klement family had moved. A week later he tracked down the family's new home: an isolated house in a remote neighborhood. On March 19 he photographed Eichmann in the backyard of the house, using a camera hidden in a bag. His mission had been a tremendous success. Armed with his graphic testimony, Aharoni set out for Israel, and during a stopover in Paris excitedly showed the photographs to Gat. Later, on the plane to Tel Aviv, he was surprised to discover Isser Harel sitting next to him. The two exchanged glances. The taciturn Harel examined the photographs. 'We're going to get him,' he said.

### **Picking the team**

"My conversation with Isser took place here in Tel Aviv, in March 1960, in his office in the Kirya [defense establishment headquarters], more or less where the Platinum Tower now stands," Rafi Eitan says, recalling the day he received the assignment. "I knew that Hofstetter had been sent and also Talmor, because everyone who went needed equipment and a briefing from me. I was involved throughout. When Zvi Aharoni sent his report about finding Eichmann, I knew about it too, through Amos Manor [the head of the Shin Bet at the time]."

"Isser had a conception. He said that we had to put one of the Nazi leaders on trial in Israel, it didn't matter who. He would come out of a meeting with Ben-Gurion and always ask Amos Manor: Who can we bring here? Brunner? Mueller? Mengele? Bormann? Eichmann? Tell me. It's by chance that we brought Eichmann."

Eitan started putting together the team in mid-March. Of the 250 people he had at his disposal, he says, seven were assigned exclusively to the operation.

### **Who chose the team?**

Eitan: "I did. They were the best for this mission. For other jobs there were better people. But unequivocally, I was the only one who did the choosing. Isser did not intervene in the least. My first choice was Malkin. He had tactical creativity, was physically strong, and he was brave. He did a lot of training and was an expert in hand-to-hand combat. I chose him and Moshe Tavor. Their job was to handle Eichmann physically and get him into the car."

Avraham Shalom has a somewhat different version: "I was picked by Isser. He was the only one who talked to me about the operation. I got off the plane in March 1960, returning from Balochistan on the Iran-Afghanistan border. What was I doing there? Something for the Mossad, I won't say what, I look out for

myself.

“Anyway, Isser calls me in and says, ‘Avrum, you know how to get around with foreign passports and we have reason to think that we have tracked down Adolf Eichmann. He didn’t have to explain to me who Adolf Eichmann was. Straight off I said, ‘I’m ready to go whenever you say.’ He told me to talk to Rafi. So I met with Rafi and then Aharoni came back with very successful pictures he took with someone who helped him. Aharoni was very systematic. He went from one address to the other, and saw that Ricardo Klement had lowered his standard of living and said it was the behavior of someone who was on the run – and he was right. Without Aharoni, it would not have happened.”

Yaakov Gat: “Zvi Aharoni returned from Buenos Aires and we met in Paris, where everyone passed through. At the time I was working under the Mossad representative in Europe, Mordechai Almog. Aharoni told me the story with the photograph and said there would be a follow-up. Then Isser arrived and chose me for the assignment. He asked if I would be ready to join. I agreed immediately. A few months earlier I had looked for Eichmann’s wife, Vera, in Austria. We got to her village and discovered that she and the three children – Klaus, Horst and Dieter – had disappeared. We realized she had joined him. We learned that she received a passport from the German consulate in Austria. Her sister remained in the village. Already then I said to Isser that there was no doubt of it, he’s alive somewhere.”

### **Change of procedure**

From March 24, 1960, the abduction team began to gather in Buenos Aires, arriving on different flights and under assumed names. Among them was Shalom Weiss (Dani), a forger who was considered a genius by everyone who knew him and could create documents under any terrain and weather conditions. He was said to have escaped from a concentration camp by forging authorizations on toilet paper. In charge of the logistics of the operation was Yaakov Medad, a Mossad man. He rented apartments and cars and allowed the group to concentrate on the abduction.

Eitan: “The plan was to abduct Eichmann while he was walking home from the bus stop. The idea was that as Eichmann was walking along, Zvi Malkin would walk toward him, as though by chance. I wanted Tavor to be behind. Then, so as not to arouse suspicions, Malkin would turn to him with a question, ‘Momentito, senior,’ and then bring him down by grabbing him and pressing the carotid arteries.”

### **What actually happened?**

“Because Aharoni suddenly whispered, ‘He has his hand in his pocket – maybe he has a pistol,’ Malkin, instead of doing the full move, grabbed his right hand. The result was that the two of them rolled into a shallow ditch by the side of the road. Tavor, who until then had been standing behind the car, joined the struggle, and afterward I did, too, and the three of us dragged him into the car. I held his head, Tavor his body and Malkin his legs. There was no resistance. We carried a person who inhaled and exhaled in a panic and did not say a word. That was not a surprise – we didn’t think it would be otherwise.”

Aharoni: “I was afraid he had a pistol and I warned Rafi and Zvi Malkin. As a result, Malkin apparently changed the procedure he had planned and was forced to grab his hand. The two of them rolled into a ditch with Eichmann squealing like a slaughtered animal. I shouted to Rafi to go and help them. Rafi came out of the car and the three of them managed to get Eichmann into the backseat, with Rafi sitting on him physically. I drove toward the safe house and told Eichmann in German that if he moved he would get a bullet in the head. I heard him mumbling in German, ‘I am resigned to my fate.’ Then I knew this was the man.”

What was the physical contact with him like?

Eitan: “What I remember is that already in the car I looked for the two scars I knew I had to feel and I

quickly found one of them below the armpit. That was the scar of his S.S. number. Then came the other one, on the stomach, an appendicitis scar from a crude operation. I discovered all that in the first two minutes. Then I removed my hand from Eichmann's stomach and shook the hand of Zvi Malkin and indicated to him like this, with my head, that this is the man. After shaking hands with Zvika, I remember feeling uplifted. Imagine, I said to myself, a Jewish officer has his hands on the Nazi who led six million Jews to the slaughter."

Avraham Shalom: "I had no contact with him. I am not a schleger [Yiddish for roughneck]."

Gat: "On the flight on the way back, when the plane landed in Senegal to refuel, I was sitting next to him and told him in German to relax. French customs officials came on board, and I was afraid he would surprise us by shouting, but his head lay quietly on my shoulder. That didn't do anything to me. For 10 days we fed him, led him to the shower, took him to the toilet."

Rafi Eitan, what was your role as commander, given that your superior, Isser Harel, also went to Buenos Aires?

Eitan: "From the start, back home, Isser decided that the field commander would be Rafi Eitan. And I can tell you to his credit that he did not intervene in the choice of the people or the equipment. That includes the decision not to use two-way radios and my decision to postpone the implementation from May 9 to May 11. From the start we decided that I was in charge of the capture, the maintenance of the safe house and getting Eichmann to the airport. The transport to Israel was Isser's responsibility."

Did you feel pressured by his presence?

"No. Isser was always in the picture, but did not intervene. Take, for example, the failed attempt by the U.S. Delta Force in Iran [to release the hostages held in the U.S. embassy in Tehran in 1979]. After the failure, the commander of Delta Force asked me to come and analyze the event. I went to Washington and sat in an auditorium with a few dozen people, and we agreed that one of the reasons for the failure was the direct intervention of the U.S. president, Jimmy Carter, who gave orders via the communications network to the force itself and bypassed everyone who was in control. Carter told officers on the ground to do this and do that."

### **'I am Adolf Eichmann'**



*Adolf Eichmann*

It took more than an hour to get to the safe house, because the two cars were caught in a traffic jam caused

by an accident that drew a large number of policemen – ratcheting up the already high tension the Israelis were working under. Finally they reached their destination and Eichmann’s interrogation began.

Aharoni: “In the safe house I was the one who interrogated Eichmann and the only one who was allowed to talk to him. As Eichmann’s interrogator, I was surprised to discover two things: first, how pathetic this man was who had conducted a vast and well-oiled system of mass annihilation; and second, that Eichmann had not insisted that his children change their name, and that they were still called Eichmann. When I asked him about this, he said he could not force them to change their name.

“I also persuaded him to come to Israel for judgment and got him to sign a letter stating that he was willing to go to Israel. The [general wording for the] text was provided to me by Haim Cohn [the attorney general]. Cohn thought this would facilitate the trial and might be of help if we were caught before leaving Argentine territory.”

Aharoni: “Zvi Malkin did not speak German, and did not get Eichmann to sign the document stating that he was willing to go to Israel. I was the one who drew up the document with Eichmann, carefully and thoroughly, and after it was formulated I had him sign it. Avrum Shalom can testify to that.”

Shalom: “I happened to be sitting with Zvi Aharoni when he asked Eichmann the questions that led to [the revelation of] his serial number in the Gestapo and the confession of his identity. Zvi Aharoni and I were the only ones who knew German, and I heard him say ‘I am Adolf Eichmann.’ As soon as he said he was Eichmann, we were filled with pride. It was a once-in-a-lifetime, once-in-a-generation event; there was no additional Eichmann, even though Likud wanted to turn [John] Demjanjuk into another Eichmann.”

Eitan: “I did not interrogate Eichmann. In Argentina, only Zvi Aharoni interrogated him. I do not speak German. But in Israel I was in his cell one time, when he was in Jalame [detention center near Haifa, now called Kishon]. I was there with Avner Less, the commander of Bureau 06, which was established specifically to interrogate him. I asked him about the S.S. officers’ courses and how people were picked for the Gestapo. I was curious. As a young Israeli officer, I wanted to learn, to know. I didn’t ask about the Holocaust, only about those things.”

And what did you learn?

“That drill and parrot-like repetition were pretty much the ABCs of the training of the S.S. officer corps. I did not accept that [way of doing things]; I thought that a system like that was doomed to fail and degenerate.”

Did you hate him?

“I never hated him. Altogether, I am a person who does not hate. I have no problem dealing with Nazis, also killing them. But to say that I do it out of hatred is wrong. Hatred is a function of a system of emotions. Maybe you will say it’s because my family was not harmed in the Holocaust, but many in the family of my wife, Miriam, who were from Berlin and Ukraine, were murdered.”

Aharoni: “I did not see Eichmann as someone very evil, but as a bland and obedient official in a satanic system.”

Eitan: “My biggest surprise was that I found an officer of a totally mediocre level, who surrendered completely from the moment we got our hands on him. It was a case of surrender and loyalty to his new masters. I found a less-than-mediocre person, and you say to yourself, it was the fate of the Jewish people to be annihilated under this technocrat. As a technocrat, he was apparently talented.”

Was it right to act on the soil of a friendly country, with the knowledge that a public trial would expose the gross violation of that country’s sovereignty?

Shalom: “There was no need to take that into consideration. There are things you do when you have no choice.”

Eitan: “My point of departure is always what an action will contribute to Israel’s security. If it is essential, I can cross many red lines.”

Jonathan Pollard?

“I don’t want to comment on Pollard.”

Mabhohuh, in Dubai?

Shalom: “I am against [the assassination of Mahmoud al-] Mabhohuh – there are 10,000 like Mabhohuh who will replace him. Mabhohuh is to spoil relations with 20 countries; I don’t understand the sense of proportion. Is Mabhohuh irreplaceable? Since Meshal [the attempted assassination of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal in Jordan, in 1997], things should be considered more carefully. Sometimes there are operations it is better not to carry out. States that murder are no longer legal tender, so to speak.”

The wisdom of a pensioner?

“I have grown old and, I hope, wiser. My strategic perception has changed. I want to make it easier for the Arabs to recognize us. In my opinion, the Arabs have a more politically sophisticated viewpoint. They do not kill individual Jews – apart from ‘Gandhi’ [Rehavam Ze’evi, Israel’s tourism minister, who was assassinated in 2001].

Back then, in the 1960s, did we assume that the world would forgive?

Eitan: “That was the responsibility Isser Harel took on himself. He assumed the responsibility for the highest goal, which also enables intelligence work to be done on the soil of a friendly country. The proof is that he prepared both the ambassador and us for the possibility that the operation would fail and also for what to do if the operation should go wrong. That is why we did not carry firearms. When the operation succeeded, and this was done immediately after the capture, we issued an apology to the government of Argentina via intelligence channels, and Argentina did nothing.”

And today?

Eitan: “I am not involved. I have no idea. Today’s world is different, because of the communications and the computers.”

Shalom: “The world will forgive for Mabhohuh, too.”

Eitan: “Let me explain something to you. It was my bad luck to study political economy in 1957 at the London School of Economics with the mother of the present-day British foreign secretary, [David] Miliband. She was very pro-Soviet – when the Soviets launched the first Sputnik into space, she and others drank a toast. Now, I assume that the British foreign secretary got a good education at home, and the way the British are behaving is connected to the private history of those who are conducting policy and does not necessarily derive from Britain’s vested interests.”

Weren’t you concerned that you might unleash an anti-Semitic wave against Argentina’s Jews? In his book, Isser Harel relates how hundreds of young Nazis volunteered to search for Eichmann after he disappeared, and Neal Bascomb describes bloody events that took place in Buenos Aires after the abduction, in which a Jewish student was murdered and many Jews were attacked.

Eitan: “I don’t know where Isser got the information that hundreds of people looked for Eichmann. Apart

from his family, no one looked for him, and even they did not go to the police. I have no recollection of pogroms, either. I don't remember anything of what you are saying. In my estimation – though I have not checked the facts – the event caused no uproar in Argentina, for the simple reason that it was of no interest to the Argentines.”

### **Open accounts**

Isser Harel published his account of the Eichmann capture in 1975, Aharoni published a book of his own in 1998, followed by Malkin in 2002, and last year the American journalist Neal Bascomb published “Hunting Eichmann: How a Band of Survivors and a Young Spy Agency Chased Down the World’s Most Notorious Nazi.” Rafi Eitan says he did not meet with the author (though in the book Bascomb claims he did), but did meet with Avraham Shalom (“for two hours”). The participants are divided over which version is the most accurate.

Eitan: “The most authentic book is the one by Isser Harel, though it also contains a few fairy tales. The version by Zvi Aharoni is the version of Zvi Aharoni. He fought for his place in the Eichmann operation. What he did is to his credit. He is the one who found Eichmann, and no one can dispute that achievement, but he wanted more, so he stuck in all kinds of things. I did not write a book. Malkin wrote, Aharoni wrote, Isser wrote; I never thought I had to glorify my connection to this history, but when I became a cabinet minister I organized a gathering of the participants or their heirs in the Knesset and awarded each of them a certificate and a citation – that, I did.”

Aharoni: “Unfortunately, Isser Harel’s book provides an incorrect picture of what happened and is in no way a historical document. It’s a detective novel whose main aim is to aggrandize the author’s name. The book was written for a commercial purpose and it wronged many people. In the book, Isser settled accounts with people by not giving them the credit they deserved. The book was first published with all the names of the participants fictionalized. In that way, Isser gave credit only to himself. Fifteen years later, a new edition came out in which most of the real names of the participants were revealed, apart from a handful, me among them. Isser claimed at the time that he did this in order to protect their security. In my case, at least, that was an excuse for an ugly settling of accounts, because by then there was no longer any reason to keep my name secret.

“As a historical document,” Aharoni continues, “Neal Bascomb’s book seems to me a lot better and more accurate than Isser’s book. I have not yet read it completely, but what I have looked at seems not bad at all.”

## **GUILTY**

## Hanged and cremated

On April 11, 1961, eleven months after the abduction, the trial of Adolf Eichmann opened in Jerusalem. A little over a year later, on May 31, 1962, he was executed. The only one of the team of abductors who witnessed the hanging at Ramle prison was Rafi Eitan. All the others declined.

Yaakov Gat: "I did not want to attend the hanging. I can't even watch movies with violence. We were all at the opening of the trial in Jerusalem, and we were with him for nine days before flying to Israel. I had enough of him."

Shalom: "I had no interest in it. Rafi likes things like that."

Eitan: "The fact is that I am the only one of the captors who went to visit Eichmann in his cell. It was important for me to see the end of the story. I had the help of Aryeh Nir, who was the prison commissioner, and his deputy, Tuvia Dori, both of whom were my friends. I arranged with them that when the moment came – I knew it would be done in secret – they would call and invite me. And Tuvia did just that. I arrived at Eichmann's cell just as the priest left. I enter the cell, more precisely stand at the entrance, he sees me and says nothing. It's possible that he never knew what my role was in his story. And then he looks at me and says in German, 'I hope that your turn will come after mine.'

"Guards came to take him and I walked behind. His legs were not bound, at least I don't remember that they were, and he wore a light brown prisoner's uniform. It took a few minutes to walk down the corridor, which was a few dozen meters long. The group consisted of two policemen, the priest, Tuvia Dori and a few other people I didn't know. We reached the execution chamber. They had prepared a chamber the size of an elevator. He was taken into the chamber and a warder, whom I later met several times, put the rope around his neck and blindfolded him. Then the hatch was opened and he disappeared. I did not see the fall. The place was small and I stood outside and did not see where he fell. I only saw them cover his eyes and then I heard the thud."

Are there photographs?

“No one took any pictures there. Afterward we went down to the prison yard. He was placed in a furnace built by Amichai Paglin, the person I succeeded as the prime minister’s adviser on terrorism. At the time, Paglin owned a factory that made furnaces, and he built a special furnace by commission to cremate Eichmann. It was made of a 30-inch pipe that was three meters long and had burners on both sides, something like flamethrowers that ran on gas. The body was inserted and the burners were turned on. It was in the prison yard and not in an orchard, as what’s-his-name, Baskind [Bascomb], wrote. I passed up the drive to the sea [to scatter the ashes]. Being there until the cremation of the body was enough for me.”

Who in your opinion contributed the most to the success of the operation?

Eitan: “The greatest contribution was by Zvi Aharoni. He found Eichmann and infused us all with the passion of the historic importance of bringing him to trial. Without people like Aharoni, it would not have succeeded. He was the one who was smart enough to find the place where Eichmann was hiding.”

Shalom: “Aharoni did not get enough credit. I think he contributed more than anyone else, even more than Isser. He was the driving force, and maybe because of that he cut himself off from Israel.”

Gat: “There is no doubt that Isser was the brains behind the whole operation. Zvi Aharoni had two disappointments in life: that he was not given command of the Shin Bet operations unit and that he did not get enough credit for Eichmann.”

What role did Yehudit Nesiahu play?

Shalom: “She was unnecessary. Isser sent an unsuitable woman. She was religious and only ate kosher. What kind of sense does that make? There were some things about him [Isser] that I don’t understand.” [Nesiahu played the part of Yaakov Medad’s wife in the safe house where Eichmann was held, in order to deflect possible suspicion by the neighbors.]

Fifty years have passed. Do you have a different take on the episode, maybe new conclusions?

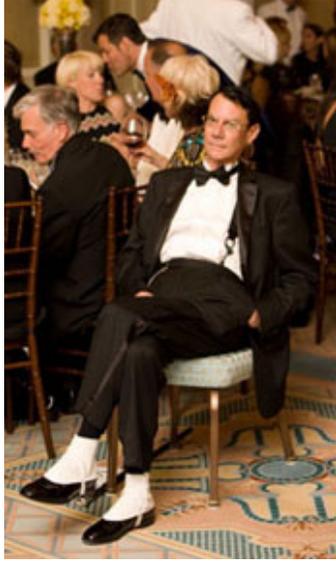
Shalom: “I am increasingly convinced that without a Jewish state there would be another Holocaust. If we had had a state then, the Holocaust would not have occurred.”

Gat: “It’s hard to imagine what we did, 11,000 kilometers from here, without communications equipment, without contact with Israel. It was extraordinarily daring. From my advanced age, I can say that today it looks even more amazing than before.”

Eitan: “The Eichmann abduction did not change my life, not before and not after.”

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