

VT-980 Transcription

Operation Israel. Panel discussion conducted by Israel American
News Service. February 1969.

Howard Stone: [singing] This is Howard Stone of the *Israel-American News Service* and I have come to the shores of the [Kaneret?] this day with a special report for you, [01:00] Rabbi Friedman by the members of the delegation of the Upper Afula Delegation to Operation Israel. Unfortunately not everyone could be here today. Jackie [Handely?] is still with three women who were leftover from the women's mission, and [Tzvi Yellensen?] couldn't get a ride. As you can see, [Shenhabi?] arranged everything perfectly on this trip -- a sandstorm in [El-Arish?], a snowstorm in Jerusalem and a flood in the Kanoit. Now we know you haven't been getting true and accurate reports on what these missions have been like, because who tells you what the missions have been like? Professional UJA staff, and it's in their interest to tell you they're good, or Laman, who'd tend to like anything at all. So, now we're going to give you a true and accurate report on what operation Israel has really been like. Here to begin is David Shenhabi. David, as commander of this

group, what's been the best mission to date and why?

David Shenhabi: They've all been good. [02:00] There have been better ones, and less good ones, but I believe that the success is a good one. I believe that next year we will do it even better than this year, and I promised you before you left Israel, you've been with the first mission, that all of them will serve the purpose and that the people will come back to the United States and will do their job. I believe in money-wise, you had the reports. The spirit of the people in all the six mission was a good one. I believe we had Israeli staff made our job as we wanted it. *Shalom baylit* [route?].

Stone: [inaudible] I just -- we won't sing anymore. [inaudible] Now, now would you? I just want to pass around -- I want everybody to tell Rabbi Friedman [03:00] one thing about the mission -- about the whole project that's most impressed them.

M1: I'm impressed with their nice organization -- that they planned in advance the tour, that every group was coming on the same day of the week, and they cover the same program. The most interesting things that even people who visited Israel once or twice, here is the time that they get a lot, and they see a lot

of what we do here and they see more of what we have to do here. The meals we hope that will come from them are from their friends, and so on.

M2: While summing up in one question -- scratching the surface like we do on this tour, we are doing the most possible in five days. Anyway, it's the best we could getting the best impression and we are fully satisfied because they are good students -- good pupils of the Bible, and they like [04:00] to learn -- pick up things and be judged by their questions. They are asking a lot, interested a lot, and they pick up the most possible. *Shalom* everyone and all the best.

M3: [*Ma hairima?*]. I don't know what the serious rain is all about -- the missions did their job; that's it. There were a lot of things wrong, not only the weather. We enjoyed working for them, although our skin was torn in some places, especially [Nuran?]. And, there isn't very much more to it because you have seen the first one -- the others were like it.

M4: I think the missions have gone excellently and that's all due to the wonderful fact that we had a wonderful crew who did the best in order to bring out the best in the people and from

themselves. [05:00] My only wish would have been if there could have been a possibility instead of having it five days to have it a minimum of six and, perhaps, even seven or eight.

M3: If possible, eight.

M4: If possible, because it was really very hard on the crew and naturally, to some extent, also on the mission's participants.

M5: I think my friend did not say enough; I think each one of them did more and above his duties. Each one acted more than an usual ambassador to the people and to the UJA. With themselves, with the strength, with the spirit, and with the daily work, even partly it looked like a routine work, but it's not. I think not only that we have given the people the most information that you wanted to give -- you give good per example; without you Rabbi Friedman, doing it, it's much harder than when you're around, but I don't think [06:00] we disappointed you. I hope that you'll bring more and more groups because this is what you want and this is what the country needs. *Shalom toda*.

Stone: I don't know why everybody suddenly got so serious -- they had some much better things that they were planning to tell you in private. Does anybody have anything they want to add general about the mission? Just anything they'd like to say to the Rabbi?

M4: Yes. The separation of male and female is not a very healthy one in any case. Neither is the excess speeches and talks -- the people want to do more, they want to see more, and they also want to enjoy while studying. That's mainly what's utterly wrong, but what should be correct.

M3: The ones that got used to get up at four o'clock in the morning -- why do you spoil it? Why do you wake them up Thursdays and Fridays at six o'clock? Why not keep it [07:00] four o'clock in the morning? It keeps them going.

M5: No, there is an important thing -- I think every mission had a lot to do with their leaders, and the leaders are the most important. In a moment the people respect the chairman -- the deputy chairman. The best leaders will participate, will go along; it's not only the guides. It's not only the people here that try to do the best, it's the tour leader that has to do

more and should be more selected (sic), especially the chairmen of various missions.

M2: They are all of the same level. You wouldn't find one or will ask you after being three days in Tel Aviv what's the name of the town. Or, you wouldn't find one who will ask you about the politic period, but the average is the same -- the level is the same -- so it makes it much easier to guide them. That their [08:00] questions intrigue us, it's a real challenge -- that's why you'll find the guides full of enthusiasm, which helps a lot.

Stone: I guess that's about it -- we're going to end up with a song for you Rabbi Friedman. Could we finish the song that you were singing; you were doing it so well.

M1: Sure. (singing begins)

Stone: And as the sun sets over the sea of Galilee, we say goodbye to you, Rabbi Friedman, and wish you *kol tov*. A *guten shabbes*. *Shabbat shalom*. (break in video) Ben through here in Israel have been the drivers [09:00]. Particularly on this mission they've driven through deserts in the Sinai desert,

they've climbed the hills of Judea to get to Jerusalem in the snow -- we wanted you to see who was handling the driving on this mission and just to give them a few words.

M6: I've been with almost all the missions and I've seen how and what the drivers did. To tell you that they had driven the night before to El Arish and didn't sleep all night in the freezing desert. When we came there in the morning with the flight, so the eyes -- almost closed -- shut off, slept in a tent, drive through the storms, get down to people in the exact times, safe, through the snow. And yet, above they kept the busses in top condition. One of the drivers had a break down and one of the fuel pipes broke down, and in 20 minutes he reported and put the bus on the road again with the people [10:00] won't miss a thing. I think a special thanks should be given to those drivers. [**inaudible**]

Stone: Just go. (break in video)

Buness: Area on the economy of Israel that we are going to have to assume the responsibility of the social aspects of the community, and we're going to ask them to give as much, if not more, than they did in '67. Now, this isn't going to be easy,

but it's all matter of interpretation. Although, I was very happy to hear that there's a large group coming over here in January for a one week tour, and if we can get a great number of particularly the younger people into [11:00] this work, I think they will help to carry on helping Israel survive.

Stone: Thank you very much Mr. [Buness?]. (break in video)

This is Howard Stone, the *Israel-American News Service*.

Traveling through Israel with the 450 members of the 14th United Jewish Appeal Study Mission. Right now we're on the veranda of the Hilton Hotel in Tel Aviv -- members of the mission are relaxing this morning after two exhausting days in the Sinai. That's one of our airplanes overhead. I'm with Mr. Irving [Rab?] of Boston, Massachusetts. Mr. Rab, this is your first visit to Israel -- [12:00] how would you compare this trip with previous experiences here?

Rab: Well, Howard it's awfully difficult in just a few minutes to give all of the impressions I've had since I've been here. I think that perhaps one of the most striking impressions I've had is the fact that Israel at the moment -- with all the activity that's going on -- is in reality an armed camp. Well, last time and the time before, all of the *kibbutzim* and the border

settlements, of course, were on the alert, but now everybody seems to be on the alert in the cities and everywhere else. As a matter of fact, I was in Jerusalem the other day, and while visiting the museum there were two young fellows, apparently on leave, carrying their riffles with them. I was told that when on leave you are supposed to have your weapons with you at all time. But, there is a contrast of a bustle of activity in all directions, both in the city [13:00] and out in the country, and at the same time, there is an awareness every minute of the day that there is a war and something could happen at any time. Yesterday -- for the sake of argument -- when we were near [Ishmalier?] -- I guess is the correct pronunciation -- there were two Egyptian MiG-21s that came over and we heard the gunfire. I didn't see anybody particularly excited among our group, but I understand the Israeli aircraft chased them off. I see no fear on the part of the people about the ability to take care of the situation.

Stone: How have they been reacting to the hostilities, if not with fear?

Rab: I've been told by a number of people here that the Israeli, as normal human beings, of course have fear when they think in

terms of [14:00] armament and they think in terms of the possible threat to their physical well-being. But, there is no evidence of anything but complete confidence in their ability to handle the situation. There's a great sensitivity to human life and to the desire to avoid any casualties, even -- not deaths, but the wounding of any people, and they take every precaution against that, but there is no fear of their ability to cope with any situation that might arise. Last night, there was some question about whether or not we should come through Gaza, and of course we had a reasonably good sized military convoy, but they came through in the dark -- although I understand that eleven o'clock last night there was a little trouble in Gaza as well. The women in the group were quite happy when we returned very safely back to our hotel.

Stone: Now, you had a similar [15:00] experience in the north, in the Beit She'an Valley I understand, at Kibbutz Tirat Zvi?

Rab: Yes, we were tremendously impressed by Tirat Zvi; it's a kibbutz that's been there for 31 years, and I could keep you here all morning by telling you about the intelligence and the skill with which they are developing their product, and their export markets, and so forth. One of the things that's really

heartbreaking is to see the tremendous amount of energy, and effort, and planning going into the construction of shelters. There were shelters being dug deep into the ground, being built out of reinforced concrete. Of course this is the easternmost kibbutz, I think, in Israel, so I've been told. We went right to the border, we asked when these attacks come and we were told that they might very well come early [16:00] in the morning, in the afternoon, late at night. It seemed so peaceful and quiet there and then I picked up the newspaper this morning to find out that Tirat Zvi had been bombed last night -- or at least a patrol car had been shot at with a bazooka -- fortunately no casualties. Incidentally, with all of the attacks that there have been there, including the six day war, they have had no casualties other than the loss of one man who went off to war, and injuries to two young boys who were a little too smart and thought they ought to stay out of the shelters during a raid. I don't think that will happen again. This gives you evidence of the tremendous care and the great discipline that these people have who are right on the front line up against the Arab terrorists.

Stone: They're being shelled rather frequently several times a week. Has anybody left the kibbutz yet that you know of? [17:00]

Rab: No, as a matter of fact, the people are coming back and one of the things that is most interesting is the fact that those who go off to the university who have had a little touch of big city life and are, perhaps, a little more sophisticated, are coming back. I think one of the reasons for it perhaps is the fact that they have diversified their activities -- there is an industrial complex as well as the agricultural work that's going on. There's a type of life that, in reality, is very stimulating; it's not a country life at all, even though it's out in the country. The fact that there is constant attacking doesn't seem to bother anybody particularly, as long as they've taken measures to protect themselves against it which of course they've done. I think this is so typical of the attitude of people here. We want peace more than anything in the world. We are [18:00] prepared to defend ourselves and we're prepared to fight for it if necessary, and it is necessary.

Stone: You speak of the high morality of the Israeli people. Have you found an awareness on their part that American jury is behind them -- does this contribute in any measure to their

moral?

Rab: I think it has a very definite effect. One of the things that is a contrast with what I'd seen here before is the attitude toward the American Jew. There always had been a very warm kinship -- we're all Jews and we're all interested in the development of Israel, as well as the welfare of Jews everywhere and the cultural ties between the people here and other parts of the world -- but, there was always the relationship or the feeling such as there might be between two groups of people, one of whom is accepting help from another. [19:00] I have the feeling that this disappeared completely because when the situation was at it's most critical point in 1967 the American Jews responded at a level almost unbelievable. The psychological reaction on the part of the Israeli to that instinctive response that came in 1967, apparently foraged a relationship that I hope will never disappear. There's a feeling that, in reality, we are brothers; what we're trying to do is together to develop a country and develop a place in the world where Jews can have the kind of dignity and the kind of self-respect, and produce the kind of constructive life and constructive attitude, and help to the world that Israel has been [20:00] and continues to deliver. I was very much impressed this morning by seeing an article in

the *Jerusalem Post* about Ghana having made the statement that they feel very close ties with Israel; obviously this is the result of so much of the work that has gone on between the two countries, and the help that Israel has given Ghana in developing it's country somewhat after the pattern of what's gone on here. So, in answer to your question, I would say that the feeling of solidity that exists between the Israeli and American Jews today is probably at it's all time high, and of course that contributes greatly to the morale of the people here. They feel that they are fighting, but they're not fighting alone because at least the American Jews are with them.

Stone: Well, have the members of the mission based on what they have seen with their own eyes made any decision concerning their responsibility and the responsibility of the American jury next year? [21:00] (break in video)

Rab: There's much question about that. What we have seen in the few days that we have been in the country I think is more than we can digest in this short period of time. Of course, there's a certain amount of emotional appeal which we all have, but this goes far beyond. There is an emergency -- there's no question about it. There's going to be an emergency here for some time

because with all of the talk and all of the negotiation and everything that goes on, we're still reading reports everyday about the complete refusal on the part of the Egyptians, and the Syrians, and the Jordanians to consider any of the propositions that have been made, or even to sit down and discuss them. I'm sure there are things going on behind the scenes, but this is attitude [22:00] that these countries have taken, so that apart from the emotional aspects there's a real rational reason why the American Jew has to respond. As the people here say -- and when the generals have talked to us and have referred -- we've made reference to some of the brilliant strategy in this or that campaign -- they have sort of written that off and said, "This isn't what has made this possible." It's the young people, even when their officers had been killed -- and I'll tell you a story about Israeli officers in a minute -- even after their officers had been killed they pick up and they go on because down deep in their heart they know there's no alternative; they win or else. This is going on, the country has had such a great development [23:00] -- all Jewry has had such an enormous investment...

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