

The Passenger Lists of Operation Magic Carpet: A Treasure for Genealogists and Historians

by Ayala Levin-Kruss

Operation Magic Carpet (or Operation On Wings of Eagles¹), which transported almost the entire community of Yemenite Jews to Israel between December 1948 and September 1950, is a celebrated part of Israeli history. With the digitization of the records of the Aden Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), detailed information about “the largest human airlift in history” is now accessible to researchers and family members worldwide. Of particular interest to genealogists are the English-language airplane passenger lists. A remarkable amount of both historical and personal information can be gleaned from a careful look at the lists containing almost 49,000 names now held in the JDC Jerusalem Archives.

These records reflect JDC’s rescue and relief operations in the British Crown colony of Aden, which, since the 19th century, had served as a refuge for Yemenite Jews. Historically, Yemenites seeking passage to the Holy Land arrived at the port city (now a part of Yemen proper), hoping to board ships to take them up the Straits of Tiran through the Suez Canal to the Mediterranean.

In 1946, JDC began formally operating a refugee camp in Aden for hundreds of Yemenite Jews fleeing drought and forced conversions by local chieftains

and their country’s widespread economic and political instability. Soon after the 1947 United Nations vote for the partition of Palestine, riots in Aden claimed the lives of 82 Adenite Jews and spurred the journey of hundreds of additional Jews to the transit camp.

When it became clear that ship passage through the Suez Canal would be impossible, JDC reached an agreement with Alaska Airlines, chartering airplanes to transport the Yemenite Jews over hostile territory to the newly created State of Israel. JDC financed the entire operation at a cost of \$3.5 million.

While we tend to think of Operation Magic Carpet as one continuous mass movement, in fact, it consisted of three phases:

- 1) The **first phase**, which began in December 1948, was referred to as the “Orphan Aliya”;
- 2) The **second stage**, from March-April 1949, was known as the “Aliya of the Adenites”;
- 3) The **third phase**, from July 1949-September 1950, was the period during which the vast majority of Yemenites emigrated.

The various columns of the passenger lists reveal a great deal

of historical and genealogical information. For example: the person's middle name is always the father's first name. Next comes sex, year of birth, weight, family status, names of the relatives in Israel, Yemen or Aden and sometimes additional observations. If the passenger is an orphan, this is noted. Together, these data corroborate information evident in other documents in the collection and reveal the effects of British political policy on the lives of Yemenite Jews.

The first two phases of Operation Magic Carpet are discussed below.

The Orphan Aliya

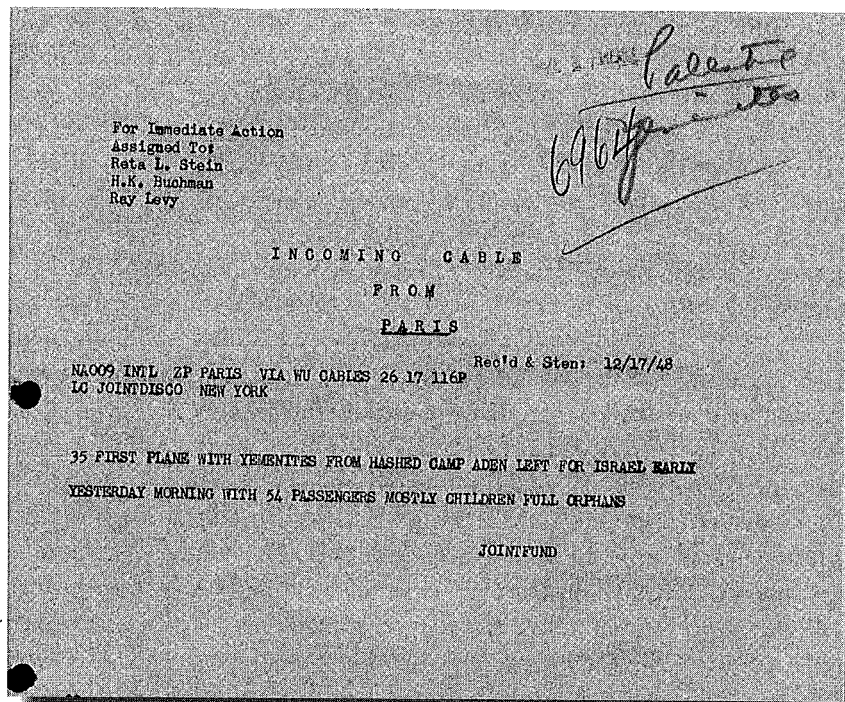
From 1947 through November 1948, JDC personnel and others had been meeting with British officials to try to convince them to allow some of the Jews to leave Aden. The focus of these negotiations had been orphans for two reasons: they were in most desperate need and their transfer would not violate the British commitment to neutrality in the conflict in Palestine, as they were not men of fighting age. Although the "Orphan Aliya" began in mid-December 1948 with full orphans, it had many starts and stops and included other children as well as adults. The initial reason behind the haphazard schedule was the unwillingness of British-controlled companies to supply fuel to the planes (the ostensible reason was shortages). A secondary preventing factor was fighting in the Negev from December 24, 1948.

In early January 1949 Alaska Airlines replaced the planes with Skymasters, which required less fuel. While the previously used C-46 flights operated according to weight limitations, Skymasters were limited by space. Benches replaced individual seats, thus accommodating more passengers, sometimes doubling the standard capacity. Thus, the weight column became less significant, but was retained (and is illustrated in the Passenger List).

From the "Relatives in Yemen or Aden" column, we learn about the separation of families. In addition to the orphans, this first phase included the wives and children of men aged 18-45 left behind in Aden and Yemen, as well as men and women over 45 years of age.

Aliya of the Adenites

After the armistice between Egypt and Israel of March 1, 1949, the British allowed men of fighting



Cable from JDC's Paris office informing the New York headquarters of the first flight carrying Yemenite orphans to Israel, December 17, 1948. Records of the New York Office of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1945-1954; file #3, item ID 652887.

age to travel to Israel. While this phase was officially the Aliya of the Adenites, including many Aden-born families traveling together, we see that it also allowed for the reunification of Yemenite families. The "Relatives in Israel" column reveals that it included the "ineligibles" – the fighting-age Yemenite husbands and children of those already in reception camps in Atlit.

The Operation Magic Carpet-related material now on JDC's websites includes accounts of the successful transport of precious Judaica, provisions for Rosh Hashana celebrations on board, and correspondence with Israel's chief rabbis on questions of Jewish law in the camp. In addition, the records detail the erection of a memorial in Aden to those who died on their way from Yemen, the visit to the transit camp of many famous individuals, and a sound recording of James Wooten, chair of Alaska Airlines, recalling one of the early January 1949 flights, which is available at <https://soundcloud.com/jdc-archives/james-wooten-operation-magic>.

Five JDC Archives volunteers (Barry Badnor, Linda Cantor, Linda Feinstone, Claus Hirsch and Susan Lieberman) began indexing the names on these Yemenite airlift passenger lists in January 2016, completing the lists from the first phase, containing more than 3,000 names, at the end of April 2016! They are available through the Names Index at <http://archives.jdc.org/sharedlegacy/search-names>. Work

PASSENGER LIST No. 1 FROM AJJDC CAMP HASHED ADEN.

Date of Departure _____ Time of Departure _____ (Identification of Plane _____)

Serial No. of Passenger in Register	FULL NAME	Sex	Year of Birth	Weight in lbs	Family Status	Orphan	Full Names and addresses of Relatives in Israel	Full Name and address of closest Blood Relative in Aden or in Yemen	Special Observations
1	Shmuel Bureh Tovim	M	1938	98	-	FO	none	Sister: Simha Bureh Tovim. HADDA	
2	Efryeem Bureh Tovim	M	1934	79	-	FO	none	- do -	
3	Hayoom Yehia Dar	M	1937	52	-	FO	none	Uncle: Chaim Yousef Yaiah MANACHA	
4	Yehia Yehia Dar	M	1939	68	-	FO	none	- do -	
5	Ghina Yehia Dar	F	1940	52	-	FO	none	- do -	
6	Salem Mimnes Yousef	M	1935	91	-	FO	none	Brother: Yousef Mimnes SANAA	
7	Shamma Mimnes Yousef	F	1937	72	-	FO	none	- do -	
8	Yehia Mimnes Yousef	M	1939	51	-	FO	none	- do -	
9	Malka Yehia Hassan	F	1934	87	-	FO	none	Cousin: Shimon Yousef KHARIDA	
10	Salem Yehia Hassan	M	1936	57	-	FO	none	- do -	
11	Yehia Yehia Hassan	M	1938	51	-	FO	none	- do -	
12	Ibrahim Ishack Maseoud	M	1934	86	-	FO	none	Brother: Sayeed Isaac Maseoud. SIRAF	
13	Sleiman Ishack Maseoud	M	1936	75	-	FO	none	- do -	
14	Bidar Yehia Hafedi	F	1935	90	-	FO	none	Brother: Yehia Yehia Hafedi. HABUR	
15	Saada Yehia Hafedi	F	1940	40	-	FO	none	- do -	
16	Rachel Yehia Mukari	F	1934	95	-	FO	none	Sister: Sayeeda Yehia Mukari. DAMT	
17	Salem Yehia Mukari	M	1936	62	-	FO	none	- do -	
18	Shaul Nissim Danti	M	1938	61	-	FO	none	Sister: Freya Nissim Danti. UTMA	
19	Shamma Nissim Danti	F	1942	32	-	FO	none	- do -	
20	Salem Dawood Geroufi	M	1937	66	-	FO	none	Grandfather: Yehia Maseoud KHAULAN	
21	Shadia Dawood Geroufi	F	1939	57	-	FO	none	- do -	
22	Salem Sleiman Mansoor	M	1934	87	-	FO	none	Uncle: Yehia Mansoor FURGAN	
23	Ester Sleiman Mansoor	F	1936	67	-	FO	none	- do -	
24	Nissim Sleiman Mansoor	F	1940	52	-	FO	none	- do -	
25	Hanna Sleiman Mansoor	F	1942	40	-	FO	none	- do -	

Signed..... Approved.....
Date.....

Note :- M = Male U = Unmarried W = Widow (e) FO = Full Orphan
F = Female Md = Married D = Divorced ML = Mother Living
FL = Father Living

First page of Passenger List No. 1 of the Yemenite airlift, December 17, 1948. Records of the Jerusalem Collection of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, 1944-1952, file #JER.210, item ID

continues with the lists from the second phase, which are expected to be indexed by the end of summer 2016. Both the indexed names from the passenger lists and the broader records of the airlift and JDC's operation of the refugee camps, which form the Aden sub-collection of the JDC Archives' Jerusalem Collection,

1944-1952, may be searched at <http://archives.jdc.org/archives-search>. Indexing of the names for the third phase (July 1949-September 1950), which may include more than 40,000 names, has not yet begun.

The JDC Archives recently initiated a collaboration

with the Israel Genealogy Research Association (IGRA). The JDC Archives is providing IGRA with the primary names from the passenger lists which IGRA will translate from English to Hebrew. IGRA will add these names to its database with a direct link to the complete record and document in the JDC Names Index. The Hebrew translations will be especially valuable for the Operation Magic Carpet lists, as many Yemenite Jewish names were spelled inconsistently in the original English-language lists.

Ayala Levin-Kruss, originally from New York, has lived in Providence, Jerusalem and London. She has been a cataloguer in the Jerusalem office of the JDC Archives since 2011. In this time she has catalogued material from JDC offices all over the world, including Istanbul, Stockholm, Australia, South America and the European headquarters in Paris.

Endnote

¹ A biblical note: The Book of Exodus (19:4) states "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to me." The authors of the *Etz Hayim Torah and Commentary*, published by the Rabbinical Assembly of the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism, commented, "When the isolated Jews of Yemen, most of whom had never seen an airplane, were flown to the modern state of Israel, many of them understood the airplane flight to be a fulfillment of this verse." (page 437). ☆



Prior to airlift to Israel, Yemenite Jewish refugees are weighed with their possessions in the JDC transit camp. At left is Colonel Max Lapidus, JDC's Director for Aden, 1950. Photo: Israel Office of Information. Courtesy JDC Archives



Yemenite Jews board a JDC-chartered Alaska Airlines flight to Israel as part of Operation Magic Carpet. Yemen, c. 1951. Photo: Al Taylor. Courtesy JDC