

WITNESSES IN UNIFORM: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THE HOLOCAUST



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Participation in a mission *Edim b'Madim* (Witnesses in Uniform) to Poland in the footsteps of the Shoah (Holocaust) is an integral part of the training of commanding officers at the Command and General Staff course at the College for Senior Officers of the Israel Police (IP). The annual delegation of thirty-five police officers and two representatives of the Ministry of Public Security makes a journey into the recent past of the Jewish people, into the excruciating years 1934-1945 of Europe. Our mission in the snow of December 2005 gave us a mere hint of the bitter conditions the sparsely dressed victims endured.

The members of our delegation, lead by the Commander of the Jerusalem District and by the head of the College for Senior Officers, truly reflected the population of the State of Israel. Among us were the adult children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors, and even the descendants of those murdered. Among us were young police officers whose families were native Israelis or who had immigrated to Israel from North Africa or Middle Eastern countries, and whose connections to the Shoah were less direct. Among us were a Christian Arab officer from Nazareth, a Moslem Arab and a Druse officer.

For each of us, this was an intensely emotional and educational encounter with the systematic murder of 6,000,000 men, women and children of our fellow Jewish people and with the near destruction of a rich religious and cultural heritage.



Being part of the special command course, the mission stressed the responsibility of the police officer and his or her relationship to this incomprehensible tragedy. Intensive study days preceded the journey: invited guest speakers who had been ghetto and death camp inmates as children and young teenagers and who are now senior citizens evoked the horror and the bravery; discussions stressed matters of moral dilemma and

many of them still suffer the scars to this day.

The preliminary study days and the mission itself were directed specifically towards the role of the police officers. Among the aims of the mission are:

- First and foremost, to serve as witnesses, to see and to be seen;
- Imparting the legacy of the Shoah and the heritage of the Jewish people among the officers and commanders of

respect for one's fellow man, human rights and tolerance;

- Displaying the presence of the State of Israel and the Israel Police at the sites of the murder of the Jewish people in the Nazi attempt to carry out the "Final Solution".

Once in Poland – the site of the ghettos and death camps to which the Jewish citizens of Germany, Holland, France, etc. were deported and murdered together with the Jews of



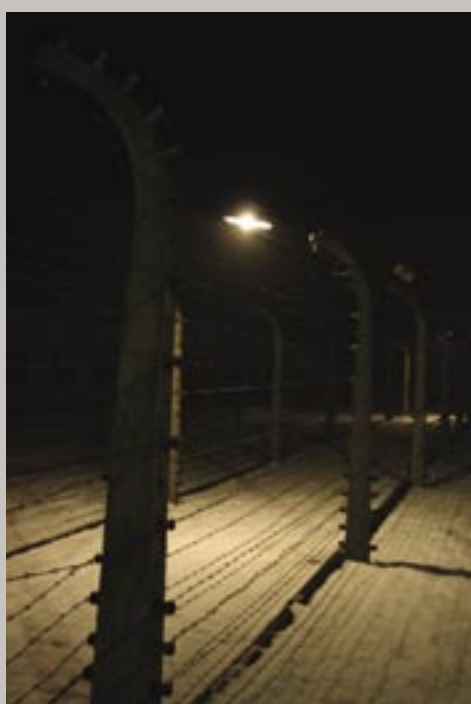
individual examples of unusual generosity and leadership; a day at Yad Vashem Remembrance Authority in Jerusalem emphasized the personal and communal losses. These presentations also offered an understanding of the trauma that many of our fellow Israeli citizens endured decades ago upon their arrival in Israel as survivors, and how

the Israel Police;

- Instilling the sense of belonging and the obligation for the continuation of the State of Israel, based on the cycle of our history, on the acts of resistance to the Holocaust, and on the revival of our nation;
- Understanding the connection between Jewish history, particularly the Shoah, and the imperative of maintaining the security of the State of Israel;
- Strengthening the self-identity and the personal and professional feeling of responsibility of the officers as it relates to their role in maintaining both a safe and a just society;
- Emphasizing the role of the commander as an educator, focusing on the values of

Poland – the journey was rigorous and heartbreaking. The sites where the mission served as witnesses included:

- the former ghetto in Warsaw with the Path of Heroism dedicated to the courage of leaders in the struggle for survival;
- the centuries old Jewish cemetery in Warsaw which testifies to the long-term and productive Jewish community that had made up one-third of the capital's pre-Holocaust population;
- the Umschlagplatz, the train depot from where the survivors of the ghetto were deported to the death camp of Treblinka;
- mass anonymous graves, in deep pits: in Warsaw, in the Lopokhova forest, in Kielce, in Kaluchin, and on the





The delegation in the restored synagogue of Tikochin, built in 1642; the Jewish residents of Tikochin were massacred in 1941.

Biblical passages, and readings prepared by the officers themselves, often referring to their own family connections to the Holocaust. Each service concluded with the chanting of the *El Maleh Rachamim* prayer, the recitation of the *Kaddish* memorial prayer and, what brought tears to our eyes, the singing of *Hatikva*, Israel's national anthem. For each of us, the scenes will remain etched in our memories and in our souls.



outskirts of Krakow; a mass grave with the names of 35 children inscribed on the tombstone in Kielce;



- the remains of destroyed synagogues and communities, at refurbished famous synagogues, and at those that now serve only as museums of what had been;
- and most painfully, the infamous death camps: Treblinka, Maydanek, and Auschwitz-Birkenau with their gas chambers, crematoria and mound of human ashes.

On a very personal note, after this pilgrimage I now believe that if one has the opportunity to pay homage, by one's presence, to the innocent victims whose lives were so brutally snuffed out, one should do so.



The Israel Police and representatives of the Ministry held ceremonies at memorial sites and at the death camps, with honor guards, presentation of the Israel and Israel Police flags, memorial prayers, the lighting of memorial candles. Each ceremony included special selections from our national repertoire of poetry and essays,

