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Convention 2002 Overview

By Alan Zimmerman, National Programs/Public Relations Coordinator

There may never have been more Jews in the area than when Savannah played host to the 107th Annual Convention of the Jewish War Veterans of the USA (JWV) August 11-18, 2002. Savannah proved to be a charming city, with wonderful parks and beautiful architecture, as well as some of the friendliest people in the USA. Many of the little squares contain statues of historical figures from the days of the American Revolution and the Civil War. As local tour guide Sharon Galin noted, there is a story behind the direction the statues are facing. The Revolutionary War figures face South; the Civil War figures face North, because you never turn your back on your enemy. The British came from the South, the Union troops from the North.



Hundreds of the Jewish War Veterans gathered from across the US to conduct the business of the organization, as well as to renew old friendships, according to outgoing JWV National Commander Bernard Becker. "JWV is an active, working organization, involved in the issues facing the Jewish community and strongly supportive of Israel," Becker explained.

All work and no play is still a bad idea, so there was more than just work to the gathering. Monday saw a two full bus loads of JWVers on a tour of the Savannah area, lead by Convention Chair Edwin Goldwasser, with stops at the Historic District and City Market, as well as the Fort Pulaski and Tybee Beach areas before day's end.

Chief among the activities of the convention is the consideration of submissions by Posts, Departments and individuals for the awards handed out each year at convention. Awards for programming, for membership, for a wide range of the activities carried out each year by JWV. The Awards Committee reviews the submitted materials and determines the winners (see pages 6 and 7 for photos of the winners with National Commander Becker).

There is one award, however, that is determined by the National Commander himself- the Murray Rosen Award. That award is presented to the Outstanding JWV member for the year. And this year, it was presented to two worthy individuals, Albert I. Lerner of Silver Spring, MD, and Morton Horvitz of Annapolis, MD. PDC Al Lerner is the Chief Docent at the National Museum of American Jewish Military History; Mort Horvitz is Guest Curator and also a docent at the Museum. Both have devoted countless hours to the Museum and JWV.

Monday evening (and Tuesday, Wednesday as well), videotapes of the Lecture Series from the National Museum of American Jewish Military History were played for the viewing of the JWVers who were not able to attend the lectures during the previous season at the museum. Thursday evening, The Jewish Veteran National Editor Sy Brody presented a video on Australia's General Sir John Monash., the highest ranking Jewish officer in World War I.

Tuesday morning saw outgoing National Commander Bernard Becker, with incoming National Commander Daniel Weiss and other JWV leaders, visiting the grave of Mordechai Sheftall, a Jewish leader of the American forces in the Georgia-South Carolina area during the Revolutionary War. The cemetery was provided to the Jewish community by the Sheftall family. A Marine Color Guard presented the flag, a wreath was placed on the grave and the memorial Kaddish was recited by the assembled veterans.

The featured speaker on Wednesday, at the joint opening ceremony of the JWV and Jewish War Veterans Auxiliary (JWVA) was Dr. Leo Mackay, Jr., Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. Wednesday evening again offered tourist options to the attendees. 130 went on a dinner-cruise of the Savannah River with the Century Club. Good food, good company and the beautiful sights of the River and Georgia countryside made for a wonderful evening for all who attended.

On Thursday the Chairman of the Joints Chiefs of Staff, Air Force General Richard B. Myers, addressed the convention. General Myers serves as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs since his appointment Oct. 1, 2001. He was previously Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and also has served as Commander of the North American Aerospace Defense Command and US Space Command. In his current role, he serves as the principal military advisor to the President, the Secretary of Defense and the National Security Council. Excerpts of his talk appear in this issue on pages 8 through 10.

The Convention featured sessions dealing with a wide variety of Veterans and Jewish issues, including veterans benefits, membership and outreach, insurance, Women in the Military, resolutions and scholarships. Resolutions on numerous issues were brought to the floor of the three business sessions (they appear in this issue on pages 18 thru 20). Speakers from the VA system addressed the VAVS workshop. A variety of booklets and brochures on VA benefits and programs was made available to all who attended. The Hospitality Suite was sponsored mornings by the Department of the Southeast, under Bonnie and Joe Kraut, and afternoons/evenings by the Committee to Elect Danny Weiss National Commander.

Among the speakers at the Commander's Banquet was a long-time friend and mentor of Bernie's, PNC Bill Carmen. PNC Carmen, 35 years old when he became National Commander in 1956, was the youngest ever to achieve that position.

As with every National Convention, the culmination was the Commander's Banquet, followed by the installation of the new National Commander, Daniel Weiss. This was truly the peak of the Convention, as the program flowed without error or complication, and those attending heard the thanks, from the heart, of their departing leader. As midnight approached, the incoming National Commander announced his leadership team (see pages 14-16), and the future of JWV was in good hands.

Excerpts from the speech given by General Richard B. Myers

By General Richard B. Myers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The following are excerpts from the speech given by General Myers at the opening of the 107th National JWV Convention.

Let me talk about the war on terrorism, and that's our number one priority. Certainly it's the administration's number 1 priority, and certainly in the military and the Department of Defense, it's job 1. If we're going to have success in this war, its going to require help from all segments of society. This is not just a military issue. YOU play a role, and we'll talk just a little about that.



Let's talk a little bit about the war on terrorism, let's talk about the threat. Currently that's the Al Qeida threat, they're the group that perpetrated the acts on Sept. 11th. Clearly, their intent is not being masked at all. They would like to do away with our way of life and our freedom. They showed that by their attacks on Sept. 11th. It didn't matter what religious faith you were or what cultural-ethnic background you came from. Man, woman or child, it was irrelevant. What they were trying to do was disrupt this society to the point it might cause us to lose confidence in ourselves. And that just simply can't happen.

So I think fundamentally their goal is to destroy our way of life. And not just ours, but others who don't believe in the extremist views they believe in.

It's a different kind of conflict, and you're probably frustrated like I'm frustrated. It's not like World War II, where you could pick up the paper and see the lines on the map changing. This is not that kind of war. It's a much different war.

I'll admit that perhaps we just haven't found a good way to tell you how it's going. And in some cases it's not military, it's diplomatic, or it's law enforcement, or it's intelligence, working together with other countries, and trying to put together the puzzle so we can arrest or combat them or disrupt their financial flow.

They are smart people. We come up with some tactics, they change their tactics, then we change ours. It's as much of a chess game as I think we've ever been involved in. Very, very difficult.

How do we respond to this? One way, we've got to defend at home, we need a good defense for our homeland and our allies. We have over 80,000 reservists and National Guard people mobilized today to do mostly that, to defend our homeland.

It's a very different way of fighting this war, and we have a lot of adapting to do in the military to be quick enough, agile enough, flexible enough to deal with it.

We've faced difficult challenges before. If you think back to this very day in 1961. The Communists started the Berlin Wall. And it failed, for lots of reasons. I would submit because a lot of you served after 1961, as I did. We served, and our service was part of the reason that Wall eventually fell back down.

You can think back to the fourteen individuals of the Jewish faith that had won the Congressional Medal of Honor. Just recently, Captain Ben Salomon who during the battle of Saipan, I'm sure you are aware of this, gave his life to defend 100 others, as a medic! Which demonstrates a lot of things to me, but it's a part of that spirit of service and selflessness that is required, not only now in our war on terrorism, but it's been required every time we've asked people to serve.

The World War II generation is the greatest generation. I will also say along with that, this current generation of young men and women that are serving our country, this current generation is going to be the next greatest generation, because we've asked an awful lot of them...but these are folks that know what their mission is.

They have the same look in their eyes that I suspect we had on the ships, in the fields, in the planes during World War II. They know what it's all about, they're not complaining. So we are making some progress on this. But it's all a way of saying we're all connected. I'm sure some of you must know someone who is serving, relatives or neighbors serving, and you should be proud of them. And that's an important message for me to tell you, and to reassure you we really are building the next greatest generation. That leads me to another very important point. Organizations like yours are very, very important, really important. You keep this legacy of service, and what it means to serve, and what sacrifice means and selflessness means, you keep it alive. And that is so important. It's important to all of us so we remember that this business of keeping America free, it's not an easy task. And we all sacrifice in our own way to make all that happen. If it weren't for organizations like yours, then I think part of that flame would go out. And we'd be in danger of forgetting what it takes to keep us a free people. That's what it's all about. In the short term you can do without almost anything, but in the long term, and I think you take the long view, I think you are doing exactly what needs to be done, and I thank you.

If you take any message away from what I say today, I would like you to take away and take back to your friends and your communities that, let there be no doubt, that the international terrorist organizations, Al Qaeda and so forth, they really do hate us and they'd really like to disrupt our way of life. That's message number one. Message number two is that we've gotta be patient. This is going to be a long, long effort. You know eventually we have to work on the root cause of all this, but in the meantime we have to have a fairly aggressive action and that's the phase we're in. It could last years and years, and so we must be patient. We can't lose sight of what our goal is and what their goal is. To win we've gotta be more flexible and adaptable, certainly in the military and certainly in many of our civilian organizations and departments. Some really big changes have been made to how we're organized to help do that. I also think you'd like to take back that we all have a part of this war. One of the things that's hard for me to do is tell you what you can do, other than that you don't let the terrorists achieve their main goal. That's to cause us to lose confidence in our institutions and our country. In other words they'd like to scare us to the point where we aren't flying on airliners, we're not conducting business like we'd like to conduct business, all that sort of thing. It doesn't mean you can't be prudent, but we ought to go about business and life as we want it to be, as we want to live it.

And finally, one last time, thank you for your past service.

Questions and Answers:

Q: I know that there is no plan on the President's desk insofar as activity dealing with Iraq. I want you to know that our organization has taken the position that appropriate action be taken, sooner rather than later. The question is, do you care to comment on that?

Gen. Myers: Everything you said is correct. The President will make that decision, if and when. He has not done so yet. So far that's not a military decision, that's a Presidential decision. I can say this, and it's not specific about Iraq, but certainly Iraq falls into this category. So what needs to be discussed, I think, is knowing what the terrorist intent is, that is to do away with our freedoms, our way of life; that they are willing to kill thousands, tens of thousands. That would not bother them. So in a sense we were fortunate that it happened at the time of day it did. So if you think that's their intent and then you think about weapons of mass destruction, biological, chemical or nuclear weapons or radiological devices, and we know from our interrogations of the detainees we have, we know from the stuff we picked up inside Afghanistan, it's for certain they'd like to get their hands on these weapons of mass destruction. Then the picture you paint is not a very pretty one and you have to ask, well, what do you want your government to do for you? Should we

wait, and absorb another attack before we act? Or should we use our inherent right of self defense, even anticipatory self defense, to keep this from happening? I think its getting good discussion today, around America, in Congress and so forth. That's how I'd approach it. I'd approach it from the strategic level, and I'd say ok, what do you need to do to keep that nexus of weapons of mass destruction and terrorists that would use them, without hesitation, how do you keep that from happening?

Q: Under the Defense Review, you provide for a two theatre operation. Since 9-11, has that changed to the degree that you now consider pre-emptive to be as important as deterrence?

Gen. Myers: I think this notion about the inherent right of self defense is a well understood notion internationally. Countries have that, they have the inherent right to defend themselves. There is also a notion that is accepted internationally, and that is the inherent right of anticipatory self defense. In other words, you don't have to wait and absorb the first blow before you can take action. And that sort of equals pre-emption, I guess. It's consistent, I think, with the body of international accord. Q: We've been getting signals that women in the military have gone far enough, and should be downgraded now, especially in the higher echelons. What is the DoD doing about this? Gen. Myers: I don't know where you're getting your information, but I don't agree with it, and neither does the Department of Defense. There is no movement to keep women down. In fact, it is just the opposite. It is not in anybody's consciousness, certainly not Sec. Rumsfeld's. It's just not the view and I think its contrary to all the evidence. There are only a couple of things, a couple of MOS's , if you're in the Army, careers where you can't serve today. Virtually every career field is open to women. Numerous three-star women officers are in the armed forces today, soon to be four-star is my guess. This is a trend that has been going on for a long time. You can't grow a four-star overnight! You can't say in 1990 you want women to be four-stars and have them in 2000. It takes time. This is all moving along very nicely. Q: As Americans and as Jews, we have two front battle in front of us, aside from Al Qaida and Afghanistan. There is Israel, who has taken preemptive strikes, who has fought the wars both ways. My question really is, do you have any comment insofar as our country's position on the alliance with Israel, and fighting the total war? Gen. Myers: That's a good question. I think the US position with respect to Israel is well understood. That partnership has endured since Israel has become a state, and that's not going to change. And I think the President has pretty much said, going back before April and then more recently about a month ago, he's made his comments on the process that's needed in Israel to deal with the issues. And they are mainly today more on the political side than the military side. You know, in the end, you need to have a political solution to a very, very difficult problem. I think the administration has been very aggressive. I've been in those discussions, but right now its not seen purely as a military issue. Q: As veterans, we are concerned about both the men and women in the armed forces. What is your personal prognosis for Afghanistan? Gen. Myers: Regarding Afghanistan, first of all, lets think about what we did. In less than 30 days after Sept. 11th, we went half way around the world, to a land-locked country, with big ambitions. We wanted to oust the Taliban from power, try to build through the international community some sort of governing arrangement inside Afghanistan and capture or kill as many Al Qaida as we could. We've moved along that path pretty darn well. And by the way, most importantly, underlying all of that, to create conditions in Afghanistan that would enable the refugees to come back, to create conditions where private organizations and non-governmental organizations could provide relief to the Afghan people, so you could end their suffering. So, we've made some progress along all those lines. The future- the future is there are still pockets of Taliban and Al Qaida in the country, pretty much isolated to one region of the country. The rest of the country is reasonably secure, and people can go about their lives in a reasonably safe manner. The US is leading the effort to train an Afghan national army That is seen as important to the transitional administration, to have a security apparatus themselves. So some of your tax dollars are going to that. In terms of major pitched battles in Afghanistan, I don't know if we've seen the last one of those, or if there are huge concentrations of Al Qaida we have to go after. There may be, but I think the probability is going down as time goes on. The President said early on, they can run but they can't hide. Well, they've run to other countries, and now we've got to go find them there. Let me just say one more time how important your service has been and continues to be in this organization. You thought your service was over when you got your

discharge or retirement certificate. Wrong! You're still serving and we appreciate that. And may God bless you and your families and may God bless America! Thank you.