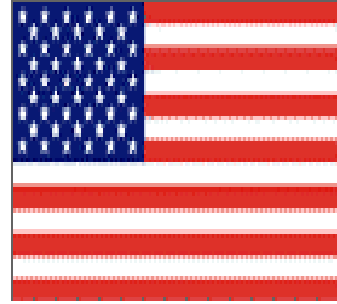




THE ANNA SOBOL LEVY FELLOWSHIP 2003-2004



Left to Right: Erik Wilkerson, Sara Reef, Tal Hazan and Brett Schor

THE ASL FELLOWS



Erik Wilkerson received his Bachelor's degree in International Studies from the Virginia Military Institute. One of the school's nine Honors Graduates and ranked 6th militarily, Erik held a number of leadership positions at VMI where he was privileged to receive the mentorship of General Anthony Zinni, General Charles Brower IV, and General Chat Teerawat. This year, Erik began an MA degree in Islamic and Middle Eastern studies, but will return to the US at the end of the year to fulfill his military commitments as an officer in the United States Marine Corps. Erik is extremely grateful to the ASL fellowship for providing him with such an amazing opportunity for professional and personal growth, as well as for the brief, happy repose before what promises to be challenging days ahead for the United States military.



Sara Reef received her Bachelor's degree in history and international relations from the American University (AU) in Washington, DC. While studying at AU, she was awarded a certificate for excellence in the Italian language, was invited to join the National History Honor Society, achieved the Dean's List, and received a certificate in knowledge of Contemporary European Affairs while studying in Strasbourg, France. After completing her degree, she worked in conjunction with the US Department of State, and the Institute of International Education on the Fulbright Scholar Program. She is currently studying Hebrew and Israeli affairs at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Sara is extremely grateful for having been awarded the ASL fellowship; it has provided her a unique opportunity to visit military sites throughout Israel and greatly facilitated her ability to pursue a Master's Degree in Israel.



Brett Schor received his BA in History from the University of Virginia. After graduating from college he worked at a Capitol Hill-based public affairs and media consulting firm, volunteered in Israel for one year on Project Otzma, and served as the Director of Student Affairs at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, DC. He is currently pursuing an MA in Israeli Society and Politics at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and hopes to eventually begin a career in Middle East policy analysis and research. Brett's experience as an ASL fellow has significantly enhanced his understanding of the geo-political and security issues facing Israel, provided him with additional tools for processing current events and contributed immensely to his classroom studies.

THE ASL COORDINATOR



In his capacity as a Lieutenant Colonel and Armored Battalion Commander in the Israel Defense Forces (res.), Tal Hazan is serving for the first time as the coordinator for the ASL Fellowship. In between the bi-monthly ASL trips to military sites that he organizes and the security-related discussions he facilitates, Tal is busy working as a senior supervisor for the Israel Land Administration (ILA) and pursuing an MA in political science at the Hebrew University. He later hopes to receive a grant to continue his graduate work in public policy at Harvard University. Tal is married and has two children. He views his involvement with the ASL fellowship as an extremely pleasurable and mutually rewarding experience. In addition to sharing his extensive knowledge about the military establishment and Israeli politics, Tal has thoroughly enjoyed learning from the ASL fellows about American politics and the US military.

September/October 2003: Jerusalem Borders, the Security Fence and Checkpoints

After viewing Jerusalem from a variety of impressive observation points on the outskirts of the city, we assembled on the remnants of King Hussein's unfinished palace in Northern Jerusalem. The construction site was abandoned after the Six Day War and is located on a hill just west of Pisgat Zeev. It overlooks Jerusalem's northernmost neighborhoods and a range of villages – Jewish and Arab – north of the city. Our objective was to familiarize ourselves with the geo-political realities in the Jerusalem area in order to better understand the government's dilemmas surrounding the route of the proposed security fence.



King Hussein's unfinished palace in Northern Jerusalem



A view of Arab neighborhoods within Jerusalem's Northern borders

In light of the intense media coverage surrounding Israel's security fence, Tal took us to already completed portions of the fence just south of Har Homa and in Northern Jerusalem near the former Jerusalem airport. While there was consensus within our group that the fence will, once completed, function as an effective security measure, we disagreed over the extent to which its route will serve Israel's interests given such factors as demography and the political implications of its controversial route. We also observed several military checkpoints on the southern and northeastern municipal borders of Jerusalem. From these visits, we gained a better perspective on border control and were able to observe first hand the security precautions undertaken by the military to prevent terrorists from entering Israeli population centers.



Chizma Checkpoint situated on the outskirts of NE Jerusalem



The security fence. An electronic gate that is one component of a series of mechanisms that comprise the fence

November 2003: Trip to the Israeli-Lebanese Border and the Northern Security Fence

It was with a great deal of excitement that the group piled into Tal's trustworthy Toyota for our first interaction with an IDF combat unit. Our visit to the Northern border with Lebanon gave us an understanding of the history and geography of the area, as well as the capabilities and mission of the IDF units deployed there. True to his tanker roots, Tal punished his Toyota by driving us through the Jordan Valley and up the rough side of a mountain in order to gain a view of the entire Golan for our first stop. From here, Tal was able to draw on his extensive knowledge of the area to give us a clear picture of its history, and strategic importance. We then drove to an IDF military installation in Zareit located in the Western Upper Galilee. The base we visited is manned by a Druse combat unit whose commanding officer warmly received and guided us around the facilities, and explained his unit's role in defending Israel against hostile Hizbullah bases stationed within plain view. Walking around the base gave us a unique insight into the lives' of IDF soldiers. Although it was obvious that the discipline was not exactly as stringent as America's all-volunteer force, we left with little doubt about the unit's determination or ability to carry out its assigned tasks.



Israeli-Jordanian Border in the Jordan Valley



Brett and Erik talking with an IDF commander near an observation tower positioned directly across from a Hizbullah installation

On the way back to Jerusalem on Highway Six, we followed the northern route of the security fence along the West Bank, and drove past the wall built around the Palestinian city of Qalqilya. Despite the fact that all of the fellows support Israel's security fence, seeing the city enclosed on three sides by a 12 meter high concrete wall prompted reservations among some in the group. It was clear to all of us why the Palestinian Authority chose to highlight this segment of the wall in its propaganda campaign against Israel and the security fence.



The security wall surrounding Qalqilya

December 2003: Demography and trip to the Central IDF Absorption Base (Bakum)

In a meeting at Tal's house in Givat Ye'arim, we discussed recent demographic trends in Israel and their implications for both Israel's Jewish character and her security. The content we covered in the meeting was inspired by Deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert's recently announced initiative to maintain a strong Jewish majority within Israel's borders. Aided by the research of Arnon Sofer, a leading geography professor at the University of Haifa, Tal helped us analyze different approaches to addressing some of Israel's demographic concerns. Among other things, we discussed the incredibly high birthrate among the Bedouin and Arab populations within Israel, possible political borders between Israel and a future Palestinian State, and Israeli immigration policies. The discussion was quite heated at times, with everyone bringing different perspectives and opinions to the table. Our meeting ended with a great home-cooked Yemenite meal provided by Tal.

Our trip to Bakum, the IDF's main absorption and classification base located near Tel Aviv provided a rare opportunity for us to witness an IDF soldier's initiation into the army. The day began with a breakfast briefing by the base's commander and attaché. Our meeting was professional and informative, giving us insight into the base's operations. More interesting, however, was the tour that followed. We witnessed the process of long-haired, undisciplined civilian boys become card carrying members of the IDF. Those of us well familiar with the experience were not surprised by our observations: long lines of nervous but excited young men being poked, prodded, photographed, and otherwise violated in accordance with worldwide military tradition. All of us found the experience serious and humorous at the same time, making this one of the most interesting visits for some in our group.



The ASL fellows standing at the main entrance to Bakum beneath a sign that reads: "Welcome to the IDF"



The ASL fellows watching new IDF conscripts receive their inoculations

January 2004: War of Independence, Burma Road tour & Paratroopers Training Base

After discussing the Arab siege of Jerusalem during Israel's War of Independence, we took an off-road tour of the Burma Road in Tal's 4X4. Most of the route we traveled on was established in 1948 and was used by the IDF to provide fresh troops and supplies to Jerusalem. The Burma Road was used to bypass the main highway connecting Jerusalem to the rest of the country which had been cut off by the Arab *Fedayeen* and the Jordanian Army. Along the route, we saw makeshift water pipes and pumps that were used during the War to provide the Jewish population in Jerusalem with fresh water. The trip gave us an extraordinary appreciation for the efforts made by the Israeli army to prevent West Jerusalem from falling into the hands of the Jordanians.



Tal's Toyota climbing a difficult stretch of the Burma Road



To better grasp the rigorous combat training program for IDF soldiers, Tal arranged a visit to an elite paratroopers base in the south. Because the base was built with US dollars in accordance with the Oslo Peace Process, we were told that it had considerably better facilities than most army bases. After speaking at length with several paratroopers about their personal experiences in combat and challenges surrounding their army service, we toured the base, observed new recruits training on an obstacle course and watched a live fire exercise in the field. After the tour, we were given an opportunity to fire M-16s at balloon targets near the base.



Sara shooting an M-16



Erik competing with two paratroopers on a rope climb

February 2004: Visit to Ariel and the Palmach Museum

In order to get a feel for the army's role in protecting Jews living on the West Bank, we visited a small military outpost overlooking the settlement city of Ariel. The soldiers on duty spoke to us about their army experience and described scenes of occasional friction between Ariel residents and Arabs from neighboring villages. In addition to visiting the military outpost, we drove through Ariel and spoke with residents and students studying at the nearby College of Judea and Samaria. We also had the opportunity to visit a caravan dormitory for student residents of the college. On our tour we learned that many Israelis who live in Ariel are there because it is affordable and near Tel Aviv, not for ideological reasons.



AsL Fellows talking with IDF soldiers stationed outside of Ariel



The City of Ariel



Caravan Dorms for Students at the College of Judea and Samaria

In conjunction with our discussion about different resistance groups during the Yeshuv (pre-State) period, we toured the Palmach Museum in Tel Aviv. The purpose of this visit was to explore the role of the Palmach, an elite unit of the Haganah, in securing independence for Israel. The interactive museum was both interesting and informative. High-tech simulations depicted the Palmach's role in undermining British rule in Palestine and in facilitating Jewish emigration. The exhibit was narrated by a fictional group of Palmach soldiers who told the story of Israeli independence through their eyes. The tour ended with a re-enactment of a local scene in Palestine during the UN's vote to recognize Israel as an independent state on May 14, 1948.

March 2004: The Reserve Army and the Israel Air Force Museum

Our discussion of the reserve army took place in Brett's spacious and well-furnished (in comparison to dormitory accommodations) apartment. The purpose of this meeting was to familiarize ourselves with the structure and functions of the IDF reserves, as well as the dramatic changes that are currently under consideration. As we came to understand, the reserves play a very important role in Israel's strategic planning. Being a small nation in a sea of enemies, Israel must be able to mobilize a high proportion of its civilian population in a short time to ensure its survival. However, with the elimination of one military threat posed by Iraq, Israel's strategic planners have recently taken measures to reduce the reserve army. We explored this cutback and its implications extensively during our discussion. In addition, Tal used examples of his own experiences in the reserves to show how civilian lives are affected by reserve duty and how men from different segments of society relate to one another during their service. He also covered the nuts and bolts of a normal reserve deployment. This meeting was exceptionally helpful in understanding a critical aspect of Israeli society.

Our trip to the Israel Air Force museum near Beer Sheva was a refreshingly light way to be introduced to the history and capabilities of the Israeli Air Force. We began our visit with a brief and motivating video that related to the selection and training of IDF pilots, as well as their accomplishments. The movie was followed by a tour around many of the planes and weapons systems that have been captured and turned into legend during Israel's wars. As we heard some of the stories behind the enemy aircrafts downed in battle, we gained a deeper appreciation for the air force's contribution to Israel's military successes. We each left the base with a healthy respect for both the Israeli Air Force and our captivating tour guide.



ASL Fellows on a guided tour of the Israel Air Force Museum

April 2004: Visit to Gush Etzion and the Central Command Reserve Training Base

Tal arranged for us to visit Hezie Markovitch, a friend from the army who lives on Kfar Etzion, a religious kibbutz in Gush Etzion located in the Judean Hills south of Jerusalem. During a walking tour of Kfar Etzion, we discussed the kibbutz's relations with neighboring Palestinian villages and government funding for security. After visiting a small museum which traced the history of the kibbutz back to the Second Aliyah, we saw a memorial to the fallen soldier-residents of Kfar Etzion who were killed during Israel's War of Independence as they fought to protect their homes and to slow the Egyptian army's advance to Jerusalem. This trip provided an interesting glimpse into the daily routine of Jews living beyond the '67 border, and presented us with a first hand account of the national contribution Kfar Etzion residents feel they are making to Israeli history.



The ASL fellows with Hezie and his children



Hezie and the ASL fellows in the Kfar Etzion Synagogue

In a follow-up to our March discussion on the reserve army, we visited Bet Jubrin, the central command's main reserve army training base located near Kiryat Gat. During this visit, we spoke with reserve soldiers from three different combat units who had recently been called up and were undergoing three days of combat training prior to serving their obligatory 24 days in the West Bank. During the visit we witnessed simulated attacks on Israeli soldiers and the execution of proper military responses. Among other things, the exercises demonstrated the operational procedure for responding to enemy fire while running a checkpoint or while in a jeep on a routine patrol. We also saw different techniques for raiding a home and for dispersing hostile crowds. Talking with husbands and fathers in uniform while they trained for reserve duty provided us with a sense of the national sacrifice being made by Israeli citizens.



Reserve soldiers watching simulation exercises



Sara with reservists



Brett and Erik talking with a paramedic in the reserves