JEWISH WAR VETERANS 80TH ANNUAL BREAKFAST

BY: Keith S. Shikowitz, Editor in Chief/Investigative Reporter

Jewish Americans have been in the nation's military since the American Revolution though their numbers were small relative to the total population. They participated in the war disproportionately to their numbers and provided essential support, with some reaching officer ranks, which was rare for Jews in Europe at the time. Prominent examples include Colonel Mordecai Sheftall, the highest-ranking Jewish officer, and financier Haym Salomon. Jewish men served in the Continental Army and militias, with estimates suggesting around 100 to 160 served on the Patriot side in many support roles. In addition to combat, Jews contributed to the war effort by providing supplies, shipping goods, and raising funds.

The JWV (Jewish War Veterans of the United States) was by 63 Jewish Union veterans on March 15, 1896, in New York City as the Hebrew Union Veterans Association in response to anti-Semitic claims that Jews did not serve in the military. Over time, smaller groups consolidated, and the organization officially became the Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America in 1929.

The JWV's mission is to affirm that Jewish men and women serve honorably in the U.S. military, to defend the rights of all service members and veterans, and to fight anti-Semitism. Any local post, such as Post 425, is part of this larger national organization and would be involved in similar activities, such as supporting veterans, fighting anti-Semitism, and serving the community. Local posts typically engage in their community with veterans from their region, hold local events, and may work to recruit current veterans into the organization.

In the 25 years following its founding, there was a consolidation and expansion as other smaller Jewish veteran organizations merged with the Hebrew Union Veterans Association, and the group officially adopted the name "Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America" in 1929. In 1951, the JWV moved its national headquarters to Washington, D.C., to gain greater visibility and advocate for the needs of veterans. The U.S. Congress officially recognized the importance of the JWV by issuing it a Congressional charter in 1984.

This year marks the 80th Annual JWV breakfast. There was in excess of 100 people in attendance including 17 elected officials from all levels of government including; town positions, county legislators, police, state and federal officials and some who wish to be elected officials, who Donna Silberman, Rockland County Clerk had the honor of announcing. About half of the attendees were military from various conflicts including WWII, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War and Afghanistan & Iraq.

After all protocols and prayers were completed, Post Commander (PC) Dave Levin introduced Past National Commander Edwin Goldwasser to do the introduction of Colonel Dr. Benjamin Wallen (retired).

"I have the distinct honor of introducing a special person that's here over Wall Street. He is somebody very close to our organization. This gentleman just retired from the United States Army as a full Colonel after 30 years. He was a graduate of the class of 1996, from the United States Military Academy at West Point. His last military assignment was assistant dean at West Point and a professor." Goldwasser stated

He continued, "Doctor Colonel Benjamin Wallen is with us this morning. He is a new veteran and is a veteran more than any of us because he and his brother both graduated from West Point. Their father was a military career officer. He's what we call a military brat. His whole life has been military. Now that he's retired, He went back to West Point as a full-time professor and the Jewish lay leader at West Point. Somebody that the Jewish community at West Point just couldn't live without right now. I can say that with knowledge because I've been involved at West Point since 1970. So, With us this morning is Doctor. Colonel Benjamin Wallen, US Army retired."

https://youtu.be/U5fVzzfbuRE

After Wallen finished his speech, the new Rabbi Wade Melnick took to the podium and gave a prayer for all of the veterans in attendance and those who never made it home.



Rabbi Wade Melnick

"Before I begin, I just wanted to say, it's truly an honor to stand up here before so many heroes. Thank you so much. I never served, but my grandfather, my Zadi, was an Air Force medic. My uncle was an Air Force engineer, and on my family's behalf, and on my congregation's behalf, thank you so much for your service.

Rabona Shaollo, sovereign of the universe, we gather this morning in gratitude for the food before us, for the fellowship around us, and especially for the men and women who we have come together to honor. We give thanks for those who answered the call to serve their country. For those who left behind their homes and families, who placed duty before comfort and who accepted burdens that others never carried. Thank you." Melnick prayed.

"We remember too, those who are not here with us this morning, those who never returned home, and those who have since passed from this world. We remember those who continue to carry the weight of their service long after their uniforms have been put to rest. May their memories be a blessing. Only one a blessing, we ask you to watch over our veterans. Grant them strength and body, peace and spirit, and the comfort of knowing that their service has not been forgotten. Bless their families who have also known the sacrifices that service demands and help us as a community and as a nation to honor our veterans not only with words of gratitude but with acts of kindness, compassion and care." He said.

"Let Hashem, even as we gather to honor those who have served in war, we remember that our tradition has never taught us to celebrate war itself. Our prophets dream of something greater. The prophet Ishayabu, the prophet Isaiah, imagined a day when nations would beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. A day when nation would not lift up sword against nation below you'll then you'll meduod milhama when they would not learn war again."

He concluded, "And so this morning, we give thanks for our veterans. We offer one more prayer. May the day come when no parent must send a child off to war. When no family must wait anxiously for a loved one to return, when the when the courage and devotion we honor here today might be called upon only in the service of peace. May we live to see a world in which there will be no need for new war veterans, because there will be no wars left to fight. Until that day, may we never forget those who have served. May we never neglect those who have sacrificed, and may we never cease working towards the peace our prophets envisioned. And let us say amen.

Ray Furlong, another decorated veteran was the next to come to the podium and address the crowd



Ray Furlong

"Good morning, everybody. It's Beautiful morning, beautiful day, beautiful people, and a great occasion here. It's quite an honor for me to be here. I know we have many speakers today, so, I'm going to have to condense this obviously, otherwise we'll be here for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. I just wanted to thank everybody for allowing me to speak today and it's a great honor as I said. When I pulled up today to the front of the temple, I saw the word Shalom there and I said to myself, boy, if that was the world that we live in today, the shalom, it's, it's now so much, terror and protest and wars and fighting. You would hope that maybe someday everybody would learn to come together."

He says he knew when he came in this special building, this temple, this place of pleasure, that it would be a place of peace and love and a lot of wonderful Jewish war veterans. Jewish war veterans have organized since 1896/130 years ago, and that's a lot of service to our country and these veterans who also serve their communities as well that they reside in. These are some wonderful people, some great veterans, people of great faith that have stayed together and been through so many difficulties, in the world's past decades and so.
He just wanted to thank them for all they do.

https://youtu.be/7G2y4P9mUmA

Jeremy Glassman a young infantry officer who has spoken to the JWV before was called to speak."Good morning everyone. I'm glad to have the pleasure speaking in front of all of you again today. I want to thank David Levin, and David Hendler for putting on a wonderful program. I've had the pleasure of speaking here a few times before and I've prepared a few quick remarks."

"Normally I wear my military uniform: I was an Infantry Officer, and I had the honor of serving with the 10th Mountain division at Fort Drum and deploying to Syria in support of Operation Inherent Resolve. In case you didn't recognize me, it's because I had a bit of a wardrobe malfunction this morning. That's the funny thing. In life, we put on all these external layers that we wear. Almost protections on our identity. Whether it's the fact that I was in the Army, or that I'm in law school now. These are just external layers." Glassman stated.

"Now they reflect a part of who we are, and the reason I joined the army was because of my deep sense of service, and wanting to serve my country from the INSIDE, but that's not the full picture. What's deep inside, is that we are all Jewish. That is what is our inner most being, our Jewish soul and it doesn't matter how many layers, or different identities you put on top of that. You will always be Jewish."

He added that in the wake of all the Antisemitism on campus, it is important stay true to our Jewish identity. To wear our Jewish heritage out and proud, while the world is telling us to cover it up with layers and feel fear.

"To continue with grace, in the face of adversity. That is true courage. He doesn't want to be a doomsayer – and he has to share some good news: "While there might be antisemitism at schools such as the Ivy's (which has been rampant in the news), or in Manhattan. Being at law school on long island – it has been a bit of an oasis, truly. There is such a critical mass of Jewish people on Long Island, that in general, especially at law school, and on campus and with young people, it has been pretty isolated from antisemitism."

"If you're caught in the middle and you ask yourself "do I choose to advocate for my Jewish self-inside, or for someone else's interests", you need to choose the Jewish side. Because that is who you are, deep inside. We must hear the other side, but we need to advocate for our best interests, as a Jewish people. Your Jewishness is not going away, no matter how many layers we put on over it. Hear other views with an open mind, but when it comes to it, you need to choose the Jewish side the Israel side, your side. Thank you for listening today. I'm looking forward to a great rest of the program. Remember, wear your Jewishness proud, and God bless you God bless America, God bless Israel and the Jewish people.

After Silberman did the introductions of the elected and other officials the National Executive Director of Zionist Organization of America Alan Jay came to the lectern.

https://youtu.be/SgAoAmT8baw

Dana Heller finished the speeches by talking about the JCC and the events they have there. You can see what they are doing at *https://lewisjcc.org*