



Lions of Judah: The Jewish Commandos of the SIG

(The initials MT in the text refer to an interview conducted with one of the last survivors of the SIG, 10428 Acting Sergeant Maurice 'Monju' Tiefenbrunner, aka Tiffen, formerly also of the 51st Middle East Commando and SAS, who gave a first-hand account of some of the incidents described below. The interview took place on 6 July 1997 at the home of his daughter Judy in Edgware, London, and other information came in letters exchanged with Maurice from his home in Jerusalem, Israel.)

Beginnings

The British Forces in the Second World War spawned many effective and daring 'special' or unconventional units. Some were very well known, such as the Army Commandos, the SAS (Special Air Service), and the LRDG (Long Range Desert Group). But among the most ambitious and mysterious were the Jewish Commandos of the SIG.

Charles Messenger¹ describes how Colonel Terence Airey – who ran G(R) Branch (formerly Military Intelligence Research at the War Office in London) – wrote in March 1942 that part of the recently disbanded No. 51 Middle East (Jewish) Commando – consisting of many German-speaking Palestinian Jews – was to be formed into 'a Special German Group as a sub-unit of ME Commando ... with the cover name "Special Interrogation Group". They were to be used for infiltration behind the German lines in the Western Desert, under 8th Army ... the strength of the Special Group would be approximately that of a platoon'. The letter² continued: 'The personnel are fluent German linguists ... mainly Palestinian (Jews) of German origin. Many of them have had war experience with 51 Commando ... it is essential they be provided with transport: a) one German Staff car b) Two 15cwt Trucks.' A second letter added, 'this issue [of transport] is of high operational importance'.

The SIG were a subgroup of 'D' Squadron 1st Special Service Regiment. Some were also recruited directly from the Palmach, the strike



arm of the Jewish/Israeli underground army, Haganah,³ and 'Etzel' (the Irgun), a semi-legal Jewish underground group, whose members included Dov Cohen (Cohen was later killed in Acre in 1947), Herbert Paul (Delmonte-Nietto) Hollander, Bernard Lowenthal⁴ and Israel Carmi, who was later an officer in the Jewish Brigade and the Israeli Army (MT). Carmi had also been in the special Night Squads under Wingate. Another comrade remembered by Tiffen was Karl Kahane/Cahanna;⁵ all four survived the war. Two others were Dolph Zeintner aka Zentner and Philip Kogel (aka Shrager-Iser), but neither saw action, according to Tiffen. The SIG's true strength has never been known, though it was probably about thirty-eight according to Tiffen, twenty according to Ariyeh Shai (see below, and in a letter and Israeli newspaper article sent by him to the author in May 1999). Other recruits came from Jews in the Free Czech Forces (about eight), the French Foreign Legion (two?) and German-speaking French Jewish troops (MT). Maurice Tiffen recalls their first training base as being at Geneifa near Suez. Having returned from Eritrea with the 51st Middle East Commando, Maurice and comrades were visited by a British captain looking for German-speakers, whom he knew he would find at Geneifa. In fact document WO 218 159 at TNA contains part of the War Diary of the 51st Commando, and a cryptic entry by the CO for 17 March 1942 describes the arrival at Burgh el Arab 'of a Capt. Buck, to select German-speaking personnel with a view to certain work'.

The British Commanding Officer of the SIG, who had served with the Punjabis, had once been wounded and captured by the Germans in North Africa at Gazala and escaped using an Afrika Korps uniform. Surprised by how easy it was – speaking German – to pass unmolested through Axis lines, he had the idea of the SIG. His name was indeed Captain Herbert Cecil A Buck, MC, 3/1 Punjabis and Scots Guards, and he was an Oxford scholar who, like his Palestinian Jews, spoke fluent German.

Authors to this day have been unable to agree on what SIG actually stood for. Peter Smith⁶ calls them the Special Identification Group – as does Eric Morris⁷ – but in his index Morris also refers to them as the 'Special Intelligence Group'.

Whatever their true title, Ariyeh Shai, aka Sheinik/Sheikin (MT), a Jewish veteran of 51 Commando and of the SIG,⁸ was an early volunteer and described his training:

situated somewhere at the far end of an isolated group of desert encampments ... we received no promises. Capt. Buck had warned that



lives would depend on our ability to wear our disguises faultlessly, to learn to perfection the slang prevalent among the soldiers of the Afrika Korps, and to drill in accordance with all the German methods. 'If your true identity is found out', said Buck, 'there is no hope for you.'

Contacts with other British units were nil, in order that they should live, eat, drill, speak and behave like Germans.

At about this time, a young British officer, Reverend Isaac 'Harry' Levy, who was senior Jewish chaplain to the 8th Army, was travelling west from Mersa on his duties:⁹

[I] had been told that a somewhat unusual outfit was to be found in the vicinity of a vague map reference. Picking our way through a fairly clearly marked minefield,¹⁰ my driver and I ultimately discovered ... a special Commando unit undergoing intensive training. Except for the CO, all were Palestinian Jewish volunteers. I met the men in a shed which was crammed full of German uniforms and equipment. I learned to my intense surprise and profound admiration that this unit was destined to be taken behind enemy lines for special Commando operations and sabotage ... All their activities were conducted in German, daily orders were published in that language and often in the dead of night a man would be suddenly awakened and he had to speak in German. None must be caught by surprise. These men knew the risks were they to fall into enemy hands ... denied the status of POW, they would be shot out of hand. The most painfully distressing aspect of my encounter with these superbly brave men was the confidential information transmitted to me by several of them.

In conversation with the author in April 1997, Isaac Levy, then honorary chaplain to the Association of Jewish Ex-Servicemen and Women until his retirement in July 1999, described the camp:

[It] was even more off the beaten track than the norm to be expected in the Western Desert; at first I thought they were prisoners of war. On seeing my Jewish Chaplains' badges, however, they spoke freely to me about their concerns.

They were convinced that one member of their group was untrustworthy, possibly a German who had been living in Palestine before the war and was a fifth columnist, and not Jewish. They wished me to notify the CO which I duly did, but he assured me their



doubts were unfounded. It subsequently transpired that the mens' suspicions were justified.

In fact two 'real' Germans, Walter Essner (or Esser) and Herbert Brueckner, had been conscripted from a POW camp to train the SIG. Brueckner was big, brash and fair-haired, in his twenties (MT); Essner quiet and good-natured in his thirties (MT).¹¹ They were former members of the French Foreign Legion before the war, professing to be German anti-Nazis. They had been captured in November 1941,¹² serving in the 361st Regiment of the Afrika Corp and recruited by the British Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre (CSDIC) as double agents. They were not trusted by the Jewish members of SIG, who opposed the idea of the two actually going into action with them, but Buck insisted and the orders were obeyed (MT and see below).

Each day the SIG were awakened by '*Kompagnie anfteher!*' (Company get up!) followed by twenty minutes' strenuous physical training,¹³ and they trained all hours of the day and night with German weapons, were questioned suddenly on their German 'identities' and taken to the mess room, goose-stepping; they even learned German marching songs, and whom and when to salute (MT). The strenuous training welded them into a team – handling explosives, desert navigation, unarmed combat: all skills required by a special raiding force. They were also all expert mechanics and drivers of German vehicles.¹⁴

Some of their earlier exploits included using captured German vehicles and going behind German lines near Bardia and setting up roadblocks. Dressed as German military police they stopped and questioned German transports, gathering crucial intelligence. On other forays unspecified by author Gordon Landsborough¹⁵ they would carry out sabotage behind the German lines in German uniforms or simply pull in at German camps, speak to troops and gather information. On one occasion, Tiffen even lined up to draw pay from a German field cashier; he explained how he was nervous, but so caught up in his trained role as a German soldier that he hardly had time to dwell on the danger of what he was doing. On other occasions he and other SIG mingled with German POWs to gather intelligence and learn how they behaved (MT).

In June 1942 the SIG were given their first major task: to assist the founder of the SAS – the charismatic Major Stirling – to blow up German airfields on the coast, 100 miles west of Tobruk, at Derna and Martuba, which were threatening the Malta supply convoys (the Malta base being of supreme importance in the struggle to starve Rommel of the supplies he needed to defeat the Allies in North Africa).



When Buck was approached by Stirling about the raid, he was absolutely delighted; it would allow him the chance to show what his Palestinian Jews could do.¹⁶ The SIG were to meet the SAS at Siwa oasis, work out detailed plans and leave no later than 8 June, to go in on the night of 13/14 June with fourteen men and an officer (Lieutenant Jordain) of the Free French Squadron, escorting them hidden in the back of two captured Afrika Korps trucks and a command car (MT). Cowles, however,¹⁷ claims the SIG had four vehicles with Afrika Corps strip and insignia: a **Knevelwagen** (a military version of the VW), one Opel, one German three-ton lorry and a 'captured' British thirty-hundredweight lorry, and eight SIG men. Tiffen says twelve SIG men, four in each of two lorries and the rest in the command car – five of whom had been in 51 Commando, and two others who were Free Czech Jews;¹⁸ Morris and Tiffen, however, claim they were posing as German guards openly escorting French POWs in captured Allied trucks.



Whatever the case, the raiders set out from Siwa after three days of checking supplies and weapons and gathering last minute Intelligence from 8th Army HQ, escorted by the New Zealand Patrol R1 of the LRDG under Captain A.I. Guild on 6 June (this patrol was to establish an RV (Rendezvous) and wait for the commandos after the raid, according to Cowles). After four days the SIG team changed into German uniforms; Buck was a private driving the lead vehicle¹⁹ and next to him were Essner and Brueckner as NCOs, and Ariyeh Shai was driver 'Corporal Adolf Schubert'. Atop each truck was an SIG 'guard', posted German-style as a lookout. Each SIG man carried a Luger, machine gun, bayonet and grenades²⁰ and – according to Cowles – the French were dressed in khaki overalls with blue forage caps, with grenades and a .45 automatic revolver each. Each lorry also concealed two ready-mounted machine guns.

During that day, the British lorry broke down but was taken in tow by Buck's vehicle. Then Shai describes how 'we saw a roadblock with a red and white barrier and guard room, about 4 p.m in the afternoon. A skinny Italian soldier wearily waved us down and demanded the password.' Captain Buck was nonplussed for the moment. British Intelligence had not supplied them with the password for June – only for May ('*Fiume*').²¹ Buck or Brueckner flourished their forged orders in the sentry's face, saying they had been on a mission before the old password was changed, but failed to budge him. Then a major arrived, suggesting they go to the guardroom to discuss the matter over a glass of wine. Buck and Brueckner went, playing their role superbly, explaining they had to deliver the trucks from Agedabia to the Derna workshops.



But the genial major would not relent as he had orders to let nobody through without the password. Buck looked at Brueckner and the German took the hint. 'You are holding us up', roared Brueckner in German. 'I'll report you to your superiors. Keep out of the way. Don't you see German soldiers are coming back from the desert?' Eventually they were allowed to pass through, but the sources do not explain how an NCO got away with speaking to an Italian major in that manner.

In the evening the convoy met another roadblock. A fat German corporal waved them through, warning that 'British Commandos reach even out here' and advised them to park in the transit camp a little further on. So as not to arouse suspicion, Buck did as advised. At the camp they filled up with fuel, chatted with the German soldiers, bought some provisions at the local canteen and 'Corporal Schubert' even stood in line to get some supper – lentils and dumplings. The French, in hiding, watched this with amusement from slits in the truck canvas sides. Shortly afterwards the convoy left unnoticed and parked overnight, several miles down the road.

Next day, 13 June, the party carried out a reconnaissance of the airfield targets in the late afternoon, to be hit that night. Brueckner drove during this recon, taking Jordain and four other men. They saw one airfield with Me (Messerschmitt) 110s and the other with Stukas. The two fields at Martuba were not investigated for fear of arousing suspicion, but also had Me 110s. All returned safely by 5.30 p.m.

The commandos were parked within five miles of the two Derna airfields at a point which would be the post-raid rendezvous. They were to split into two parties, one led by Buck and Essner in a truck with three SIG (including Shai) and five of the French to attack one of the Martuba airfields, and the other led by Jordain (the French CO) and Brueckner with the other nine of the French SAS and three other SIG, including two named Peter Hass/Hess and Peter Gottlieb (see notes below), to be taken in two parties to the two airfields at Derna. Swinson claims Buck stayed at the rendezvous point to coordinate the operation. Tiffen says no: he himself was at the rendezvous with the command car and another SIG member, to act as liaison between the two groups. Whatever the truth, so far all had gone perfectly well.

But before this, they had to get the proper password and so Brueckner and Essner had earlier in the day been sent to a nearby German post to ask – and got it. The challenge was 'Siesta' and the reply 'Eldorado'. Cowles, however, gives a different version.²² Buck typed a letter to be given to the fat German NCO they had met earlier, requesting the password. Two SIG – again Hass/Hess and Gottlieb – volunteered



to deliver it. They took the **Knevelwagen** and found the German, who quipped that he was not sure he even knew it; they all laughed merrily and went to look for an Italian guard who gave them the passwords by looking in an index book of some kind. They all then saluted each other and the SIG men left.



Buck with Essner took off to their target at Martuba with the first party. The other group left at 9 p.m. from a point three kilometres north of the Carmusa crossroads to Derna, in another lorry, first to drop off Jordain's group, and then the second Derna group under Corporal Bourmont. But before this could be done, whilst passing through Derna itself, Brueckner stopped the truck near the cinema on the pretence that the engine was overheating and went to a nearby German guard-room or garage. Cowles claims the French could hear the film projector running.²³ But Landsborough's source says that Brueckner exclaimed, 'Something has fallen off the truck; I am going back for it.' He then walked off into the night. One SIG man in the cab said, 'Brueckner is away a long time.' The other replied, 'I am uneasy. I do not trust Brueckner. I think he might play traitor.' Yet another source²⁴ claims that Brueckner waited till they were 200 yards from the airfield before betraying the raiders.

Whatever the truth, the next that the French knew was that the truck was surrounded by Germans who ordered 'All Frenchmen out!' Jordain says he heard the crunching of footsteps and when peering out to check what was happening, was dragged out of the truck by two Germans.²⁵

But the commandos refused to give up without a fight and came out with guns blazing. They inflicted many casualties on the Germans, fighting defiantly until overwhelmed. In the melee, only the commander, Lieutenant Augustine Jordain,²⁶ escaped. Buck, having succeeded in his raid, destroying twenty enemy planes with the SIG and his French SAS, returned to the RV with the remainder of his party, receiving the news – about the second French group from Jordain – in shocked disbelief.²⁷ All Jordain's Frenchmen had been either captured or killed.²⁸ Jordain said he had seen two SIG men – one of them Hass/Hess – hurtling grenades with reckless abandon at the enemy; then on the brink of capture they blew themselves up with the truck with grenades. Tiffen and Shai, however, who remember clearly hearing the gunfire and explosions of both raids, also remember Jordain returning, badly wounded, in the pitch dark with four survivors – not alone. They also say that they learned afterwards that two SIG had been captured and then shot. Cowles writes²⁹ that months afterwards,



Jordain learnt that four of the French had been captured on the airfield and three more later on in the desert. Two others met up with the Martuba group but this RV had been betrayed aswell. They fought off a German attack but were all eventually captured. So Jordain was the only French evader of the raid.

After waiting for any stragglers, the handful of survivors then made their getaway towards Siwa with the lorry, and abandoned the command car. They waited for stragglers for almost a week at Baltel Zalegh, but none came. At one point they fooled a German plane into holding its fire by laying out a swastika flag on the sand (MT).

Much of the above description is supported by evidence given by two Luftwaffe Me 109 pilots – Leutnant Friederich Korner (captured 5 July 1942 at El Alamein) and Oberleutnant Ernest Klager (captured 3 July 1942, also at El Alamein).³⁰ In their interrogation, they claim: ‘The Germans already knew that a group of English saboteurs would carry out a raid on German aerodromes in Cyrenaica dressed in German uniform ... being organised by an English Colonel. As a result a state of alarm had been ordered as from sundown on all aerodromes.’³¹ Koerner continued:

Brueckner got out [of the truck], saluted the [German] CO and stated that he was a German soldier acting as driver of a German lorry containing a party of heavily armed English troops in German uniform with explosive charges to destroy aircraft. The CO was rather suspicious at first but the driver pressed him to organise as many men as possible with all speed and as heavily armed as possible to disarm the raiding party. The lorry was immediately surrounded and the occupants forced to get out. A few seconds after the last one had got out, there was an explosion inside the lorry and it was completely destroyed. A melee developed and it was believed that all the raiders had been shot. However, on the following morning a wounded man presented himself at Derna hospital saying he was a wounded German soldier needing treatment. For some reason the doctor became suspicious and on examination it turned out that he was not a German soldier but a Jew from Palestine [this is almost certainly one of the two Tiffen says was shot later by the Germans]. Brueckner claimed to the Germans that he was a German POW who had been approached by the English to drive a German lorry for them behind the lines. He had at first refused but money had been offered which he again refused. However, the sum increased and he accepted as he felt it was the best way of getting back his freedom.



Brueckner was flown to Berlin and awarded the Deutsche Kreuze in gold (Buck later believed it was silver). Morris claims, however, that he was killed in the fighting, and in the 'Most Secret' post-raid report,³² Buck stated this too (this incident is described in a report in the *Jewish Chronicle*, 13 July 1945). Tiffen had argued with Buck that using Germans as trainers was one thing, but taking them actually on a raid was tempting providence too much. Buck did not listen and Tiffen was proved right. In another statement in the post-raid report, Buck said Brueckner and Essner had been 'cleared' by Intelligence, and he 'considered it was a necessary risk for training purposes and initial operations to have men who had recently been in the German army and knew the ropes'. The report reminded critics that up to that point Brueckner and Essner had 'provided intelligence with very valuable information about German dispositions and had extracted information from many POWs on behalf of CSDIC'.

Essner had behaved well during the raid but was closely guarded by Tiffen on the way back to the base and then handed over to British MPs with a warning that he might try to escape. This he did, and was shot. Swinson, however, alleges Essner was later caught in Cairo trying to contact German agents and was 'shot trying to escape' by SIG men.³³

Whatever the truth, most of these events were only revealed years after the war, with just a slight hint of the mysterious group's activities being mentioned in a very brief article in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 24 September 1943.

Authors John Gordon³⁴ and Bradford and Dillon (see note 5) relate yet another SIG exploit, when Stirling and his deputy, Paddy Mayne – whilst the Derna raid was in progress and hiding south of Benina – decided to attack Benghazi again. Stirling was anxious to show Mayne the havoc he and his raiders had caused the Germans at Benina. With four other SAS men and Karl Kahane of the SIG, and a Chevrolet truck that they had persuaded Captain Robin Gordon of the LRDG to lend them for twenty-four hours,³⁵ they set off across the escarpment. Mayne drove with Stirling next to him. They were first stopped at a roadblock at the dead of night, still in their British uniforms. Kahane, short and dark-haired, whom Stirling had brought along precisely for this purpose (and who had been an NCO in the German army before the rise of Hitler had forced him to flee to Palestine) used bluff and German slang to talk them through. But at a second Italian roadblock nearer to Benghazi, they were discovered. In a letter to his brother Douglas written six weeks after the raid, Mayne wrote:





With headlights on we passed through one Italian roadblock shouting 'Tedesecco' – Italian for German – but at a second checkpoint came upon a large gate and barbed wire. Kahane shouted that they were Germans, hungry and in a hurry and 'to open the — gate'. Unsure, the guard called out a dozen heavily armed Germans with a Sgt Major, who was holding a potato masher grenade and a P38 pistol and who asked for the password. Kahane replied 'How the — do we know the — password and don't ask for our — identity cards either; they're lost and we have been fighting the past 70 hours against those — Tommies. Our car was destroyed and we were lucky to capture this British truck and get back at all. Some fool put us on the wrong road. We've been driving for two hours and you so and sos, sitting on your arses in Benghazi in a nice safe job, stop us! So hurry up and get that — gate open.

But the German was not satisfied and walked to within three feet on Mayne's side of the truck whilst other guards focussed a light on Stirling and Mayne in the front seat. Mayne noisily cocked his Colt revolver lying on his lap, and all the others released their safety catches too; the German took one look and ordered the gate open; with many a '*Gute Nacht!*' the SAS drove on; clearly the German concluded that if anyone was to be hurt, he would be first, and even though it was clear he knew they were British, he had to let them through. Stirling, sitting next to Mayne, is in no doubt that the click of the Colt was deliberate, as the German's eyes met Paddy's. But the cat was out of the bag and Benghazi was now out of the question, so on arrival at Lete, just down the road, they came upon various targets of opportunity and blew up a roadblock, fuel tanks, pumps, trucks and Daimler half-tracks with machine guns and bombs. Now chased by armoured cars, they raced back five miles into the desert, having to use a different route to the one they had taken into the area, headlights blazing, the truck jolting fiercely as they and the Germans exchanged fire on the run. They eventually left their pursuers behind, the Germans not anxious to go too far and possibly meet an ambush, but the SAS team had had a narrow escape. They stopped eventually and celebrated with some whisky from Stirling's flask. The jolting, however, had set off the fuses they were still carrying, and as they climbed the escarpment to freedom they smelt burning. With a warning shout from one of the men, they all jumped off as the truck blew up. They recovered and surveyed the scene, then burst out laughing. Kahane³⁶ indicated that he was too old to laugh at such a thing but was so impressed with their humour that





he told them he was convinced the Germans could never win the war against such spirited men.

They continued on foot and after an hour came to a Senussi village where they were cared for overnight. Next afternoon the LRDG came to pick them up after a messenger had been sent to fetch them.

The Raid on Tobruk

An audacious raid on Tobruk in North Africa to lay waste, from land and sea, the vital German Afrika Corps supply port, code-named Operation Agreement, took place on 13/14 September 1942, involving elements of the RM, RN, RAF, SAS, SBS, LRDG and a six-man Special Forces group of the SIG.

Taking part in Agreement were Captain David Stirling's SAS again; Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Peniakoff of the Libyan Arab Force (Popskis Private Army – PPA), born in Belgium of Russian Jewish parents; and Colonel John E. 'Jock' Haselden, killed in action on the raid, the Egyptian-born son of English and Greek parents. He had guided into shore the abortive Special No. 11 Commando raid to attempt to kill Rommel in November 1941 at Beda Littoria,³⁷ Operation Flipper – where Colonel Geoffrey Keyes won a posthumous VC. Haselden was an Arabic linguist (who spoke several Bedouin dialects) and wealthy cotton mill owner as well as a member of Military Intelligence (MI) Research, who had been back and forth behind enemy lines since the war began. With Haselden on the Rommel Raid there had been members of the Palestinian Jewish 51st Commando, notably Corporal Drori who spoke both Arabic and German.³⁸ Drori had been in the house when Keyes was killed.

On this Tobruk raid, Haselden was the officer commanding the Commando group Force B, code-named 'Picture',³⁹ the land-based assault striking from the desert via Kufra Oasis, code-named 'Daffodil'.⁴⁰ LRDG Patrol Y1 (led by Captain David Lloyd Owen) were acting only as guides from Kufra to the perimeter of Tobruk, with eighty-three Commandos and an SIG team with eight three-ton Canadian Chevrolet trucks. (In WO 201/749, the SIG were described cryptically as 'Special Detachment G(R)' in the Battle Plan.) Afterwards, Y1 were to participate in another part of the raid. It was the Commandos and SIG who were actually to penetrate Tobruk itself by bluffing their way through the perimeter fence with the SIG posing as German guards, as they had done at Derna/Martuba, and assault the coastal guns of Mersa Umm es Sciausc east of the harbour with the rest of Force B.



The detachment of SIG were 'to play a special part in the proceedings'⁴¹ with Buck and Lieutenant T.C. David Russell, Scots Guards, who was also fluent in German. Two other British officers allegedly attached to SIG were Captain H. Bray (4th Indian Division) and Lieutenant D. Lanark, Scots Guards. However, in 1989 it emerged that Gordon Landsborough, in his 1956 edition of *Tobruk Commando*, had – due to War Office restrictions – used noms de guerre for many of the Commandos. The true names were revealed in David List's 1989 introduction to the book. So Bray was in fact Buck, and Lanark was Russell. It also emerged that the Nazi traitor Brueckner was really called Brockmann.

Dressed in German uniform and speaking German, the SIG even carried faked love letters to fictitious wives in Germany and authentic German weapons, pay books (*Sold Buch*), insignia, cigarettes and chocolates. The letters were written by an SIG man, using forged German stamps and frankings, and copied by ATS (women) for authenticity, in Cairo. The women then dressed as civilians and posed with the SIG in their German uniforms, and then a Berlin background was dubbed on. One Jewish SIG member, Weizmann, actually called his 'girlfriend' Lizbeth Kunz, as this was the name of an actual well-known Nazi who lived in his street in Berlin before the war; this meant that if it came to it, he could claim (under interrogation if required) she was a real person. The SIG men were constantly tested on this detail in their documents – names, addresses, jobs; even German Army typewriters and stationery had been procured from British Intelligence for such use – but as Landsborough says,⁴² 'the Palestinian Jews never faltered, never protested'.

The SIG were to play the role of German guards transporting three truckloads of British POWs to a camp at Tobruk. As Smith says, 'this was high bluff and indeed required nerves of steel and much courage', which the SIG showed they had in plenty. Needless to say, had their disguises been penetrated, the Germans would have shot them out of hand as spies (see Appendix 3). In fact, following the earlier betrayal, the Germans already knew of the SIG's existence. Buck suspected this and that is why he only took four or five of the SIG with him, as opposed to the dozen or so that might have been required (Buck also planned to kidnap a particular German general as booty, who was supposed to be staying in the old YMCA in Tobruk).⁴³ We must remember, however, the deep motivation of these men who had fled Nazi Germany as Jewish refugees, whose families had been or were being murdered in the Holocaust, and who were absolutely committed to the downfall of Nazism.



THE JEWISH COMMANDOS OF THE SIG



8.1 The SIG – left to right in Tel-Aviv whilst on leave, Dov Cohen, Rosenzweig, Maurice Tiefenbrunner, Walter Esser (the German traitor).



8.2 Egypt 1942 on leave with the SIG – left to right, Tiefenbrunner, Cpl Drory/Drori, Goldstein and Rohr.



(A poor and not very accurate Hollywood movie, *Tobruk*, directed by Arthur Hiller and starring Rock Hudson, Nigel Green and George Peppard, made in 1966, portrayed the SIG role in this raid but tended to mix elements of their work on other raids too. It was filmed in Yuma, Arizona.)

The small SIG team reached Kufra in RAF Bombay Transports where they met the LRDG and other Commandos. There the SIG continued drilling in German uniform and using German commands as their British comrades looked on in amazement.⁴⁴ They were Corporal Weizmann and Privates Wilenski, Hillman, Berg and Steiner.⁴⁵ A naval signal of 12 September 1942⁴⁶ – from Commander-in-Chief Mediterranean to DCOM – stated that ‘Buck and 6 ORs [other ranks] operating with Haselden may be wearing German uniform. Their recognition signal is “red handkerchief”.’

They kept themselves to themselves because, despite the fact that it was known that the traitor had been a Nazi, the SIG were looked upon with suspicion, following the betrayal of the French group the previous June. One LRDG veteran, Jock Fraser, told the author of *Massacre at Tobruk*: ‘We all distrusted these guys though some were very brave men.’

Again the SIG names were not real; David List gives the actual names: Steiner was 10716 Private Hillman (SAS Regiment), Berg was Rohr,⁴⁷ Weizmann was Opprower and Wilenski was H. Goldstein. There was also a Private Rosenzweig but Tiffen does not remember his English alias.

Weizmann/Opprower’s father had been murdered by the Nazis and at 16 years old he had been sent by his family to Palestine. He volunteered for the British Army on the outbreak of war in 1939, but when he was given only administrative work he hitchhiked to Egypt and volunteered for active service. Three times he was charged for breaking camp to get into the front line. Eventually the SIG recruited him.⁴⁸

On D Minus 7 (6 September) the main part of Force B left Cairo for Tobruk, which was 300 miles behind the lines but a distance of 1,800 miles by their roundabout route. Morris, however, says the raiders left Kufra on 5 September, to travel the 800 miles to Tobruk – which seems much more likely and is in any case borne out by Lloyd-Owen’s report,⁴⁹ which says they left at 1706 hrs precisely on that day.

Gordon Landsborough⁵⁰ describes how they travelled south to El Kharga (500 miles inland), then west to Kufra (to meet the SIG) and then north to Hatiet Etila. Here, ninety miles from the target, they rested on the night of 10 September. Kennedy-Shaw (see below), how-



ever, does not even mention the SIG as taking part in the raid, possibly for security reasons, when writing his book. I am grateful to Captain, now General, David Lloyd Owen, for pointing this out to me in a letter (13 December 1999). The plan was for them – at 2 a.m. on 14 September – to call in Force C from seaward, if they had managed to silence the guns of Mersa Umm es Sciausc. (A Jewish British officer and LRDG survey/cartography expert, Captain Ken Lazarus, was with SAS Squadron 2 with Stirling, the same night that they launched a diversionary attack at Benghazi; an SIG man was on this raid too – see below.⁵¹)

The Commando convoy of lorries did not attract attention from the German and Italian patrols because so many Allied vehicles had been captured by the Axis forces. On the trucks were the Afrika Corps motif, painted using captured German stencils by Steiner/Hillman, and identification marks on the cab roofs to ward off prowling Stukas. Also across the bonnet was a wide white stripe, sign of *Bentezeichen*, or booty, which the Germans painted on captured Allied vehicles, and the divisional sign ER 372, which Intelligence had discovered was a real division stationed near Alamein. Each vehicle carried thirty fake POWs instead of the usual forty, because of the need to hide the arms and uniforms they contained. The SIG carried the requisite fake passes and ID documents. Landsborough, however, says that only four trucks were used with one SIG driver in each and Buck in the front one dressed as a German officer. Then, about four miles out, just three trucks went in, with the fourth disabled by removing the distributor cap, which was buried near the front left wheel, for use in escape later should it be needed. At the drop-off point there was then an emotional parting with the LRDG as they cheered each other goodbye, for they all knew that many of the Commandos would be going to their deaths. It is interesting that Lloyd-Owen notes in his post-raid report that Haselden had *not* arranged a rendezvous with him in case of a land withdrawal,⁵² which proved to be a costly mistake.

On approaching the perimeter road across scrubland they saw two German trucks coming towards them on the same course; but they simply sped by without pausing. Then a red German light spotter plane approached and circled twice just a few hundred feet above them, but it too passed on.⁵³

On reaching the main metalled road to Tobruk they merged easily into the regular base-traffic flow to the perimeter fence. They were merely waved through by Italian guards, even though Buck leaned out to show his documents. The SIG men, playing their parts fully, responded



as Germans did, insulting their Italian allies as '*Schweinhunds*' as they drove past.

Inside they met a fast-moving convoy coming in the opposite direction and the middle truck was struck a glancing blow by a German staff car carrying, according to Weizmann, a high-ranking officer. Nobody stopped but the German convoy halted and angry voices were heard; eventually, after a tense moment, the Germans sped away. Further on they were accompanied for a while by two heavily armed motorcycle combinations and a solo of German military police who were irritatingly inquisitive. The Commandos took the safety clips off their guns but there was no attempt to stop them and the motorcycles turned off.⁵⁴ They then came upon a rock face looming in the darkness, at about 9 p.m., and Haselden nodded casually towards it saying, 'That's the bomb-proof oil storage depot we must destroy later tonight.'

All around were tented enemy camps and lines of German and Italian troops going about their duties as the three trucks sped on. But then a further hitch: Buck's Chevrolet halted and he and the SIG driver got out and walked out of sight. Clearly there was a problem – a fence had been built across the turn-off they were meant to take. Soon Buck and his driver returned – they had found a new track further on, and the convoy continued.

After fifteen minutes, they were met with a harsh challenge in German; one of the Commando officers got out and walked into the darkness. Soon he returned with a German rifle, having silenced the enemy sentry. Another 500 metres and they stopped, de-bussed and put on full combat kit. Nearby were the few buildings they had expected – the administrative centre for the coastal defences they were to silence.

At 10.30 p.m. the RAF softening-up bombing raid began.

On reaching their first objective, a small villa to be used as their HQ, Haselden and the four or five SIG, with Buck and Russell, burst in and drove off or killed the Italian platoon holding it. One was captured but was later killed 'trying to escape'. Knocking out various German machine-gun posts, a wireless station and negotiating minefields, Force B began taking casualties, but at 2 a.m. signalled Force C to land using the unfortunate code-word 'Nigger' (the alternative 'Cloud' was never used⁵⁵). However, under heavy fire and in darkness, only two of sixteen MTBs were able to land a handful of reinforcements.

Buck, Russell, Wilenski and Weizmann cleared several more positions alone whilst the Commandos dealt with several others. The SIG team then moved, as planned, a little inland to guard against any counter attack from that direction and captured and held four ack-ack



gun emplacements. Through the night they held these positions against sustained attacks by the Italians to recapture the guns. Eventually they rolled grenades into the barrels and destroyed them.

But as the enemy regrouped, now fully alerted and prepared, as the sun came up, they closed in on Force B, now outnumbered and short of ammunition after a fierce fire-fight. Weizmann and Wilenski were met by Berg who told them that Buck had ordered them to destroy all their German documents and uniforms, find British uniforms and destroy the lorries. Haselden, from his HQ in the captured villa, had ordered destruction of all the coastal guns, and then every man for himself. It was clear that the Tobruk raid had failed, reinforcements would not be coming from the seaward invasion as planned, and they had to move fast to save themselves. Berg moved off and Wilenski and Weizmann destroyed one lorry with petrol and then moved to a cave, stripped off, burnt everything that would incriminate them, and then went, naked, to find two uniforms, which they had eventually to take from two dead Commandos.

Buck suddenly reappeared with Russell; they had apparently been on some other SIG mission, perhaps to try and release the Allied POWs in Tobruk (part of the original plan, had Agreement succeeded) or to capture the general in the old YMCA. There was also talk of breaking into the enemy garrison's strongroom and stealing the German funds. To this day it is not known precisely what the SIG had in mind.

Haselden ordered all the force remaining to re-embark on the last two trucks and try to break out (others made vainly for the sea but were then driven inland, and in small groups tried to head east back to Allied lines). Russell brought a truck up as Steiner appeared still in German uniform. Buck yelled to him to take it off even though he himself was still dressed as an Afrika Korps officer.

As they made to get away, the ever-calm and brave Haselden in the lead truck meanwhile decided to halt and cover the escape of those behind him. He led a forlorn charge single-handedly against the encroaching Italian forces with Russell, Buck, Watler, Berg and Steiner following him. Berg was wounded and Haselden was killed by a grenade. Steiner called his CO's name but there was no answer. In the melee and still half-light, Steiner grabbed Berg and dragged him away.⁵⁶ Others, however, were forced to surrender because they had no food, water or ammunition and were carrying wounded comrades.

Only six of Haselden's group escaped, and then made a run for it to Allied lines, including Lieutenant Russell and (according to Landsborough) Buck, Berg and Wilenski. Weizmann was with them but had been wounded later breaking into an Italian camp for food. After seventeen



days he was unable to go on and agreed to be left behind. Local Arabs handed him over to the Italians, who handed him to the Gestapo. He was tortured for five days but revealed nothing. At one point they made him dig his grave and stood him in front of a firing squad. However, an Afrika Korps Officer eventually had him released to a POW camp.⁵⁷ After many close calls and terrible hardships, the rest of the group reached Allied lines on 18 November (despite every effort by Lloyd-Owen, Naval Signals testify that he lost all contact with Force B early on in the raid and was unable to search for or rescue any survivors the next day⁵⁸).

In another escape party led by Lieutenant Tommy B. Langton of the SBS (ex-Irish Guards) were Watler and 19-year-old Private Steiner/Hillman; he had already lost his left boot in the fighting and also had a foot lacerated by barbed wire. Knowing he would be shot if caught, he changed his name to Kennedy and was known as Ken by his comrades throughout his evasion adventure. It was known that the Germans knew his identity. He was in fact a short, broad Austrian Jew, son of a Viennese butcher. Aged 16, he had been imprisoned for anti-Nazi activity and then escaped to Palestine where he joined the Pioneer Corps, thinking they were a fighting unit. He served with them in France in 1940 and then joined the tough 51st Middle East Commandos and fought in Eritrea.⁵⁹ At some time he had served in the French Foreign Legion. After several weeks dodging German and Italian patrols and being fed by friendly Arab villagers (Hillman in fact saved the group's lives several times by negotiating – as interpreter in his excellent Arabic – for food, and got himself a new pair of boots), Hillman and his party eventually reached Allied lines at Himeimat, 400 miles east of Tobruk on 13 November, having been marching for seventy-eight days, much of it in bare feet.⁶⁰ Hillman ended up at No. 1 South African Convalescent Depot.⁶¹

The failure of this raid marked the end of the SIG as a fighting force, and surviving members were transferred to the AMPC (Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps). From here several joined No. 2 Commando and fought with them until war's end in the Balkans, Italy and the Adriatic. According to David List, Steiner/Hillman later joined the SAS as did Tiefenbrunner and others; Wilenski/Goldstein – who had fought on the Mersa Matru and Fuka raids with 'L' detachment LRDG – was captured after Operation Agreement but then later fought in the Far East SAS against the Japanese. Tragically Russell was murdered in Yugoslavia whilst working for SOE in August 1943 and Buck was killed in 1946.⁶²



Smith's account of the Tobruk raid is inconsistent with Landsborough's, who actually spoke with eyewitness survivors. Smith used many PRO records but these records for that time are alleged to have been partial and contradictory. Ultimately, readers must decide for themselves. What is not in doubt, however, is that the SIG were extremely brave men who willingly threw themselves into the devil's cauldron, and were often left to fight their own way out. They should all be remembered with pride as Lions of Judah.

Appendix 1

On pages 181 and 110 in Norman Bentwich's book, *I Understand the Risks* (London: Gollancz, 1950), an Austrian Jewish refugee who fought on the Tobruk raid is identified as Captain F. Hillman/J. Kennedy, MC, MM. This is almost certainly the same man described above as a member of the SIG Team. Charles Butt, writing in the *Journal of Military History*, 50 (August 1999), p. 64, recalls:

Captain 'Charlie' or 'Chunky' Hillman, MC, MM, originally of the Royal Pioneer Corps ... went on after North Africa to command a Field Security Section in occupied Germany in 1945/46. He hated Germans but had a reputation for personal bravery with both of his medals being earned the hard way on operations behind enemy lines. Later (1955) he commanded 147 Field Security Section in Nicosia and Famagusta, Cyprus, during the early days of EOKA ... it is thought he emigrated to Canada after retirement from long service with the British Army.

Jim French, 'The Rose and Laurel', *Journal of the Intelligence Corps* (December 1997), p.33, says: 'as an NCO with BAOR 1948-50, I was with 309 Field Security Section in Hamburg with OC Capt. Hillman, who clearly loved the pastries of his native Vienna. He had been in the Foreign Legion and SAS and won an MM and MC.' And WO Hillyer-Funke served under his command in an internment camp for Nazis in Wolfsberg, Carinthia, 1945-47, as Captain Leo Hillman (Intelligence Corps Archives, Michael Potter, 1999), and later again in Cyprus, where he described him as 'a good and crazy man! I liked him!'

Major Fred Warner, aka Werner, PC and later SOE, writes on page 39 of his book, *Don't You Know There's a War On?* (privately published):

[Hillman was] one of the most decorated foreigners in the British Army, small, stout, with gold-rimmed glasses, looking more like a



professor than a tough paratrooper ... he had come to Britain via the French Foreign Legion and Norway; he spoke English with a cockney accent and always introduced himself as Baron von Schnitzelberger. He always chewed garlic, a habit picked up in the Foreign Legion, and so always sat alone to eat. He was dropped by SOE into Vienna in early 1945 and eventually interrogated the head of the Vienna Gestapo.

Appendix 2

Maurice Tiefenbrunner was born on 18 December 1915 into an Orthodox Jewish family in Wiesbaden, Germany, as one of eight children. Maurice was something of an athlete and scholar and his father a devout and well-known teacher. On 28 October 1938, Jews of Polish origin, like Maurice's family, were deported by Nazi law to Poland. He was 22 years old.

A brother in Antwerp managed to obtain papers for Maurice to enter Belgium, which he achieved with hair-raising adventures via Warsaw, Prague and Rotterdam. From Antwerp, he contacted Jewish agents of the Irgun, illegally transporting Jewish refugees into British Palestine (Israel). Via Paris and Marseilles, he made it to a ship with a group of twenty others, and eventually set sail on the *SS Parita* with 950 Jewish refugees, on a vessel meant to carry 250.

After seventy days – instead of the intended ten – of wanderings, touching Rhodes, Smyrna and other ports, and begging for food from passing liners (including twenty bottles of beer from one passing cruise ship), his group took over the ship from the Greek crew, hoisted the Israeli flag and then beached the vessel on the seafront of Tel-Aviv on 22 August 1939. It was a Friday night and thousands of Tel-Avivans came out to greet them with food. Then they were promptly interned at Sarafand army camp by the British. Two weeks later war broke out and Maurice was consequently made a 'legal' citizen as an amnesty was declared.

Allowed only to enlist in non-combatant units for political reasons by the British, Maurice (and thousands of other Palestinian Jews) joined the Pioneer Corps. He fought in and escaped from France via St Malo with hundreds of other Palestinian Jewish troops, in 1940, fighting with the BEF. Regrouped at Aldershot he joined the 51st Middle East Commando and fought in the battles in Gondar and Keren in Ethiopia/Eritrea where he was wounded trying to rescue a wounded comrade, promoted and Mentioned in Despatches. Maurice was finally



returned to Egypt with the 51st Commandos and then took part (in December 1941) on an early raid on Tobruk. They inflicted heavy casualties on the Italian garrison before withdrawing but were now down to one-third strength. The 51st were thus disbanded at Geneifa, and this is where Buck recruited Maurice and other Jews into the SIG around March 1942.

After the SIG raid with the Free French in June 1942, described earlier, Maurice took part in a few smaller raids and then was recruited with about fourteen other surviving SIG into the SAS under Stirling. He took part in one of the several Commando raids from naval destroyers, with other Palestinian Jews, on Rommel's HQ in summer 1942 in the Derna area. Rommel was not at home but he remembers many German officers were killed and his force re-embarked with no casualties.

(Before the SIG raid on Derna, Maurice and five friends were ordered by Buck to accompany him to King Farouk's royal palace on a secret mission to 'persuade' HRH not to back the 'wrong side' in the war. This was successful.)

In December 1942, Maurice, still with the SAS and now with five remaining members of the disbanded SIG following the large raid on Tobruk (Operation Agreement – in which he did not take part), went with Colonel David Stirling and Major Oldfield on a hundred-man raid behind Italian lines, with the aim also of destroying German targets on the way. Maurice was in a jeep at the rear of a convoy of fifty vehicles, and broke down. Seen by Italians, he and his driver (from Lancashire) were soon surrounded by armoured cars and, after they had destroyed any sensitive documents which may have incriminated them, they were captured on 18 December 1942. When the Italian army collapsed he was taken (as an important SAS prisoner) with eight others by Italian submarine to Bari. On the way they tried to overpower the crew but failed and were punished by being locked up. As the Allies advanced on the POW camp at Bari, he was moved to a POW camp at Udine. His cover (prepared before the raid) was that his name was Tiffen, born in Montreal but taken to Palestine as a child.

Then Italy surrendered and the POWs were about to be liberated by the advancing Americans when the Germans appeared and shipped them off, in dreadful conditions, to Wolfensgarten in Austria. A group including Maurice tried an escape en route but were recaptured and then shipped to Thorn in east Germany. As the Russians advanced, the Germans force-marched them yet again for five days to Fallingsbostel near Hanover, where Maurice met POWs from the famous 'Wooden



Horse' escape from Stalag Luft 3, and Palestinian Jewish friends he had known in 1939–40 who had been captured in Greece/Crete in 1941. He was finally liberated in May 1945 after thirty months as a POW.

When the Allies separated SS prisoners from **Wermacht**, the Germans retaliated and separated Jewish POWs from others for several weeks. Maurice says he suffered no discrimination other than this, as a POW of the Germans, though there are British POW eye-witness accounts of Palestinian Jewish troops who were murdered by Germans in Crete and Greece. In a letter to the author, dated 12 November 1997, Edwin Horlington, of the British Veterans of the Greek Campaign Brotherhood, wrote; 'I know of one case where 12 Jewish Pioneer Corps men were found with their throats cut in a cave just SE of Kalamata. This was attested to by the Chief Clerk to the Senior British Officer at Kalamata.'

Back in Britain, Maurice was tracked down by Captain Buck, who tried to persuade him to join the SAS fighting the Japanese. He declined. Maurice and his newly-wed wife, Friedel, spent several evenings with Buck enjoying nights out in London. Some weeks later, Buck's sister telephoned Maurice with the sad news that the captain had been killed in a plane crash on his way to Germany.⁶³

Demobbed, Maurice went to Israel and fought in the War of Independence throughout 1948 (Woodside Park Synagogue magazine, September 1963, and his autobiography).

At various times, Maurice has worn the insignia of the 51st Middle East Commando, SAS, and the 'neutral' overalls of the SIG – not to mention the Pioneer Corps and the Israeli Army. For many years after the war he lived in west London and Israel with his wife Friedel and large family but is – at time of writing – in his nineties, living happily in Jerusalem. He has the 1939–45 Star, Africa Star, France and Germany Star and War Medal. He was Mentioned in Despatches for courage in the battle of Keren in Ethiopia.

I would like to thank Maurice Tiefenbrunner most sincerely for speaking with me, and writing to me, at length, and providing me with such unique first-hand accounts of his experiences as well as some very rare photographs. Thanks also go to Jeffrey Tribich and his mother Mala Tribich (a Holocaust survivor) for their help in putting me in touch with Maurice in July 1997. Equally, I thank the patient staff of the Imperial War Museum Reading Room and The National Archives at Kew for all their help, as well as Sean Waddingham, whose enthusiasm for naval history prompted me to get on and write a long-planned article on the incredible Jewish lads of the elite SIG.



Appendix 3

PRO HW 1/643: Message intercepted and received in German by British Intelligence on 13 June 1942 and forwarded to Prime Minister Churchill as file CX/MSS/1071/T6, stating:

Most secret document – only to be opened by an officer – from Supreme Command of the Army to Panzer Army Africa – are said to be numerous German political refugees with Free French Forces in Africa. The Führer has ordered that the severest measures are to be taken against those concerned. They are therefore to be immediately wiped out in battle and in cases where they escape being killed in battle, a military sentence is to be pronounced immediately by the nearest German officer and they are to be shot out of hand, unless they have to be temporarily retained for intelligence purposes.

This order must NOT be forwarded in writing. Commanding Officers are to be told verbally.

I am grateful to Dr John P. Fox for pointing out this document to me, as further evidence of what the SIG faced if captured.

Notes

1. C. Messenger, *Middle East Commandos* (London: W. Kimber, 1988), p.109.
2. 'Most Secret', WO 201/732 PRO; a letter by General Airey, 1 April 1942, also includes a sentence where the group is called 'Special Operations Group', with 'Operations' later struck out and 'Interrogation' written instead above it. I am indebted to Desmond Duffy of Welling, brother of the late Lieutenant Michael Duffy, Commandos, killed in action on the Tobruk raid with the SIG, for pointing this out to me in a letter of 16 December 2000. The SIG are mentioned in his superb memorial book to his brother, *One of the Many* (Scotland: Pentland Press, 1993), with some very rare photos taken on the Tobruk raid approach.
3. E. Morris, *Guerrillas in Uniform* (London: Hutchinson, 1989), p.85.
4. Y. Gelber, *European Jews from Palestine in the British Forces*, Year Book 35 (London: Leo Baeck, 1990), p.329. Information on Hollander is from his son Paul (Aug. 2009).
5. Kahane had an Iron Cross from the First World War, had twenty years' service in the regular German Army, and had been a town clerk in Austria until forced to flee to Israel after the Anschluss. He joined the SAS/SBS after the SIG was disbanded and fought in the Aegean Islands with the famous Anders Lassen, VC, taking part in the raid on Santorini, among others, where there was bitter hand-to-hand fighting; he was one of the oldest members of the raiding party, leading his section in the capture and killing of many of the German garrison there – see M. Langley, *Anders Lassen* (Kent: New English Library, 1988), pp.199, 210. For Kahane's SIG participation in the Benghazi raid of June 1942, see R. Bradford and M. Dillon, *Rogue Warrior: Paddy Mayne* (London: Arrow, 1989), pp.43–4 and Appendix 1; and V. Cowles, *The Phantom Major* (London: Collins, 1958), pp.156–61.
6. P. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk* (London: W. Kimber, 1957), p.27.
7. Morris, *Guerrillas*, p.84.
8. Shai was born in Germany in 1922, emigrated to Israel aged 16, in 1938, and brought up at Kibbutz Ginnegar. He joined the British Army aged 18.
9. Reverend I. Levy, *Now I Can Tell: Middle Eastern Memoirs* (London: published privately, 1978), p.49.
10. Levy, *Now I Can Tell*, p.50.
11. Morris, *Guerrillas*, p.86.
12. WO 201/727 PRO.
13. V. Cowles, *The Phantom Major* (London: Capital Book Club, 1958), p.135, and Collins' edition on Kahane, pp.156–61.





14. Ibid., p.135.
15. G. Landsborough, *Tobruk Commando* (London: Greenhill Books, 1956), p.31.
16. Cowles, *Phantom Major*, p.135.
17. Ibid., p.136: Shai (see note 8 above) agrees with this description but adds that there was another French officer – Gitterchen – and that the SIG team were armed with a Luger and Spandau each and several grenades, as well as a double-edged bayonet that could be used as a dagger.
18. WO 201/727 PRO.
19. Cowles, *Phantom Major*, p.137; J.W. Gordon, *The Other Desert War* (London and New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), p.105.
20. Gordon, *The Other Desert War*, says they carried P-38 pistols, Mauser rifles and Schmeisser sub-machine guns (p.106).
21. A. Swinson, *The Raiders* (London: Purnell, 1968), p.115.
22. Cowles, *Phantom Major*, p.139.
23. Ibid., pp.140–1.
24. Morris, *Guerrillas*, p.89.
25. Cowles, *Phantom Major*, p.141.
26. R. Miller, *The Commandos* (New York: Time-Life, 1981), p.85.
27. W. Seymour, *British Special Forces* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1985), p.196.
28. D. Lloyd-Owen, *Providence Their Guide: the LRDG* (London: Harrap, 1980), p.99.
29. Cowles, *Phantom Major*, p.142.
30. WO 201/727 PRO.
31. According to John Bierman (letter to the author, 6 August 1999), the US military attaché in Cairo had sent coded messages to Washington about the impending raids and the Germans had deciphered them.
32. WO 201/727, headed 'Capt. Buck's Party'. Barrie Pitt, *The Crucible of War: Year of Alamein 1942* (London: J. Cape, 1982), is quoted in T. Geraghty, *March or Die: France and The Foreign Legion* (London: HarperCollins, 2001), p.213, as saying that 'Bruckler' re-joined the Foreign Legion after the Second World War and served with an Englishman, Jim Worden, to whom he told the story of his betrayal of the raiders. Afterwards, he alleges he had been personally decorated by Rommel and then posted to Tunisia, where he was again captured, this time by Americans. In May 1945 he was released by the French at Setif POW camp, Algiers, as he volunteered to re-join the Legion to fight Algerian nationalists. In the 1960s, Bruckner told Worden he still feared being hunted by the British as a war criminal.
33. Landsborough, *Tobruk Commando*, p.33, quoting Swinson. In an interview in 1999, Carmi says he and Shai were ordered by Buck to take Essner to a POW camp but to dispose of him en route. Carmi says he gave the order to shoot Essner and Shai pulled the trigger himself (John Bierman interview with Carmi in letter to the author, 6 August 1999).
34. Gordon, *Other Desert War*, pp.106–7. I am grateful to Professor Asher Tropp for pointing this book out to me.
35. J. Cooper, *One of the Originals* (London: Pan, 1991), pp.54–7.
36. J. Lodwick, *Raiders from the Sea* (London: Greenhill, 1990), pp.141–2.
37. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk*, p.27. Haselden, with native clothes and a beard, easily passed for a Bedouin and he knew the desert and many of its inhabitants very well. As WDLO (Western Desert Liaison Officer), he coordinated British and Bedouin agents: Gordon, *Other Desert War*, pp.78–9.
38. J. Ladd, *Commandos and Rangers of WW2* (London: Macdonald, 1978), p.123.
39. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk*, p.54.
40. Morris, *Guerrillas*, p.125.
41. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk*, p.55.
42. Landsborough, *Tobruk Commando*, p.68.
43. Ibid., p.51.
44. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk*, p.60.
45. Ibid., p.81.
46. WO 201/750 File 1403 PRO.
47. A Jewish Chaplain Card is labelled 'J. Roer, 30777 – 1st Special Service Regt' (SAS?) and says he was seen by Reverend Rosenberg on 26 May 1945, at Botleys Park Hospital and was an escaped POW. This must be the Rohr who was in the SIG.
48. Langton – see note 50 below.
49. WO 201/745 PRO.





50. Landsborough, *Tobruk Commando*, p.34.
51. W.B. Kennedy-Shaw, *The LRDG* (London: Greenhill, 1989), p.25.
52. WO 201/745 PRO.
53. M. Tiefenbrunner/Tiffen, *A Long Journey Home* (Israel: published privately, January 1999), chapters 4 to 7. M. Crichton-Stuart, *G Patrol* (London: W. Kimber, 1958), also fails completely to mention the SIG role in their various raids.
54. Smith, *Massacre at Tobruk*, p.88.
55. WO 201/750 PRO.
56. Post-Raid Report – WO 201/742 PRO.
57. Landsborough, *Tobruk Commando*, p.215.
58. WO 201/750 PRO.
59. Colonel T.B. Langton, unpublished manuscript, Imperial War Museum.
60. Lodwick, *Raiders from the Sea*, pp.50–1.
61. WO 201/741 PRO.
62. Research by author John Bierman (letter to M. Sugarman, 6 August 1999) suggests Captain Buck, 1st SAS, was in fact captured after the Tobruk raid and spent the rest of the war as a POW with Yitzhak Ben Aharon – see note 63. After liberation he married and was posted to the occupation forces in Germany; he was killed 22 November 1945, aged 28, near Chard, on a flight to Germany. He was cremated on 28 November 1945 and interred at Reading, where a CWGC plaque (panel 1) bears his name, son of Lt Col Cecil and Eleanor Buck of Yatley, Hants, and husband of Celia, née Wardle. However, Buck's post-raid report (see note 32) appears to have been written immediately after the raid, so Bierman's theory may be incorrect. Buck was born in India on 12 December 1916 and read German at St Peter's Hall, Oxford, where he was also a university fencer. Commissioned into the Punjabis (no. 1A1117) he transferred in 1939 to the 1st Battalion Worcester Regiment. I am most grateful to Sheila Jepps, Buck's niece, from Broadstairs, for some of the above information (letters to the author, 2001).
63. Leah Rabin, *Rabin: Our Life, His Legacy* (New York: Putnams, 1997), describes her childhood in Israel and on pages 54–5 writes:

In 1941 whilst at summer camp ... a dashing British Officer on the Haifa-Tel-Aviv road gave me and a girlfriend a lift on a lorry loaded with Indian soldiers. Although he was British this Captain was born and bred in India. Since he loved music and opera and was a stranger to Tel-Aviv, I casually invited him to stop by and visit our home. Home hospitality to the Forces was very in vogue, but I never expected to hear from him. Well, he sent a letter two weeks later asking if he could call. I was only thirteen at the time. 'Leah, what kind of relationship have you established with a British Officer?' my parents asked.

One afternoon he appeared at our door. Captain Buck turned out to be a multilingual cultural whiz. My father and mother took a shine to him, and the Captain even lost his heart to my sister Aviva – who by no means lost her heart to him. Later Captain Buck moved to the ... Commandos and was assigned to work with the 'German Platoon' of the Palmach – learning everything from German slang to German songs, gearing up for a mission behind enemy lines in the Western Desert ... when the war was over, his marriage to a pre-war sweetheart was tragically cut short as his RAF plane crashed en route to a military location. I learnt about this from Yitzhak Ben Aharon, a prominent Labour Party leader, who had been a close friend of Captain Buck when they were prisoners.

It is an amazing coincidence that the wife of an Israeli PM should have known one of the British heroes of the SIG.

