

The Canadian Jewish News



JONATHAN AND ELLIOTT SHIFF retracing the final steps of family war hero SGT. HARRY BOCHNER / page 6

CANDLE LIGHTING TIMES

HALIFAX	4:33
MONTREAL	4:10
OTTAWA	4:19
TORONTO	4:38
WINNIPEG	4:32
EDMONTON	4:24
CALGARY	4:36
VANCOUVER	4:18

Holocaust education heading to Grade 6 in Ontario	page 2
B'nai Brith's cross-country checkup on antisemitism	page 2
Obituary: Alvin Segal, who perfectly suited Montreal	page 3
Remembering the pair of Jacks who built up Toronto	page 4
Winnipeg tribute to survivor and soldier Hans Wolpe	page 6

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Ontario is the first Canadian province to make Holocaust education mandatory for Grade 6 students

/ Lila Sarick

Ontario will become the first province to make Holocaust education mandatory at the elementary level, starting next September, education minister Stephen Lecce announced Nov. 9.

Speaking on the eve of the 84th anniversary of Kristallnacht, he revealed that Holocaust education will be part of the Grade 6 social studies curriculum. (It is already covered in Grade 10 Canadian history.)

“The horrors that took place 84 years ago, on the Night of Broken Glass, were unleashed on people for no other reason than the simple fact that they were Jews. We are here today to confront that same threat, one that is rising, a threat that I know plagues our democracy, our freedom and the pluralism that is our country,” Lecce said.

“We are acting today to ensure Ontario elementary students will learn for the first time how to combat hate and antisemitism and to ensure the words ‘Never Again’ will remain true for future generations,” Lecce announced to applause at a press conference at Toronto’s Beth Emeth Bais Yehuda Synagogue.

The Ministry of Education will work with the Ontario College of Teachers to develop professional training—known as an Additional Qualification—to prepare teachers to handle the sensitive subject.

The province has also funded Friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA) and UJA Federation of Greater Toronto to develop resource guides for teachers and parents about combatting antisemitism.

Liberation 75, an organization founded by Marilyn Sinclair, whose parents were Holocaust survivors and which hosted the press conference, will receive \$140,000 for Holocaust education.

Hate-motivated incidents are on the rise in Ontario schools, with over 50 incidents involving antisemitic hate symbols occurring in the Toronto District School Board during the 2021-22 school year, according to the ministry of education.

Ninety percent of antisemitic incidents in schools occur in grades 7 and 8, which is why Holocaust education will be mandated for Grade 6 students, Lecce said.

A survey conducted by Liberation 75 last year found that 42 percent of Ontario students said they witnessed an antisemitic event.

One-third of students said they thought the Holocaust was fabricated, exaggerated or were unsure if it actually occurred.

“It is necessary to introduce these ideas at an age that can buttress against hateful acts that are manifesting in Grades 7 and 8,” Lecce said in an interview with The Canadian Jewish News. “Often educators say ‘I don’t think they even know what they’re saying’ but they’re repeating it because they’re learning it online.”

Last winter, The CJN reported on a spate of incidents at Toronto

public schools, involving swastikas drawn on school property and Jewish teachers and students being targeted by students saying “Heil Hitler” and doing the Nazi salute

The announcement was welcomed by representatives of Jewish organizations, many of whom attended the press conference.

“We look forward to the curriculum being developed and rolled out into the classroom. It provides a really powerful, foundational learning experience for students at a really formative moment. We’re seeing across the GTA (Greater Toronto Area) a real rise in antisemitic incidents taking place in middle school,” Noah Shack, vice-president of CIJA, said in an interview.

Ensuring that teachers are properly prepared to introduce such a sensitive subject will be the key to the initiative’s success, Holocaust educators said.

“Mandating through curriculum needs to be partnered with supporting teachers to teach this history, because if they aren’t provided that support, it won’t be taught or it won’t be taught well,” said Leora Schaefer, executive director of Facing History and Ourselves Canada.

“Especially when we’re thinking about students as young as Grade 6, it is especially important that teachers are knowledgeable in best practices, that they are grounded in resources that are age appropriate and that their approach is age appropriate,” said Schaefer, who attended the press conference.

Teacher training for this new, mandatory curriculum should happen during school hours, which will require a financial investment from the province, Schaefer said.

Holocaust education needs to be “carefully navigated because of the age and because of the diversity of the students in our province,” she said. “It is an exciting opportunity, but the teachers need to be carefully supported.” ■

Lila Sarick is news editor of The CJN.

B’nai Brith conducted a cross-country checkup where Canadian politicians promised to do more to fight antisemitism

/ Janice Arnold

The justice ministers of the two Prairie provinces that this fall adopted the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) working definition of antisemitism say the next step is implementation of its objectives in a practical way.

Tyler Shandro of Alberta, whose United Conservative Party government endorsed the definition in September, told a virtual B’nai Brith Canada meeting that he has since written to every

mayor and reeve in the province urging them to do likewise.

“The fight against Jewish-targeted hate crimes and hate speech on social media is becoming more and more urgent,” Shandro said. “Antisemitism is a form of hate; the oldest in the world, the canary in the coal mine, the most toxic in our society.”

He emphasized that former premier Jason Kenney, who resigned in May, “laid the groundwork” for the IHRA adoption and regards it as part of his legacy as premier.

Shandro’s Manitoba counterpart, Kelvin Goertzen, whose Progressive Conservative (PC) government adopted the definition on Oct. 27, said politicians in that province are committed to working across party lines to combat antisemitism.

“We have a responsibility as leaders to be unequivocal in the denunciation of these (antisemitic) acts and comments,” he said.

The Criminal Code and human rights provisions are “obviously not enough,” said Goertzen who wants the justice system to take the IHRA definition into consideration.

Manitoba opposition leader, Liberal Dougald Lamont, said the social media giants should be legally liable for what they disseminate, similar to television and radio networks.

New Brunswick’s PC government also formally adopted the definition in October, 2022. Although the legislature unanimously passed a motion in March 2021 endorsing it, B’nai Brith pressed for something “more far-reaching” that applied to the whole of government, which Premier Blaine Higgs has now done by declaration.

Former education minister Dominic Cardy, who brought forward the motion in 2021, stressed his personal commitment to countering antisemitism “as a Christian and a Zionist,” even though he is no longer in the caucus.

Cardy sits as an independent after resigning from his party last month.

He proposed forming a non-partisan association of Canadian politicians at all levels interested in promoting the IHRA’s aims, an idea applauded by Marvin Rotrand, national director of B’nai Brith’s League for Human Rights, who chaired the meeting.

From British Columbia, opposition Liberal MLA Michael Lee said his party will press premier-designate David Eby of the New Democrats to follow up on the personal support outgoing Premier John Horgan has expressed for the definition.

The 90-minute Zoom call, billed as a check-in on how antisemitism is being combated across the country, was attended by 130, mostly elected, federal, provincial and municipal officials from across the country.

B’nai Brith is now pressing all jurisdictions to move beyond endorsement to implementation, even though the definition, formulated through broad-based international consensus in 2016, is not legally binding.

Critics say the definition could be used to discredit and silence opponents of Israel or Zionism.

B’nai Brith does not count the Quebec government’s endorsement in June 2021 as adoption.

At that time, the governing Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) made a declaration against antisemitism in the National Assembly that alluded to the IHRA definition, when it failed to get unanimity to table a motion due to Québec Solidaire withholding its consent.

B’nai Brith wants the CAQ, re-elected last month, to adopt

the definition through an order-in-council, as other provinces have, which would commit to its implementation through the whole of government.

Benoit Charette, then minister responsible for the fight against racism, “indicated the government would adopt the IHRA definition but the minister’s statement was never followed up on despite repeated outreach from B’nai Brith,” Rotrand said on June 9, 2021.

Charette wrote to B’nai Brith last February to explain why no order-in-council had been adopted, stating, “To adopt a decree, we would need to be able to link it to a framework law (for example, on the fight against racism), which to my surprise does not exist. We are examining what form a bill could be developed to constitute such a framework law.”

B’nai Brith disagrees with that interpretation. In any case, it maintains Premier François Legault could table a government motion for which unanimous consent is not required.

Elisabeth Prass, the new Liberal MNA for D’Arcy McGee and official anti-racism critic, said she will press the government to adopt the definition more formally.

No one from CAQ took part in the call.

Mount Royal Liberal MP Anthony Housefather agreed with B’nai Brith that it is “not enough for any government to symbolically adopt (the definition). We need to apply it to all government departments and train (civil servants) in what it means.”

Canada’s special envoy on antisemitism Irwin Cotler urged the definition to be “mainstreamed across civil society.” ■

Obituary: Alvin Segal, 89, was the leading man of suits in Montreal—and his infatuation with Yiddish theatre motivated him to save a local stage

/Janice Arnold

Alvin Cramer Segal always enjoyed a good story, seen in his love of theatre, and the drama of his own life, he knew, could compete with any fiction.

Segal, who died on Nov. 4 at age 89, didn’t quite come from rags but his ability to turn them into riches became legendary.

Peerless Clothing Inc. under his stewardship grew into one of the largest suppliers of high-end men’s suits in North America, holding the license for such labels as Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein and Michael Kors.

Segal was also a leading spokesman for the Canadian apparel manufacturing industry, helping shape government policy.

His wealth allowed him to become an outstanding philanthropist. His family's \$24-million donation in 2005 to the Jewish General Hospital for the creation of the Segal Cancer Centre was one of the largest of its kind at the time.

But he will probably be best remembered for his rescue of the Saidye Bronfman Centre—now the Segal Centre for Performing Arts—a couple of years later, motivated largely by Segal's infatuation with Yiddish theatre.

Segal has been called a visionary entrepreneur and one of the most knowledgeable people in employing technology to produce fine apparel. Segal's foresight served him and the struggling garment industry in Canada most spectacularly in his recognizing what a boost free trade with the United States would be, opening up a market 10 times the size of that in Canada.

Segal was named a member of the Order of Canada in 2002 (promoted to officer in 2010) for his "pivotal role" in advising Ottawa during the negotiations that led to the 1989 Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement and later the North American Free Trade Agreement.

A native of Albany, N.Y., 18-year-old Segal realized he was not university bound and came to Montreal in 1951 to work in his stepfather's clothing factory. He started at the bottom toiling on the floor.

Even after he rose to chairman and chief executive officer of Peerless, Segal never lost his sweet, unassuming persona—at least, outside business. Within, he was known as one tough customer.

Numerous condolences speak of his kindness, constant smile and loyalty as a friend. According to his family, his motto was: "Don't look back, you'll only get a crick in your neck."

In his 2017 memoir *My Peerless Story: It Starts with the Collar*, Segal recounts how he transformed a small family business from "the collar down and from the ground up" relying heavily on intuition. Improving fabrics and modernizing machinery to make the "engineered suit" led to Peerless becoming the main source of designer labels for major department stores.

When the FTA came into effect, Segal seized the opportunity to enter the American market, and eventually almost all of his company's clothes were exported to the U.S.

Segal became president of the Canadian Men's Clothing Manufacturers Association.

Following a company tradition, Segal said he donated his first paycheck at Peerless to Combined Jewish Appeal and "I haven't looked back since" when it came to charitable giving.

The Jewish community, Israel and Montreal in general have been beneficiaries of the Alvin Segal Family Foundation, especially in the arts, health care and education. It has made large donations to McGill University Health Centre, Concordia and McGill Universities (notably to its Jewish teacher training program), Centraide of Greater Montreal, the Jewish Public Library, and the Governor General's Performing Arts Awards.

He was chairman of the Segal Centre for Performing Arts board for many years, playing a hands-on role in its welfare and creating an endowment for it.

Besides the Order of Canada, Segal was inducted into the National Order of Quebec and named a Great Montrealer.

In a statement, the Segal administration said that thanks to his support the centre has "thrived and become a leading

player in the development of Canadian theatre. Simply put, we would not be here without him..."

"Nothing brought him more joy than the Dora Wasserman Yiddish Theatre. He would show up with danish pastries and pizza in hand for our volunteers, and took pride in the personal recordings of the productions," said Segal executive and artistic director Lisa Rubin.

Segal once said, "Art brings people together and is a positive force in society. My passion is to make this a cultural centre like you've never seen in Montreal."

Friend Arthur Roskies said, "My one outstanding memory of him was sitting beside him at a play at the Segal Centre and he was mouthing and virtually anticipating by a second what the actors were about to say on the stage. He confided to me that it was the sixth time he had seen the play and that he sees all the productions more than once. It showed me how dedicated he was to his centre—it was his baby."

"Together with the board of directors, we mourn the passing of a visionary who personified the importance of philanthropy for the arts, in paving the way for the timely art institution that the Segal Centre is today. We are honoured to carry on his work and legacy," stated board president Sylvi Plante.

Segal is survived by his wife Emmelle, his children Joel, Barbara and Renee, and their families. ■

Remembering the pair of Jacks who changed the face of buildings in Toronto: John "Jack" H. Daniels, 96, and Jack Diamond, 89

/ Janice Arnold

The two "Jacks" who played seminal roles in building modern Toronto—and who died within a few days of each other in October 2022—had much in common despite different personas.

Jack Diamond and John "Jack" H. Daniels were both Jewish immigrants, and a family history of persecution influenced their destiny. They became architects—a field in which Jews of their generation were sparse.

The first Jack attained international stature in that profession's design side, while the second Jack was a builder, making a success in real estate.

Over their long lives Diamond and Daniels changed the landscape of Toronto—literally and figuratively—and leave an imprint that will last for generations.

Although different in temperament, each was an activist and

ahead of his time in envisioning a more livable city and equitable society.

Abel Joseph Diamond, who died on Oct. 30 just shy of his 90th birthday, was born in South Africa into a family from Lithuania where Diamond's grandfather was murdered in a 1917 pogrom.

Daniels, who was 96 when he passed away on Oct. 22, left Poland in 1939 at the age of 12, his family fleeing looming Nazism.

Among Diamond's numerous achievements in Toronto are the Four Seasons Centre for the Performing Arts, Corus Quay, St. Michael's Hospital and Holy Blossom Temple, and, elsewhere in Canada, Montreal's Maison Symphonique and the University of British Columbia medical school.

Internationally, he designed Israel's foreign ministry building and the Jerusalem City Hall and the Mariinsky II opera and ballet hall in St. Petersburg, Russia. One of his last projects was the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial in London in 2016, in Victoria Tower Gardens near parliament.

After studies at the University of Cape Town and Oxford, Diamond began his practice in South Africa. He then taught at the University of Pennsylvania and, working with the towering Louis Kahn, in 1964 he established the Master of Architecture program at the University of Toronto.

Early on in his new home, Diamond made his mark as an urban planning reformer, urging the revitalization of older neighbourhoods and warning against suburban sprawl, an expertise the Ontario government would call upon in the development of the Greater Toronto Area.

Diamond was outspoken about the necessity of investing in public housing and transit.

His colleagues at Diamond Schmitt eulogized him as "one of the most significant and defining architects of his generation" and "a teacher, collaborator and mentor who shaped an exhilarating studio culture" who helped launch the careers of many architects in Canada and abroad.

Partner Don Schmitt said Diamond's experience living in an apartheid regime was at the root of his commitment to equity. He was an Ontario Human Rights Commission appointee.

Diamond was a talented watercolourist, a lover of classical music serving as a trustee of the Canadian Opera Company, and appreciated good food. A peccadillo of his was having a soup made from scratch every day at his office by staff and himself—his way of fostering collegiality. Diamond was proud that his was the only architectural firm ever among Canada's 50 best-managed companies.

The other Jack, who most notably built the Toronto Eaton Centre and Toronto-Dominion Centre, also had a strong social conscience, championing higher education and affordable housing.

The John H. Daniels Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design at the University of Toronto (UofT) speaks to its benefactor's long support for his alma mater. He graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture in 1950.

He and his wife Myrna gave more than \$30 million to the UofT, which transformed architectural education, quadrupled enrolment and raised the department's international stature.

Starting in 2008 they donated \$20 million for scholarships to gifted but needy architecture students, prioritizing those who are the first in their family to pursue post-secondary education.

Five years later they gave \$10 million for a new home for the architecture school, incorporating spacious new facilities into a renovated 19th-century heritage building.

In total, Daniels and his wife gave over \$200 million to educational, health care and cultural causes. One of his earliest interests was Associated Hebrew Schools of Toronto, where his father taught. The younger Daniels was its architect and fundraiser.

"A celebrated innovator in urban development, John was guided by a strong social conscience rooted in his own experience as an immigrant to this country," said UofT president Meric Gertler.

As a high school valedictorian in 1944, Daniels expressed the ideals that would guide him: "Canada will be a home for many millions of peoples and many different races and creeds. Let us realize we are all Canadians and pride ourselves with more community consciousness."

Daniels made his first foray into real estate development while still at UofT, building a few houses with borrowed money. He would go on to become CEO of the Cadillac Fairview Development Corporation, one of the largest real estate companies in North America.

In 1983, he left Cadillac Fairview to start the Daniels Corporation, which was behind numerous residential projects in Canada, including Erin Mills in Mississauga. The business worked with the government to build thousands of non-profit rental units, founded the First Home communities geared to first-time buyers, and revitalized Toronto's deteriorating Regent Park public housing project.

The Danielses were early investors in the Toronto International Film Festival in 1976, supporting the Bell Lightbox Theatre. Earlier, he was a founder of the Toronto Sun newspaper.

"John was a 'city-builder' long before the phrase became popular," said Richard Sommer, former UofT dean of architecture. "He had a humility that could belie the sharpness of his intellect, his uncompromising will to excel, and his array of accomplishments." ■

Janice Arnold has been reporting for The CJN from Montreal since 1976.

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Holocaust survivor and Canadian soldier Hans Wolpe is being remembered by Winnipeg's Jewish community

/ John Longhurst

Hans Wolpe's life was the stuff of a Hollywood movie—German Jew in hiding during the Second World War, Holocaust survivor, soldier, new Canadian and university professor.

His life and accomplishments will be recognized by the Winnipeg Jewish community this week during its annual Kristallnacht commemoration.

Wolpe, who went into hiding when the Nazis invaded Belgium in 1940, managed to escape being sent to a concentration camp. The rest of his family were not as fortunate; they were all rounded up and killed in Auschwitz.

He moved around Europe using false papers, all the while hiding his true identity. In 1944 he ended up in Calais, France, where he was hired as an interpreter by the Nazis to help them build their defenses around the city.

After the Allies invaded Europe, Canadian forces besieged Calais in September, 1944. When the Nazis allowed civilians to evacuate the city, Wolpe left, too. When he encountered soldiers from the Royal Winnipeg Rifles, he offered to show them on a map the location of the Nazi defenses—and volunteered to fight with them.

They agreed; his language skills—he spoke several languages, including German and French—would be valuable. But they said he would not be paid or protected by the Geneva Conventions if captured.

Wolpe ended up fighting with the Winnipeg Rifles through France, Belgium and the Netherlands, where he was wounded. Evacuated to England for medical care, he caused headaches for the military since he wasn't actually in the army or a Canadian citizen.

On hearing about his case, prime minister Mackenzie King was reported to have said: "If he's not a Canadian, we'll make him one."

In fall 1945, Wolpe was allowed to formally join the Canadian Army and gain citizenship. The next year he was sponsored to come to Winnipeg. He began studies at the University of Manitoba, graduating with an honours BA degree in languages.

He went on to study at Harvard before becoming a professor in the United States. He married and had three children. After the break-up of his marriage, he tragically took his own life in 1963.

"When we think of the Holocaust, we often don't think of people like Wolpe," said Belle Jarniewski, executive director of

the Jewish Heritage Centre of Western Canada. "But anyone who was Jewish and was living under Nazi occupation during the war is a survivor."

What makes Wolpe's story of interest to Jarniewski and the Heritage Centre is his Winnipeg connection, and how he took the fight to the Nazis. He reportedly killed 28 Nazi soldiers and captured many more during his service with the Rifles.

"Those stories of resistance are important," Jarniewski said, noting they are less well-known today. "Many Jews fought back."

Allan Wise is the volunteer director of the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum and Archives. For him, Wolpe's story is a significant part of the regiment's history.

"He fought alongside the regiment, he became a brother in arms," he said. "His is a story of survival and hope, a true Canadian story of immigration and acceptance and finding a new home and life after having lost everything to the despair of war."

From her home in New York City, Wolpe's daughter, Lisa, said although she has few memories of her father—she was four when he died—"he is a constant presence in my thoughts."

"He was a hero," she said, adding his story "reminds me to have compassion and empathy for those who served in war."

She is grateful to the Winnipeggers who sponsored him to come to Canada and to those who helped him start a new life in this country.

"He was all alone, there was no single surviving member of this family," she said, adding he may have suffered from what we now know as PTSD.

On Nov. 10, the Heritage Centre will honour Wolpe at its annual Kristallnacht commemoration, in collaboration with the Royal Winnipeg Rifles Museum and Archives and the Jewish Federation of Winnipeg. The event will include the unveiling of a permanent exhibit about Wolpe and his life. ■

John Longhurst is the religion reporter at the Winnipeg Free Press.

A family retraces the last steps of Sgt. Harry Bochner of Toronto, who was one of the last casualties in the Second World War

/ Ellin Bessner

Of the 1,347 graves of Canadian soldiers from the Second World War buried in the Dutch cemetery of Holten, the final resting place of Sgt. Harry Bochner is likely the only one that now has some earth from both Jerusalem and Toronto.

Bochner's great-nephews Elliott and Jonathan Shiff, and

their families, placed it there during a September memorial ceremony at the Commonwealth War Graves cemetery in the Netherlands. They were retracing the last steps taken by their grandmother's brother, before he was killed defending his anti-aircraft gun crew under fire during the final days of the war.

"I brought some earth and stones from Jerusalem, because in one of his letters, Harry says, 'I hope after the war I have the opportunity to travel and I'd like to visit Palestine,'" said Jonathan Shiff, a Canadian-born lawyer now living in Israel. "And since he never made it to the land of Israel, I've brought the land of Israel to him."

Shiff's great-uncle Harry was 34 when he was killed by a piece of shrapnel near Holten, during Operation Cannonshot. Bochner fell near a barn while helping one of his men, according to reports.

On that day, April 11, 1945, the Canadian units had been ordered to forge a bridgehead across the IJssel River in the eastern part of The Netherlands, then to push the Germans out of the nearby occupied city of Appeldoorn.

While the crossing was successful, the Canadian advance met with German counter-attacks.

Many observers and soldiers knew the war would soon be over: the Allies were closing in on Berlin, and both Mussolini and Hitler would be dead three weeks later. The ceasefire went into effect on May 5, 1945.

"It just adds to the tragedy," said Jonathan, adding that his great-uncle had "seen such horrific, horrific fighting for a couple of years in Italy and then he gets killed just before the end when it was really over."

The brothers never met Harry, as they were born after the war. Their grandmother Mollie (Bochner) Troster never spoke about her brother, although the Shiffs do recall seeing a picture of him displayed prominently in their grandparents' apartment.

It was only after their grandmother's death in 2003 that they discovered a treasure trove in her personal effects—over 1,300 letters from Harry, plus some condolences to his family from his senior officers and friends.

Harry himself felt the odds were against him coming back, despite surviving six years in uniform and fighting in some of the fiercest battles of the war—in North Africa and Italy until a month before he died, according to the Shiffs. You can hear the doubt in one of his last letters, after he praises his sister for cleaning his room every day in the family's Toronto home at 127 Braemore Gardens.

"He writes in his letters, 'Even though the war feels like it's at the end, you know, you're not there 'til you're done.' And he says, 'I'm not sure,'" said Elliott Shiff, a former Toronto journalist who now works as a real estate broker.

The Shiffs have spent nearly 25 years learning about their great-uncle's life and his wartime experiences. They also tracked down former artillery soldiers who served with him, to paint a more nuanced picture of the stocky, red-headed sergeant.

His first letters were lighthearted while Bochner was training in England—but they became consecutively darker and more introspective after he shipped out to the Italian front. He describes having to scrounge for food to feed his men, going without showers for days, and enduring the cold and mud.

Elliott Shiff thinks Harry was able to remain calm and keep his

nerve for so long by doing two things: keeping as clean as possible under the circumstances, and writing a letter every day.

"These were the kinds of things that kind of kept him together," said Elliott. "I'm sure that that was a way of, not only just keeping up a connection [with his sister and widowed mother], but I also think keeping his own sanity under the worst possible conditions imaginable."

Harry Bochner was 28 when Canada declared war in September 1939, having been born in Guelph, Ontario in 1911. [Records show he might have been born in 1910, but his military papers show he enlisted with the latter date for his birthday.]

After public school, and three years at Toronto's Harbord Collegiate high school, Bochner dropped out to go to work.

He was a salesman in the fur business, and, according to family lore, enjoyed partying and carousing, much to the great disapproval of his relatives.

"He was kind of a playboy," said Jonathan Shiff. "He liked to drink. He liked to run around with women. He liked to play cards, and he was a bit of the black sheep of this very straight-laced family."

But in 1940, after Germany had swept into Holland, Belgium and France and launched the Blitz air raids across the English Channel on London, Harry Bochner put on a uniform.

He was attached to a militia unit run by Conn Smythe, the owner of the Toronto Maple Leafs, and even managed his baseball team while training in Petawawa, Ontario.

On the eve of Yom Kippur (Sept. 29, 1941) Harry enlisted for active service with the Royal Canadian Artillery.

A year later he was in England, learning how to drive an anti-aircraft gun vehicle. In 1943, he and several hundred NCOs (non-commissioned officers) were sent to Italy to be observers with the British forces, but their orders were cancelled en route and he wound up being sent to the front lines.

His relatives aren't sure what motivated Harry to join up and volunteer to go overseas, although they've scoured his letters for clues.

An explanation came after the war, in the 1960s, from Harry's nephew, the late actor Lloyd Bochner.

Bochner was a Canadian who became a star in Stratford, and then Hollywood. He appeared on the long-running *Dynasty* series, and in episodes of countless TV shows from the 1950s to the 1990s including *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, *The Golden Girls* and *The Twilight Zone*.

(Lloyd Bochner's son Hart Bochner is also in show business, and is best known for playing the sleazy lawyer hostage in the first *Die Hard* movie with Bruce Willis. The Shiffs aren't sure if Hart was named in memory of Harry, who was his great-uncle, too.)

Lloyd Bochner served in the Royal Canadian Navy during the war, and he told the Shiffs he thinks Harry signed up because he was Jewish.

"[Harry] wanted to set an example as a Jewish man who was able-bodied and willing to go fight," they were told.

Bochner grew up in an observant Jewish home, and even while overseas, he tried to keep in touch with his roots. He would write home that he had attended a Kol Nidre service, or that he had remembered to mark his father's *yahrzeit*.

"There were a lot of jokes about food that Harry was eating. He couldn't bring himself to spell the word pork. It was like p,

blank blank, k and it made everyone laugh,” Elliott said, adding that it was nearly impossible for Harry or the other Jewish servicemen to keep strictly kosher during the war.

Food jokes aside, Bochner had to confront the antisemitism that was widespread both in Europe at the time, but also within Canadian society and from his own men. On one occasion, when someone piped up that the (now-defunct) Eaton’s department stores were owned by Jews, according to Elliott Shiff, the Jewish sergeant set them straight.

“Harry’s Jewishness was important to him. He wasn’t a religious man. But there are so many references throughout the letters that obviously he grew up in a religious family and that stayed with him, especially as he found himself at war among mostly non-Jews,” Elliott said.

Which is why the brothers were particularly moved when they discovered a letter in their late grandmother’s bedside table from a Jewish chaplain, Capt. Isaac Rose, of Ottawa. It was he who had given Harry a proper Jewish burial in a temporary grave in a meadow near Zutphen.

Rose was one of the first Canadian rabbis permitted to join the troops overseas in the Second World War. He was embedded with the Canadian army as it moved through Italy and then across to France, in March of 1945, to go into action in the Netherlands.

After the war, Rose immigrated to Israel, where he became a client of Jonathan’s. Neither was aware of the connection to his great-uncle Harry. After Jonathan read the old letter, he was stunned and moved by its message.

“And he writes to our great-grandmother that he knew Harry and that he was brave and he was a leader. ‘But mostly, I think of his smile and he was always happy and he knew what he was fighting for and he believed that he was fighting for your freedom.’ And he writes that ‘If you may ask why, if he was so good, why was his candle snuffed out so early? And you should know,’ the rabbi wrote ‘that some people on this earth complete what they’re here for, in a short time.’ And it’s signed, Rabbi Isaac Rose.”

Jonathan then reached out to his client, who confirmed his identity, in a goosebumps kind of moment.

“I said, ‘You buried our uncle.’ And here we were 60 years later in Jerusalem and we knew each other.”

There were more goosebump moments like that during the brothers’ trip through the Netherlands.

In a previous visit, Elliott had located the exact site where Harry had been killed: it was near a barn in the town of Gorsel. This time, 77 years later, the brothers and their families got to meet Johan Wolters, now 85, who had lived on the property at the time.

Wolters was a small boy when his family’s house was being shelled that day. He told the Shiffs he remembered seeing Harry Bochner’s body being carried out of the barn, and the fatal head wound.

The next day, the Shiffs took part in a small memorial service held in the meadow near Zutphen, where Harry had been buried by Rabbi Rose. Organizers had erected 11 markers, including one with a Star of David, for the Canadians who were killed.

The Shiffs learned that after the war, a young girl who lived next to the graveyard, Antje van Geetenbeek, took it upon her-

self to take care of the graves. She would put flowers on them every day on her way to school.

Incredibly, she was still alive, and in her 90s. For this memorial service, she brought her grandchildren along, and as she was in a wheelchair, she handed out 11 bouquets for them to place at the site.

But it was at the large Holten cemetery where the brothers were able to commemorate their uncle in a much more traditional way.

The Holten cemetery was where their great-uncle was reburied properly after the war, together with hundreds of his comrades who died in the last few weeks and hours of the fighting, and even after the ceasefire.

Aside from the stones and dirt which Jonathan brought from Jerusalem, and the pebbles which Elliott had brought from Canada, they also carried Harry’s personal Jewish prayer book, a siddur, which he had with him during the war. (His army records show he had three such books in his kit. These were sent back to the family with his personal effects.)

Since there were not enough Jewish men that day to form a minyan, Jonathan Shiff felt that he could not recite the Jewish prayer of mourning, the Kaddish. Instead, he adapted the prayer for the soldiers of the Israeli Defence Forces, the *El Maaleh Rachamim*, and chanted it in English, on behalf of all soldiers who fell fighting the Nazis.

When asked why they made this trip for a relative they never knew, Jonathan replied that he felt a duty to do for Harry what the fallen soldier’s own parents and siblings never managed to do: visit his grave.

“Even though he wasn’t our father or grandfather, and in a sort of bizarre kind of way, Elliott and I both feel like we know him really well, and so being on this trip for us was to honour him and to sort of be there for him,” Jonathan explained.

Elliott thinks his grandmother couldn’t make the trip and maybe didn’t want to, because losing her baby brother was too painful.

“I was thinking a lot on the trip, and since, about the significance of memory. Does it matter to him? Does it matter to be remembered, that we did this?” Jonathan asked. “It feels like it does. It feels like it does. Maybe somewhere he knows that we did this. And also, I think, for us and our children, I think it’s important that he be remembered, his sacrifice be remembered.”

In the ensuing years since the discovery of the letters, the Shiffs have had them all transcribed. And Elliott’s daughter Carly has done a photography project with them. There’s even talk of trying to turn it all into a book, or a screenplay.

It would be the story of a man who left for war a little rough around the edges, but then, according to Jonathan, earned admiration from his men. Harry was killed as a hero, rescuing one of his men under fire.

“And so I think in addition to the family interests, which we have, there’s a universal story here about this man, how he developed, how the war changed him and how he really evolved and how the best parts of his personality came out in that hell over there in Europe.” ■

Ed. Note: While the Canadian military spelled his name Bockner, the family spells the name Bochner.

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