

Isn't it Time for the Truth about Feivel Polkes and His Haganah Chiefs?

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written by Dan Fischer | February 25, 2021



Adolf Eichmann and Herbert Hagen
Two SS Men Who went to Palestine to Meet Haganah Agent Polkes

On February 4, 1936 a young man named David Frankfurter assassinated the head of the Nazi movement in Switzerland. The Nazi was named Wilhelm Gustloff. The German Nazis mourned him as a martyr. Frankfurter turned himself in to the Swiss police and said he acted on his own to avenge Nazi humiliations of Jews. The German Nazis didn't believe this and thought he was an agent of some group. They were frantic to find the supposed group to destroy it before it could kill other Nazi leaders, perhaps even Hitler.

As part of their investigations that year they talked with an agent of the Haganah, the Jewish paramilitary formation in British Palestine. He was named Feivel Polkes. He promised to aid them to find out about the group behind the killing of Gustloff and offered to assist Nazi Germany in other ways. Discussions continued and eventually Polkes brought to British Palestine none other than SS-Untersturmführer Adolf Eichmann to continue cooperation.

If someone put this in a novel it would be ridiculed, but it's all true. Why would any Jew want to give help to the SS, after Nazi brutality and humiliation of German Jews, after the Nuremberg laws, etc. etc. ? We know about the affair mainly from two documents, one was captured by the Allies from Nazi files after World War II, the other a report by Eichmann and his boss on their Palestine trip. Both are included in historian Lenni Brenner's "51 Documents" pp.111-120. Polkes involvement is examined in some detail by Francis Nicosia, the Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies at the University of Vermont in books he wrote, "The Third Reich and the Palestine Question" (1985) and "Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany" (2008).

According to the captured "Secret Commando Affair Report" of June 1937 written by Franz-Albert Six, Polkes had been recommended to the SD by Dr. Franz Reichart of the DNB (German News Bureau) in Palestine as someone "who was well acquainted with all important matters occurring in the Jewish world." The secret report assumed that Polkes was "a central figure in the Jewish intelligence service, Haganah." It describes a meeting that took place at the very end of February or early March 1937 in Berlin.

The SD interview with Polkes was done by Adolf Eichmann and recorded by Six, who was his boss. (Sources; Brenner and Nicosia, "The Third Reich", Chapter Abteilung II/112 and Palestine) Polkes told Eichmann that he and the Haganah wanted to create a Jewish majority in Palestine and he was ready to "serve" Germany as long as it didn't conflict with his overriding political goal. "He let it be

know (sic) that he knew the men and the background of the Gustloff murder.” He also offered to try to get Germany sources of Middle East oil.

Stop here for a second. If you’re astounded that a Haganah man or any Jewish official would be meeting with German Nazis realize that had been Zionist policy since 1933. When Hitler took over Germany in January of that year most Jewish organizations tried to raise the alarm and thought of ways to fight back, like launching a boycott of German goods. The Zionists (then led by leaders of what later became the Labour Party) thought differently. They assumed opposition to Hitler was useless and the best thing to do was to try to get some German Jews and their wealth into British Palestine. They made the so-called “Transfer Agreement” in 1933 with Nazi Germany to *sell* German goods, financed by frozen bank deposits of wealthy German Jews. That way those Jews could get into Palestine with more of their money than if they had just fled. The agreement continued until December 1939. So the Polkes-Eichmann meetings were part of the pattern of Nazi-Zionist contacts.

The Nazi SD Jewish Department was desperate to find out about what they believed were “many murder threats and attendant plans of the *Alliance Israélite Universelle*, Paris, against the Führer” and thought it was “absolutely urgent to find contacts to discover the men behind it.” The *Alliance Israélite Universelle* was a group set up in Paris in 1860 to defend the rights of Jews and to provide education. It still exists today. I cannot find any account of its activities in Germany or against Nazis (for which today it would be rightly proud). But, of course, the Nazis imagined Jewish conspiracies everywhere. Six’s report proposed that Polkes be enlisted as a “steady informant”, that 1,000 Reichmarks be allotted to give Polkes regular payments, and that Adolf Eichmann be his contact. Polkes had asked to meet with Eichmann in Palestine and Six said that should happen.

The Nazi report about the meeting in Berlin lists four objectives for further contact with Polkes. The first was to find out more about the Gustloff murder, the second was to know more about the plans of “international Jewry”, specifically American boycott organizations and groups the Nazis believed to be planning assassinations, third was to learn about attempts “against the Fuhrer”. What they called “Jewish colonization work” in Palestine was listed as the fourth interest. The Nazis worried that if a Jewish state was proclaimed “a new political opponent of Germany will arise”.

As historian Nicosia wrote in 1985 (“The Third Reich”, II-112), the Nazi intelligence unit, “was more interested in obtaining information on assassinations and alleged conspiracies in Germany and Europe ... than in securing an accurate picture of the state of affairs in Palestine.” The Nazis evidently had high hopes for information from Polkes. After all Eichmann would have to travel for seven days and 4,000 miles to get to Haifa.

The next time we hear about Polkes is after Eichmann and Herbert Hagen (another future mass murderer) debark from a ship in Haifa to meet with him on October 2, 1937. Their “cover” was as German journalists. Polkes shows them around Haifa, but evidently the British found out who these “journalists” really were and expelled them to Cairo. Polkes follows. The Eichmann-Hagen report about their meeting (printed in John Mendelsohn’s 5-volume “Holocaust” and in Brenner’s “51 Documents”) says they met with “the informer Polkes” on the 10th and 11th. There Polkes talks about what he says is Zionist strategy of accepting part of Palestine and pushing out the borders later. He said that “in Jewish nationalist circles people were very pleased with the radical German policy, since the strength of the Jewish population in Palestine would be so far increased...”. He told the Germans the group behind the assassination of Gustloff “should be sought in anarchist circles” and named Paris streets where they might be found. He promised to get material about the *Alliance Israélite Universelle* and the killing of Gustloff “in 14 days”. When told about Jews arrested in Hamburg smuggling arms to Palestine, he started at the name “Schalomi” and asked what they wanted for his release. They told him they wanted a complete explanation of the Gustloff murder to

which he agreed.

Polkes proposed a plan to have 50,000 Jews emigrate to Palestine with the equivalent of 50,000 British pound sterling and discussed possible means of financing by selling goods. The Eichmann-Hagen report says Polkes gave them this political information about possible opponents: "The Pan-Islamic World Congress convening in Berlin, according to Polkes, is in direct contact with two pro-Soviet Arab leaders, Emir Shekib Arslan and Emir Adil Arslan" and "The illegal Communist broadcast station whose transmission to Germany is particularly strong, is, according to Polkes' statement, assembled on a truck that drives along the German-Luxembourg border when transmission is on the air."

Lenni Brenner tried to find out more about Feivel Polkes. In "51 Documents" (p.111) he writes "In 1982, I met Yoav Gelber, a scholar at Jerusalem's Yad Vashem Holocaust center. I asked what he knew of Polkes: 'The Haganah archives refuses to let me see his file.' On October 3, I went there and asked custodian Chaim Zamir to see the file: 'There is no file.' 'But Yoav Gelber says that you would not let him see the file.' 'There is no file because it would be too embarrassing.'"

Adolf Eichmann was captured by Israelis in Argentina in 1960 and made to stand trial and was executed in 1962. In the press it was revealed that Eichmann had been in Middle East in 1937. In his 2008 book Nicosia writes that in 1963 Feivel Polkes was interviewed by someone working for the Haganah Archives. Polkes said his work with Reichert was authorized by the Haganah. However, in another interview that month, Haganah agent Shaul Avigur said that the Berlin trip was Polkes' own idea and that the Haganah was angry with what he had done and dismissed him. (source: p.126, Francis Nicosia, "Zionism and Anti-Semitism in Nazi Germany").

So there are (at least) three ways of looking at all this. We can say it was nothing, spy vs. spy, both sides lying their heads off. Move along. Nothing to see here. Or perhaps Avigur is right, that Polkes went overboard in implementing Zionist cooperation with the Nazis and spying for the SD was his own idea. Or maybe Chaim Zamir of Yad Vashem knew the truth. Something very embarrassing happened, so embarrassing that the Polkes file had to disappear.

What would be so embarrassing? Well, it could be that Polkes offer to spy was a genuine Haganah proposal. Some things Polkes said to Franz Reichart the German agent in Palestine, must have checked out. Otherwise Reichart wouldn't have recommended him to the SD. Maybe what Polkes told Eichmann *were* worthwhile pieces of intelligence, like the location of the anarchist circles in Paris, the names of the two "pro-Soviet Arab leaders" at the conference in Berlin or the means of how Communists sent radio broadcasts into Germany from the Luxembourg border. Maybe he gave them much more.

It's been 85 years since the Gustloff killing and the Nazi meetings with Polkes. Surely anyone connected with it is long dead and any "national security" concern has long faded away. It's time that the Zionists and the Israeli state (whose military developed from the Haganah) explain in full this incident, something that to all appearances looks like collaboration with German Nazis.

The Polkes files and other relevant information about Zionist-Nazi contacts should be open for public inspection. Historians should look for the answers to these questions: What were the substance of the talks Polkes had with Reichert before he went to Berlin? Who was Feivel Polkes? How high up was he in the Haganah? What did Polkes report back about his Berlin talks in 1937? If he did report and the Haganah was unhappy with him why didn't it cancel the Eichmann visit in October to Palestine? How valuable were the pieces of intelligence Polkes gave to the Nazis in October? What did Polkes report after meeting Eichmann and Hagen in Cairo? Was he dismissed from the Haganah and when? Did Polkes give out information about people or groups planning assassinations of Nazis?

How long did contacts continue after the Cairo meeting? When did they break off and why? If the Polkes file was destroyed, who ordered its destruction?

It's time for the truth.