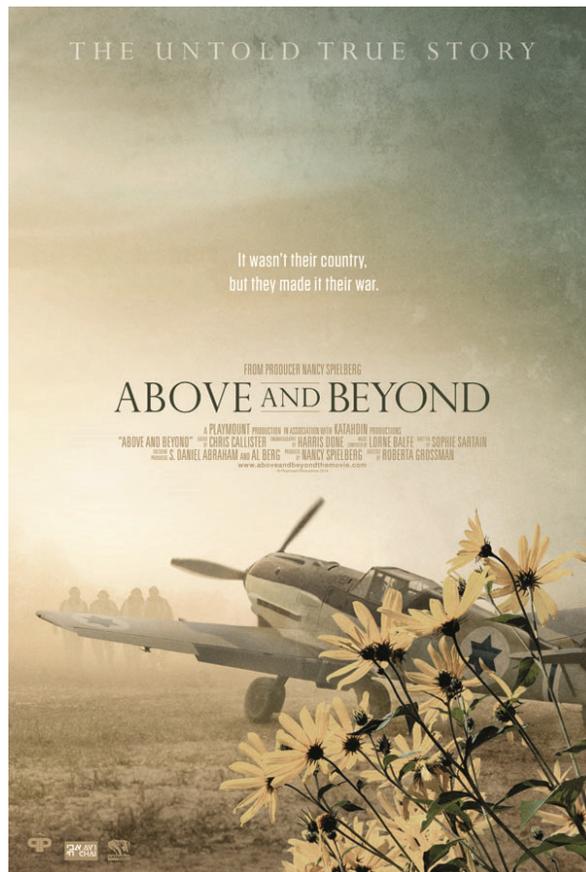


International Film Circuit presents  
a film by Playmount Productions  
in association with Katahdin Productions

# ABOVE AND BEYOND

**It wasn't their country, but they made it their war.**



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US • 2014 • 87 minutes • 16:9 • 5.1 Stereo • NR • English  
[www.aboveandbeyondthemovie.com](http://www.aboveandbeyondthemovie.com)

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

The Filmmakers

Produced by.....NANCY SPIELBERG

Directed by.....ROBERTA GROSSMAN

Executive Producers.....S. DANIEL ABRAHAM AND AL BERG

Written by.....SOPHIE SARTAIN

Edited by.....CHRIS CALLISTER

Cinematography by.....HARRIS DONE

Music Composed by.....LORNE BALFE

Associate Producer.....JULY HODARA

## **INTERVIEWS**

**(in order of appearance)**

Lou Lenart  
Coleman Goldstein  
Leon Frankel  
Gideon Lichtman  
George Lichter  
Benny Morris  
Derek Penslar  
President Shimon Peres  
Jeffrey Weiss  
Harold Livingston  
Craig Weiss  
Smoky Simon  
Paul Reubens  
Judy Rubinfeld  
Mina Alon  
Michal Gonen  
Dani Shapira

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

### Short Synopsis

In 1948, just three years after the liberation of Nazi death camps, a group of Jewish American pilots answered a call for help. In secret and at great personal risk, they smuggled planes out of the U.S., trained behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia and flew for Israel in its War of Independence. This ragtag band of brothers not only turned the tide of the war; they also embarked on personal journeys of discovery and renewed Jewish pride. ABOVE AND BEYOND is their story. The first major feature-length documentary about the foreign airmen in the '48 War, ABOVE AND BEYOND brings together new interviews as well as stunning aerial footage to present a fascinating, little-known tale filled with heart, heroism and high-flying chutzpah.

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

### Long Synopsis

*Would you risk everything – your future, your citizenship, even your life – to help a brother in need?*

In 1948, just three years after the liberation of Nazi death camps, a group of Jewish American pilots answered a call for help. In secret and at great personal risk, they smuggled planes out of the U.S., trained behind the Iron Curtain in Czechoslovakia and flew for Israel in its War of Independence. As members of Machal – “volunteers from abroad” – this ragtag band of brothers not only turned the tide of the war; they also embarked on personal journeys of discovery and renewed Jewish pride. ABOVE AND BEYOND is their story.

The first major feature-length documentary about the foreign airmen in the '48 War, ABOVE AND BEYOND brings together new interviews with the pilots, as well as stunning aerial footage, to present a fascinating, little-known tale filled with heart, heroism and high-flying chutzpah. The film follows the pilots on their circuitous route from the United States – where they met and trained in secret and struggled to stay two steps ahead of the FBI – to Panama, Italy and Czechoslovakia, where they flew versions of the very Nazi planes they had tried to shoot down in World War II.

More than a retelling of the '48 Arab-Israeli War, ABOVE AND BEYOND examines the motivations of the foreign volunteers – both Jews and non-Jews. It mines the tensions between the Israelis and Machal soldiers. Would the foreign pilots stay in Israel after the war? Were they Americans first or Jews first? The film recounts the personal stories of the young pilots, whose experiences in Israel were life altering. And through their stories, ABOVE AND BEYOND reveals how under-equipped and isolated the Israelis were, how desperately they needed planes and pilots and how critical the actions of these young American men were for the country's survival.

Filmed in the U.S., Israel and the United Kingdom, ABOVE AND BEYOND is produced by Nancy Spielberg (*Elusive Justice*) and directed by Roberta Grossman (*Blessed Is the Match*), with cinematography by Harris Done (*The Last Days*), special effects by Industrial Light & Magic and an original score from Hans Zimmer's Studio.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND Producer's Statement

By Nancy Spielberg

In 2011, after I finished executive producing the documentary *Elusive Justice: The Search for Nazi War Criminals*, I came across the obituary of a man named Al Schwimmer. "Father of the Israeli Air Force Dies at 94," it read. The obituary detailed how an American, a flight engineer for TWA, had smuggled the first planes to Israel, recruited volunteer pilots to fly them in the '48 War and, in doing so, helped create the Israeli Air Force.

The story immediately struck me. Smuggling operations? An American responsible for the Israeli Air Force? A David and Goliath story of a fight against five Arab armies? How could this story not be known? As soon as I read that piece, I said to my husband, "This has my name written all over it."

I knew that time was of the essence. The pilots had to be entering their 90s. I needed to hire a team and film interviews before we lost any more of these "Top Guns" to the Grim Reaper. I wanted the film not to be about machines, but rather about the human spirit, about those "they don't make 'em like they used to" guys who felt a responsibility to help a brother in need.

My first task was to find a director. Roberta Grossman's name came to me from four sources. The joke she often tells is that whenever her phone rings in the office, she says, "If it's Spielberg, tell him I'll call him back." Next thing she knew, there was a voice message from the "other" Spielberg. She thought someone was pulling her leg and actually called a friend to check me out.

We started filming interviews immediately. Our writer Sophie Sartain churned out questions at the same time she was writing a preliminary script. Interviewing 90+ year-olds is, at times, a bit complicated, but these guys were really game. Even though they sat for hours in cold airplane hangars while we fiddled with their mics, they never wavered, never complained. The stories flowed, the details perfect.

In fact, they blew us away. I had expected to hear wild adventure tales – evading the FBI, chasing after girls, racing through the skies in aerial dogfights – but what surprised me was the heart and emotion each pilot brought to his interview. Most of them did not grow up with a lot of Jewish pride in an era of widespread anti-Semitism. Some of them volunteered purely for the adventure of it. But in their interviews, they shared how their experiences in Israel awakened their Jewish identities and transformed their lives.

I identified with these flyboys, having grown up in Phoenix, Arizona, where we were the only Jewish family on the block. And, I saw my father in them. My dad used to fly B-25s. He was Army but flew with the Burma Bridge Busters Squadron doing radio

communications. I marveled at the camaraderie he had maintained with his “band of brothers” and saw similar bonds among our pilots.

Once we had our core interviews and realized what a powerful story we had to tell, I searched for creative partners with big hearts. I found several. We needed flying sequences but they would prove costly. It was tough to find these ol’ war birds around the world in airworthy condition; their price tag made it even tougher. There was one company I wanted to handle the CGI work to help me get 12 Spitfires “flying” when I really only had one, and that was Industrial Light & Magic. I contacted them, and to my delight and overwhelming gratitude, ILM agreed to do our CGI.

My next phone call was to Hans Zimmer’s partner, Steve Kofsky. Steve enlisted Lorne Balfe, a star composer, to write the original score. Surprisingly, Steve was well aware of our story because his own father and uncle had volunteered to help Israel in 1948.

We flew to England to film aerial sequences at the Imperial War Museum in Duxford, and to Israel to interview President Shimon Peres and some of the pilots. The commander of the IAF opened up his base and assigned staff to help us maneuver. Harris Done, our DP, captured incredible footage on both trips.

We began post-production in the fall of 2013 with our editor Chris Callister, who helped us weave together a complicated story involving history, flying sequences and multiple personal stories. It’s no wonder Chris pulled a few all-nighters in the editing room!

Now that we are finished, I am grateful that we were able to capture the pilots’ stories and share them with the world. Sadly, we have already lost two of our pilots, George Lichter and Coleman Goldstein, since we filmed them. But we take comfort in knowing that their legacies – and the legacies of our other pilots – will stay with us and be taught for generations to come. Their families are very proud, as are the families of all the men and women who volunteered for Israel in 1948 – some 3500 individuals from every corners of the globe. We are honored to tell one part of this extraordinary story in ABOVE AND BEYOND.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

### Director's Statement

By Roberta Grossman

In July 2012, the name “Spielberg” appeared in my inbox. It was a few days after we premiered our last film, *Hava Nagila (The Movie)*, as the opening night film at the San Francisco Jewish Film Festival. I assumed the Spielberg email was a joke sent by a friend who thought I might be getting a little too full of myself! Of course, I opened the email right away and it was from a Nancy Spielberg. Once I confirmed that Steven Spielberg does indeed have a sister named Nancy, a two-year conversation began.

From moment one, it was clear that Nancy was on fire about making a film about the American Jewish World War II pilots who volunteered to fly for Israel in the 1948 War of Independence. Nancy knew the story backwards and forwards and even knew the difference between an Avia and a Messerschmitt! I had zero knowledge about planes, but I did know that time was of the essence.

We plunged almost immediately into what I call “emergency interviews” – in this case with pilots who were in their late 80s and 90s. I wanted to interview the pilots in front of WWII-era planes – so we found great locations in vintage airplanes museums in Florida, New York and Southern California. Cinematographer Harris Done did a wonderful job lighting and framing the interviews in a way that is both beautiful and intimate. Talking with the pilots was a revelation. With charm, wit, intelligence and most of all humility, they told the riveting story of a ragtag bunch of guys who created an air force in the midst of a war with airplanes held together by rubber bands. We fell in love with Leon, Harold, Giddy, Coleman, George and Lou.

Once we had the pilots' interviews “in the can,” the next question became how we could visually bring their stories to life. There is little archival footage of the '48 War and just about nothing of air battles during the conflict. We had the amazing good fortune of having the opportunity to recreate flying sequences with George Lucas' Industrial Light and Magic. After careful storyboarding and planning over a period of months, we shot recreations in Duxford, England, one of the few places in the world with an airplane that could stand in for the Avia used by the nascent IAF. We shot with one Avia and one Spitfire. Only the Avia went up in the air. With this footage, ILM created CGI flying sequences with 4-12 planes in the air! Our goal with the CGI footage was to make it look and feel like archival footage. In fact, I wanted to be able to cut back and forth between archival and CGI material. With ILM's technological know-how and artist finesse, I think we succeeded.

Over the years, one of the most frequently asked questions in Q&A sessions after film screenings is “what was your biggest challenge in making this film?” If asked this question about ABOVE AND BEYOND, I'd have no problem with the answer: fitting the whole story into one movie! Working with writer Sophie Sartain and

editor Chris Callister, we faced the challenge of telling the personal stories of not only the pilots we interviewed, but the stories of Al Schwimmer, the mastermind behind the operation, and other pilots such Milton Rubinfeld, Stan Andrews and Bob Vickman who had all passed away. Add to that the complicated story of the '48 War, the enormous American Jewish clandestine effort to smuggle arms into British-controlled Palestine, the British Mandate, the UN Partition Plan and the birth of the Palestinian refugee situation. If we left out any of the above, it would be an omission; if we told too much of it, we risked boring audiences to tears! In the editing room or through sending cuts online, Nancy provided steady guidance about the core story that she wanted to tell.

I believe in the importance of telling historical stories, and I think that film, hands down, is the best medium for telling those stories. It has been an honor to tell this little-known story in Jewish history, a privilege to get to know the pilots, and a pleasure to collaborate with Nancy Spielberg.

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

### **The Volunteers**

#### **Leon Frankel**

A bomber pilot in the Pacific in World War II, Frankel received the Navy Cross for his heroism in the Battle of Okinawa. "I just made up my mind that I was going to do it," he says of his decision to volunteer for Israel. "I couldn't live with myself if I didn't do it." Frankel flew 25 missions for the Israeli Air Force as a member of the 101 Squadron before returning to Minnesota.

#### **Coleman Goldstein**

A U.S. Army Air Corps pilot, Goldstein's plane disappeared over France in 1943 and he was declared "missing in action." He crossed over the Pyrenees to Spain and was eventually rescued. For this reason, Goldstein kept secret from his family his decision to fight for Israel. After flying in the IAF's 101 Squadron, Goldstein stayed in Israel for 32 years and became a pilot for El Al Airlines. He died in 2014.

#### **Lou Lenart**

After serving in the Marines in the Pacific Theater, Lenart volunteered to fly for Israel and led the Air Force's first combat mission on May 29, 1948, stopping the Egyptians less than 30 miles from Tel Aviv. "I was born to be there at that moment in history," he says. "It's the most important thing I did in my life." Lenart later helped airlift Iraqi Jews to Israel and became a pilot for El Al Airlines, as well as a film producer.

#### **George Lichter**

The former U.S. Army Air Force pilot flew 88 missions over Europe in World War II. After Lichter volunteered for Israel, he was singled out for his expertise as a flight instructor and trained the first wave of Israeli pilots. He became Israel's chief flight instructor. "I really did get a lot of satisfaction training those pilots," Lichter says. "That was the beginning of the Israeli Air Force." Lichter passed away in 2013 at the age of 92.

#### **Gideon Lichtman**

A former U.S. Army Air Force pilot, Lichtman shot down an Egyptian Spitfire on June 8, 1948, in one of the Israeli Air Force's first missions. "I was risking my citizenship and possibly jail time," he says of fighting for Israel. "I didn't give a shit. I was gonna help the Jews out. I was going to help my people out." Lichtman flew more than 30 missions for the 101 Squadron. He returned to the U.S. after the war and lives in Florida.

## **Harold Livingston**

Part of the U.S. Army Air Corps' transport squadron in World War II, Livingston joined Israel's Air Transport Command and flew critical supplies, weapons and airplanes between Czechoslovakia and Israel during the war. "The idea that Jews were going to fight back I found exciting," he says of his service for Israel. "It's about time." Livingston became a novelist and Hollywood screenwriter, penning the script for *Star Trek*.

## **Milton Rubinfeld**

A former stunt pilot who flew for the Royal Air Force and the U.S. Army Air Force, Rubinfeld was one of the first volunteer pilots in Israel, narrowly missing out on the IAF's first combat mission when there were five pilots but only four planes to fly. He flew the next day, May 30, 1948, on a critical mission that stopped the Iraqi Army. After volunteering, Rubinfeld returned to the U.S. His son Paul Reubens became famous as the character Pee-wee Herman.

## **Al Schwimmer**

Regarded by many as the father of the Israeli Air Force, Schwimmer worked for TWA and was a flight engineer for the U.S. Air Transport Command in World War II. Upon learning of the need for aircraft for the new nation of Israel, Schwimmer smuggled about thirty surplus planes to Israel in 1948. He also recruited pilots and crew from the U.S. After the war, Schwimmer was indicted for violating the U.S. Neutrality Act and lost his citizenship. He stayed in Israel and founded Israel Aircraft Industries. In 2001, he was pardoned by President Clinton.

## **Smoky Simon**

A navigator-bombardier with the South African Air Force, Simon flew missions over North Africa and Sicily in World War II. He and his wife Myra Weinberg pushed their wedding date earlier in 1948 so they could both volunteer for Israel. Simon flew more than 20 missions during the war, in a range of aircraft including B-17 bombers. He became Chief of Air Operations for the IAF and is currently chairman of World Machal.

## ABOVE AND BEYOND

Scholars

### **Benny Morris**

Benny Morris is professor of history in the Middle East Studies Department of Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in the city of Beersheba, Israel. He is the leading figure among Israel's "New Historians," who over the past two decades have reshaped our understanding of the Israeli-Arab conflict. His books include *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*; *Israel's Border Wars, 1949-1956*; and *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* and *1948: A History of the First Arab-Israeli War*, winner of the 2008 National Jewish Book Award in the category of History.

### **Derek Penslar**

Derek Penslar is a professor of Israel Studies and Fellow of St. Anne's College at Oxford University, with interests in the relationship between modern Israel and diaspora Jewish societies, global nationalist movements, European colonialism and post-colonial states. A native of California, he taught at Indiana University in Bloomington and the University of Toronto before coming to Oxford in 2012. Between 2002 and 2008 he directed the University of Toronto's Centre for Jewish Studies. He co-edits two scholarly journals, *The Journal of Israeli History* and *Jewish Social Studies*.

### **Jeffrey Weiss & Craig Weiss**

Jeffrey Weiss and Craig Weiss are the authors of *I Am My Brother's Keeper: American Volunteers in Israel's War of Independence, 1947-1949*. The Weiss brothers interviewed about 200 of North American volunteers for their book, eliciting their motives for enlisting in the Israeli cause and explaining their critical contribution in fending off the Arab forces. Jeffrey and Craig have each spent several years in Israel and are fluent in Hebrew. They live in Phoenix, Arizona, with their families and are currently writing a book about volunteer pilots Stan Andrews and Bob Vickman.

## **ABOVE AND BEYOND**

### Filmmaker Bios

#### **NANCY SPIELBERG (Producer)**

An accomplished businesswoman, fundraiser and philanthropist, Nancy Spielberg has in recent years turned her energy and talents to producing documentary films. She served as consultant on the Oscar-winning documentary *Chernobyl Heart*, and is executive producer of *Elusive Justice: The Search for Nazi War Criminals*, which aired nationally on PBS. Before creating and producing *Above and Beyond*, Spielberg produced a project for the Israeli government, *Celebrities Salute Israel's 60<sup>th</sup>*, which was featured in Times Square on the NASDAQ screens for one month. Spielberg grew up surrounded by the film industry, where she worked on her brother Steven's early films. She attended Arizona State University and UCLA and, after moving to New York, studied film at Sarah Lawrence College and the New School in New York. She is founder and co-founder of several charities including "A Bid for Charity," "Children of Chernobyl," "Project Sunshine" and the U.S. branch of The Jerusalem Academy of Music and Dance.

#### **ROBERTA GROSSMAN (Director)**

Roberta Grossman is an award-winning filmmaker with a passion for history and social justice. She has written and produced more than forty hours of documentary film and television. Grossman's most recent film, *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* was the opening or closing night film at 46 of the 80 film festivals where it screened. *Hava* had a theatrical release in 2013 and is now available on Netflix. Grossman's previous film, *Blessed Is the Match: The Life and Death of Hannah Senesh*, was shortlisted for an Academy Award, won the audience award at 13 film festivals, was broadcast on PBS and nominated for a Primetime Emmy. Grossman is the producer of *Dorothea Lange: Grab a Hunk of Lightning* for PBS/American Masters (Fall 2014) and was the series producer and co-writer of *500 Nations*, the eight-hour CBS mini-series on Native Americans hosted by Kevin Costner. Her feature documentary, *Homeland: Four Portraits of Native Action*, premiered in 2005, screened and won awards at more than 40 festivals worldwide and aired on public television stations.

#### **SOPHIE SARTAIN (Writer)**

Sophie Sartain is award-winning writer for print, film, television and digital media. Her credits include the 2012 documentary *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* (writer/producer), the 2014 documentary *Mimi and Dona* (director, writer) and the 2008 film *Blessed Is the Match* (writer/co-producer). Sartain's past positions include Executive Director of Editorial Services for MGM Home Entertainment and Managing Editor of Sony Online Entertainment. As a freelance writer, her clients have included Los Angeles Magazine, 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, Universal Studios, New Line Home Entertainment, CBS Sports Radio and ABC Radio Networks.

### **CHRIS CALLISTER (Editor)**

Chris Callister received his master's degree in film production from USC. He has directed and edited documentaries, short films, and music videos, and his work has been seen around the world by over a million people. He has edited for The History Channel and the Sundance Institute. His credits include the feature documentary *Hava Nagila (The Movie)* (editor and post-production supervisor); the feature documentary *Blessed Is the Match* (assistant editor and post-production supervisor); the documentary *Mimi and Dona* (editor); music and concert videos for The Killers (writer, director and editor); the feature film *Cyrus* (apprentice editor); and the short film *The Liar* (writer, director and editor).

### **HARRIS DONE (Cinematographer)**

Harris Done was director of photography on the Academy Award-winning documentary *The Last Days*, executive produced by Steven Spielberg. Done also served as cinematographer on *Price for Peace*, the Spielberg-produced documentary on World War II in the Pacific, as well as on *Inheritance*, which won an Emmy Award in 2006, and on *Running the Sahara*, for which he followed three ultra marathon runners across the African continent. Recently, Done was director of photography on *Foo Fighters: Back an Forth*. The film won a Grammy for Best Long Form Music Video. Other notable D.P. credits include the cult classic *Trekkies*, the Emmy award-winning *Pancho Barnes!* and the feature documentary *A Whisper to a Roar*.

### **LORNE BALFE (Composer)**

Lorne Balfe is a Grammy Award-winning, Emmy and BAFTA-nominated film composer from Inverness, Scotland. He is known for composing the scores to the Dreamworks' animation *Megamind*, and Ubisoft's acclaimed game, *Assassin's Creed III*. In addition to being recognized for producing two of Hans Zimmer's Oscar-nominated scores, *Sherlock Holmes* and *Inception*, Balfe has also received significant recognition for his work in the United Kingdom. In 2009, he was nominated for the Discovery of the Year World Soundtrack Award for his score in the BAFTA award-winning film, *Crying With Laughter*. The same year, he was nominated for the prestigious Glenfiddich Spirit of Scotland Award.

