

From The Parnas:

By Mark I. Wolfson

Next week begins the Congregation Mikveh Israel Sephardic Film Festival. This is our third annual event. Last year's even was much better attended than the first year, and this year we are expecting an even bigger turnout. Many thanks to Board Member and Officer Carol Marchand and Executive Director Lea Alvo-Sadiky for putting this together and working so hard to make it a success. The last film is March 20th, and at the meeting of the Board of Managers on the 21st, we will begin to plan for next year's event! I encourage everyone to come and support our film festival. There will be lots of guests from around the area, and for many of them it will be their first time at KKMI, so be sure to reach out and welcome them warmly.

The last film, on March 20th, is the Impossible Spy. This is a fascinating film based on the true story of Israel's most famous and most important spy: Eli Cohen. The story is really about Israel's struggles with Syria, which up until 1967 used the Golan Heights to fire mortar shells into the Jewish settlements of the Upper Galilee below. Additionally, and just as important, the Golan, where melting snow produces a huge run-off which flows into the Sea of Galilee, provides 30% of the water used in Israel. Finally, towards the end of the Six-Day War, the Israelis captured the Golan Heights, largely because of the amazing work of Eli Cohen.

Cohen, who was born in Alexandria, Egypt to Syrian Jews from Aleppo, made aliyah to Israel in 1955. He married Nadia Majald in 1959 and worked as an accountant in Tel Aviv. In 1960, Israeli Intelligence approached him to work for them. Throughout the next year, he underwent extensive training in weapons proficiency, topography, map reading, sabotage, radio transmissions and cryptography. He then assumed a new identity, Kamal Amin Ta'abet, and perfected his Syrian Arabic.

He created a complete fictional biography where he emigrated from Syria to Argentina and ran a successful textile business. His great "aspiration" was to return to Syria, his beloved homeland. In 1961, he travelled to Buenos Aires to establish his cover, and soon became part of the high society there, making important Syrian contacts through social networking and lavish dinner parties. In early 1962, he moved to Damascus to assume his new role, that of a wealthy influential businessman returning to his native land.

Soon he was able to become very close with high-placed government officials who came to wild parties Cohen would throw and would share military plans and tightly-guarded state secrets freely with him. All of this information Cohen would transmit back to Israeli Intelligence. A good example was in 1964, when Cohen was informed of a Syrian project to divert water from the Jordan away from Israel. Cohen learned that the Syrians were planning to dig a channel along the Syrian Golan Heights to divert the water into Jordan. Cohen meticulously sent all of the details to Israeli Intelligence who sent the Israeli Air Force to bomb the equipment used for the scheme and destroy the entire project.

Come out on March 20th to see the film which tells the whole fascinating story.

I hope to see you all at the film festival. Be sure to remind friends and family!