



Lawrence Fisher

“The computer was born to solve problems that did not exist before.”

Bill Gates

Welcome back. It is good that you are here because today we have a new exciting story, one full of intrigue.

And now on with our story. We all know there was a war for Israel's basic existence in 1948 and if you didn't, sorry about that. At that time, there was a worldwide boycott of arms sales to Israel except for one country, Czechoslovakia. Whoever thinks that the Americans stood by us at this time, is wrong, this is a pretty common mistake nowadays that is heard mostly on social media. Why did countries not want to sell us weapons? Good question, and I don't have many answers only that Western countries did not want to annoy their Arab customers, after all we are a small country compared to the many large countries surrounding us that also had oil. An old joke says that it is a pity that Moshe, our ancestor from the Bible should have turned left instead of right. If he had turned right we would have the oil and the Arabs oranges, referring to Jaffa oranges. Of course it is an old joke, because Jaffa oranges are not what they once were, if there is such a thing today.

Czechoslovakia was willing, but only with Russia's approval, since in 1948 they were a part of the Russian Alliance. And why were they willing, other than to receive money like Pfizer nowadays, well Jan Masaryk, the then Czech Foreign Minister, was a friend of Israel and allowed the sale of weaponry. For those who don't know, Kfar Masaryk is named after his father. The weaponry we received was the same weapons that they produced for the Nazis. We had soldiers who had previously served in the British Army but who knew how to use German equipment? We also bought planes from them but who knew how to fly a Messerschmitt plane? It turns out that no one, and Ezer Weizmann, who was a pilot in the British Air Force and knew the British Spitfire plane, very well, flew to Czechoslovakia to learn about the plane.



Flights from Czechoslovakia to Israel brought small arms and of course mail. There was a war going on, so which flights would bring mail? For some unknown reason they had no emails in 1948, I do not know why. Among the Czech pilots who flew regularly to Israel, was a brave man named Vaclav Fogler.

Fogler wanted to defect to the West and had an exact plan, unlike our government's, but success depended on him returning to Prague on December 24th (Christmas Eve, when security would be lax) and smuggling his family out. He had to adhere to the strict schedule of leaving Rome on December 21st, flying to Athens, then Lydda (Lod), near Tel Aviv, and back again, a very tight

schedule. A round trip in three days, on a Dakota plane? It may sound ridiculous today, because a flight to the Czech Republic is only a few hours, but who wants to go to Prague in the winter?

Nothing happens in a vacuum and in December 1948, something is going on in Greece that could greatly affect Fogler's plan but no one told him about it. Since the liberation of Greece from Nazi occupation, Greek Communist partisans had tried to overthrow the pro-Western government by an open revolt, similar to my previous story, no? England and the United States supported the Greek government and England also served as de facto ruler of Greece during 1948, not exactly an occupation. So on December 21st, 1948, the day Folger left Rome, fierce fighting took place all over Greece, between the government and the rebels. It is important for you to know that the rebels were receiving constant air drops from the Yugoslav Air Force.

British intelligence commanded air traffic control in Greece, including Athens and the airport of Kalamata, a city in southern Greece, and wanted to identify each and every flight before assisting in takeoff and landing, and of course they did not give permits to the Yugoslav Air Force.

When Fogler approached Greece carrying weapons for the IDF, bad weather forced him to deviate from the original flight plan and he radioed this to Athens. There was total darkness and he had no idea where he was and he was unable to identify his whereabouts. He asked for help from the nearest air traffic control to help him identify his whereabouts. He broadcast again and again, and was met with total radio silence. He had no idea that his SOS was actually heard in London, Malta and Tangier he did not know that Greece's air control did not answer intentionally. And why? Because British intelligence believed that the intention of the Czech flight was to drop weapons to the local Communist rebels. Kalamata Airport was less than 60 km away and could easily have handled the Dakota, but the British forced air control not to respond.

The partisans heard the plane in the sky above them and of course assumed that the flight was intended for them. They hurried to turn on lights and other marks on a ridge, suitable for dropping supplies. Poor Fogler thought that the equipment on his plane was not working properly because of the radio silence and was delighted to see the lights. He believed that they were showing a runway that would be suitable for an emergency landing. As he began landing, he suddenly noticed a hill. Unable to climb in time, he collided with the ridge. The Czech airliner crashed near Kalamata, Greece on December 21, 1948.

Of course the partisans pounced on the plane and took all the weapons and left us with nothing but a few letters that survived the crash. Too bad we did not have insurance. In addition to the pilot, there were other unfortunate passengers on the plane, including fourteen Israelis.

If you had received a letter like the one above, torn, tatty, burned and dirty, wouldn't you have thrown it in the trash? No? I have not seen many letters that survived this crash and they are of course quite rare but of course they exist. No one knows exactly how many survived. The example above is from my personal collection. The story is based on an article in issue 36 of the journal HLPH.



If you enjoyed this story, tell your friends, enjoyed it even more, feel free to share. If you didn't enjoy it, maybe you will enjoy the next one.

So friends, that's the story of the day, but there is more, much more. Until next time.

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