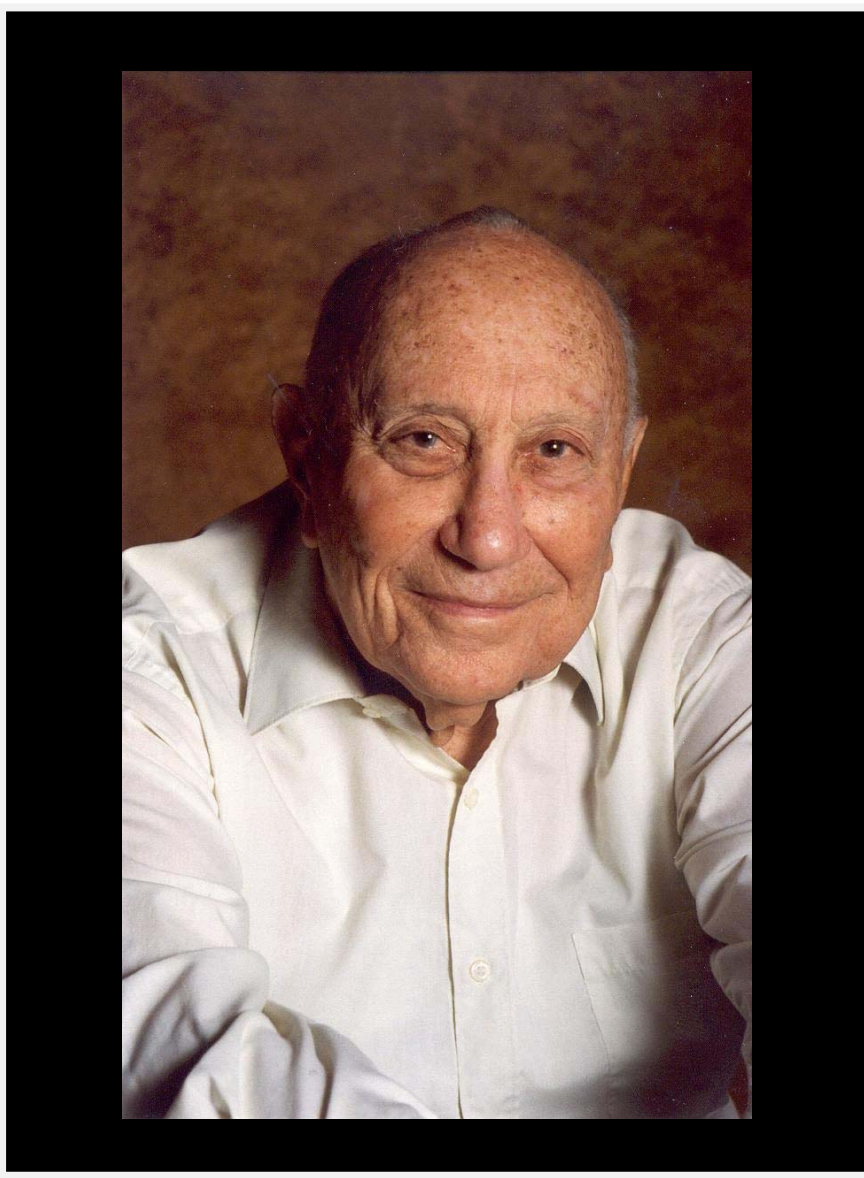**Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center**

July 20, 2009

General (Ret.) Meir Amit, Commander, Leader and Friend Passed Away

■ General (Ret.) Meir Amit, commander, leader and friend passed away on Friday, July 17, 2009 at the age of 88. He filled a series of key position in Israel's army, intelligence, politics, economy and technology. His most prominent roles were that of head of military intelligence, head of the Mossad, minister of transportation and communications and general manager of the Koor concern. He left his mark wherever he served and in 2003 was awarded the Israel Prize for Lifetime Achievement for his unique contribution to society and the country. He was among the founders of the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center to commemorate the fallen of the intelligence community and to preserve its legacy, heading it for many years. He is survived by his wife, three daughters, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

■ **Meir Amit's biography is integrated into the biography of the State of Israel**. "I was born on the road from Tsemah to Tiberias to Haya and Shimon Slutzki, members of Gdud HaAvoda[1] who were living in Moshavat Kinneret[2] at the time," he wrote in the introduction to his book *Head On: A personal look at great events and world affairs* (Hebrew). "From infancy I absorbed the values of the labor movement and they left their impression on what I thought and what I did. The education I received, from elementary school in the Borochov neighborhood of Ramat Gan, through the regional (agricultural) high school at [Kibbutz] Givat HaShelosha until I realized its values and went to live on Kibbutz Alonim, all gave me a burning faith and made me care passionately about everything. My worldview was shaped by the childhood influence of my parents, labor movement schools and socialist youth movements... I joined the Haganah[3] when I was only 16 years old. It was only natural for me, an integral part of the environment I grew up in."

■ "**In the War of Independence I served in the Golani brigade**,"[4] he wrote in *Head On*. "I began as a company commander and didn't skip any link in the chain of command: company commander, deputy battalion commander, battalion commander. I also didn't miss almost any battle. I fought with my company everywhere possible: against Qawuqji [the commander of the Syrian-sponsored volunteer army called the Salvation Army] at Mishmar HaEmek and Sejera, against the Syrians at Degania and in the Jordan Valley, against the Jordanians in the Beit Shean Valley. Later [I fought as] as the commander of mechanized assault battalion, against the Salvation Army in Operation Hiram in the Galilee and against

---

[1] Gdud Ha'avoda was a group of pioneers (*halutzim*) active in Eretz Israel between 1920 and 1927. Its goals were work, communal settlements and defense.

[2] Moshavat Kinneret, located six kilometers south of the city of Tiberias, was important in the ethos of the labor movement in Israel. Inter alia, the place was home to the Kinneret Farm, where the idea of Kibbutz was born.

[3] The Haganah was the main military organization of the Jewish people during the British Mandate, and was the foundation on which the IDF was built when the State of Israel was established.

[4] The Golani Brigade was established in 1948 and played a central role in the IDF's history. During Israel's War of Independence it was responsible for defending the entire northeastern part of Israel. Golani participated in the battles which stopped the advancement of the Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian and Iraqi armies in the Galilee and the Jordan Valley, and took part in Operation Hiram which expelled the Syrian-sponsored Arab Salvation Army from northern Israel.

the Egyptians in Operation Horev in the western Negev. And finally, our battalion conquered Eilat [the southernmost city in Israel, the gate to the Far East]. Immediately after the war I was appointed commander of the Golani Brigade and thus have commanded every military formation in the chain of command from a company to a brigade."

■ When the kibbutz movement split, Amit left his kibbutz and went into long-term service in the regular army. In 1953 he served as **head of the Operations Division** in the IDF General Headquarters. In 1955 and 1956 he was **head of the Southern Command** and again head of the Operations Division of the General Staff . He participated in planning the Sinai Campaign in 1956. In 1958 he was appointed head of the Central Command. At about the same time he was seriously injured in a parachuting accident and was hospitalized for more than a year. As part of his rehabilitation he received studied business administration at Columbia University (1959-61).

■ When he returned from the United States in the summer of 1961, Chief of Staff Tsvi Tsur asked him to accept command of military intelligence. **He was appointed to the office in early 1962,** the first time the post was filled by someone from the army and not from within intelligence. As head of military intelligence he strengthened the collection units. In 1963 Ben-Gurion appointed him head of the Mossad, a position he held until 1968. In 1963 he was head of both military intelligence and of the Mossad, a precedent which has never been repeated. He shaped military intelligence and the Mossad, and adapted them to the challenges of the future, strengthening the cooperation between them. He had the leadership qualities and the ability to understand the needs of the intelligence community from the perspective of a client and a decision-maker.

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol visits an intelligence unit in 1963. Meir Amit is at the left; to the right of Levi Eshkol is Yitzhak Rabin.

Meir Amit at his desk in the Defense Ministry in 1963, the year he was appointed head of military intelligence, serving at the same time as head of the Mossad for eight months.

■ Some of Meir Amit's achievements as Mossad head were exposed by the media. Many others remained hidden from the public eye. One of his most prominent achievements was bringing the Iraqi MIG-21 and its pilot to Israel in 1966. Israel put the plane at the disposal of the United States and gave the West its first opportunity to view this advanced Soviet aircraft. As head of the Mossad he worked tirelessly to bring back the prisoners of "the Lavon affair" who had been incarcerated in Egypt since 1954, and effected their return after the Six Day War. On the eve of the 1967 War, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol sent him on a mission to the United States, during which he managed to get the green light from the American administration. In *Head On* he wrote (on p. 241) that "I left Washington after 36 hours, strengthened in my position and determined to recommend to the government that it launch an attack immediately..." That was what he told a meeting of the Israeli government on Saturday night, June 3, 1967, and the rest is history.

The wedding of Marcelle Ninio, one of the heroes of "the Lavon affair," in 1968. From left to right: Mossad head Meir Amit, Chief of Staff Haim Barlev and in the center, Prime Minister Golda Meir.

Meir Amit and the Kurdish leader Mullah Mustafa Barzani in the mountains of Kurdistan (1966). As head of the Mossad he fostered extensive relations with the Kurdish National Movement.

■ In September 1968, after he resigned as head of the Mossad, he was appointed **general manager of Koor**, the dominant industrial concern of the Histadrut, the largest labor union in Israel, which in those days controlled much of Israel's industry. He turned it into a profitable, specialized, modern company. His years as head of Koor were the best the Histadrut's industries knew.

■ During the difficult times in Israel after the Yom Kippur War he was harshly critical of the Israeli political system, leading him to join Yigal Yadin's new party ("Dash"),[5] and he was elected to the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) in 1977. The new party made an impressive showing in the elections at the time, winning 15 seats and joining Menachem Begin's coalition government. **Meir Amit was made Minister of Transportation and Communications**, but after less than a year resigned in protest and later left political life.

■ After his short experience in politics, Meir returned to economics and technology. In 1981 he initiated **the planning and development of the Amos communications satellite**, which put Israel on the international satellite communications map. For twenty years he was one of the growing group of Israeli hi-tech pioneers and filled many managerial positions in hi-tech companies. In 2003 he was awarded the Israel Prize for his unique contributions in the fields of the army, society, economy and industry.

■ For 20 years the apple of his eye was the Israel Intelligence Heritage & Commemoration Center, which **he headed**. He said that "...after I retired from politics in 1981, the parents of the fallen of the intelligence community raised the idea of erecting a memorial site to them. I suggested something different: an active memorial which would transmit the intelligence legacy to the next generations. What is in the IICC? Its heart is a maze inscribed with the names of those who fell in active service. The maze is divided into sections chronologically. Next to it there is a "shrine" which has files on everyone who fell. All the material is computerized. There is also a room (*Yizkor*) where visitors can see...slides documenting those fell on a particular day, with commentary in the background. There is another room with the lists of retired intelligence officers who have since passed away. In addition, there is a open theatre for events and an auditorium...**We also set up a computerized international center for intelligence and terrorism**."

■ Meir Amit's vision for the IICC had four main goals: To serve as a memorial for those members of the intelligence community who died in the service of their country; to educate the younger generation about the intelligence legacy emphasizing the existence of a living memorial; to use the heroic stories of the intelligence community to reinforce the Zionism of the youth who come to visit; and finally to build a large, supportive family, in Israel and abroad, whose loyalty to the IICC made possible its development and expansion while preserving its special character."

---

[5] Yigal Yadin (1917-1984) was the de facto IDF commander during the War of Independence and its second Chief of Staff, as well as an archaeologist and politician. In 1977 he founded the Democratic Movement for Change, known by its Hebrew acronym "Dash." The party collapsed after a few years and Yadin retired from politics.

■ In his eulogy for Meir Amit, Israeli President Shimon Peres said that "Meir Amit filled important positions in the army, intelligence and security of the State of Israel. However, he was central to the life of the country, but his contributions were greater than his roles. No man was more dedicated, responsible and meticulous than he. He was a natural leader trusted by people and at the same time had a vision for the country. From the Sinai Campaign and his initiative to launch the first satellite into space, to his term as Mossad chief, we honored him, loved him, and his actions will continue to be with us in the future. Entire generations of Israelis owe Meir Amit a debt of gratitude for his enormous contribution, a large part of which has never been published, for the State of Israel's military buildup and deterrence."

The Memory of Meir Amit will always be with us.