

The 'Man Who Saved Tel Aviv' Dies at 94

Lou Lenart, who became known as “the man who saved Tel Aviv,” passed away Monday in his home in Ra’anana outside Tel Aviv at age 94.

His “bigger-than-life story” is fascinating.

Born Layos Lenovitz in Hungary, he immigrated to America at age 10 with his parents and two younger siblings to escape increasing anti-Semitism in their rural community near the Czech border. One incident in particular convinced the family it was time to leave. They were farmers and moved to a small town in central Pennsylvania.

But the move didn’t shield them from anti-Semitism. There were few Jews in the town and the kids endured slurs from their classmates.

At 17, Lenart enlisted in the Marines, where he served in an infantry division before being accepted to flight school. After surviving a serious training accident, he went on to battle Japanese kamikaze pilots in World War II.

Following his discharge as a captain, Lenart learned that 14 family members, including his grandmother, perished in Auschwitz.

From America, he watched Israel move toward statehood, as Holocaust survivors found their way to the Jewish homeland.

Early in 1948, Lenart joined the Haganah, the Israel Defense Forces’ precursor, flying a cargo plane 1,300 miles from Italy to Israel. As an experienced fighter pilot, he helped locate surplus war planes for the emerging state.

On May 29, just two weeks after Israel’s official

establishment, some 10,000 Egyptian troops invaded, with about 500 vehicles, tanks, trucks, and tankers, marching toward Latrun to join Jordanian troops. At least five armies from neighboring Arab states plotted to destroy the newborn state.

Israel needed to stop the advance. Lenart, joined by three other pilots, including Ezer Weizman who would later serve as Israel's seventh president, were told if you don't go now, they'll be in Tel Aviv tomorrow and there will be no Israel. They attacked the massive ground forces camped outside Ashdod, just 20 miles from Tel Aviv.

Lenart would later write about "the IAF's [Israeli Air Force] first aerial attack," calling it "the most important event of my life" and saying he survived World War II to lead the mission.

"There were thousands of troops, tanks, and hundreds of trucks. We flew lower, dropped the bombs, and started shooting at anything we could spot," Lenart wrote. "The Egyptians tried to shoot at us, but they were stunned. They didn't even know Israel had an air force. The Arabs had everything, we had nothing. And we still won. We just didn't have a choice. That was our secret weapon."

Lenart later helped establish the IAF's 101 Squadron and flew missions to bring Iraqi Jews to Israel.

He also flew commercially for El Al, Israel's national airline. And if that wasn't enough, he produced six feature films, including "Iron Eagle" and its sequel, "Iron Eagle II."

Lenart was buried this week near Tel Aviv. He is survived by his wife, Rachel, two children and a grandson. His daughter, Michal, also served in the IAF.

For the original article, visit [.](#)