two years after the end of World War II, hundreds of Americans went on to fight another war.
Almost 60 years ago, they joined with 3,000 others from around the globe to fight and to carve out a nation.
Their charge: to fulfill an ancient promise of a Jewish homeland. And to give those who survived the death camps a place to call home.
The place was called Palestine, a land ruled over the centuries by the Romans, the Turks and the British.
There had been talk, since the 1920s, of splitting the land into two small states, one Jewish, one Palestinian Arab.

South Florida residents fought to help create, defend the Jewish state

STORIES BY TIM COLLIE, STAFF WRITER | PHOTOGRAPHY BY MIKE STOCKER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

"Volunteers from outside the land."
On May 14, 1948, Israeli leaders declared the existence — the independence — of Israel. The news touched off violence between Arabs and Jews. Armies from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and Lebanon came in. But those who believed in the birth of this nation defended it.

Today, 60 years later, nearly two dozen of those fighters for Israel live in Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade counties. Here are their stories, told by four from South Florida.

See story, 2-3F
FIGHTING FOR A HOMELAND

Arthur Jaffe Spy

The former Army officer never intended to fight in Palestine.
Arthur Jaffe had landed on the beaches at Normandy and survived the front lines of France and Germany. As a counterintelligence officer, he had interrogated German prisoners and mounted psychological warfare operations.
He went to Jerusalem to use the GI Bill to study languages at the Hebrew University. After learning Hebrew, he planned to return to the Midwest and join his family’s successful retail operation.
But a few months in, Jaffe was recruited by the Jewish underground. Soon he was training with the military in the Negev desert.

“What was I going to say? After a while over there, you get caught up in the fervor of the society, says Jaffe. No, it was like being here when George Washington founded the country.”
That meant learning how to shoot a Czech-made rifle, to take it apart and reassemble it blindfolded. And learning desert survival — camouflage and “water discipline,” preserving supplies.
Training for Americans included lessons in Zionism, the political movement that called for a Jewish homeland.
Jaffe’s instructor: Golda Meir, who became Israel’s fourth prime minister.

“Soon, he commanded a squad of 12 teenage Sabras, Palestinian-born Jews.
After a few months, Jaffe’s commanders realized the soft-spoken Midwesterner could serve them better elsewhere.
They made him a spy.
Jaffe joined a unit that later became the Mossad, Israel’s intelligence agency. He and other agents would hang out around the posh King David Hotel in Jerusalem, chatting up secretaries for information, tapping telephones and bugging the hotel rooms of diplomats.

Delegations from the United States, Europe and other countries routinely visited Palestine as the debate over creating a Jewish state intensified. Jaffe and his colleagues wanted information about which way countries were leaning to influence positions in the United Nations.

“They’d have meetings in the King David Hotel, and we’d record them — the French delegations, the Russian, the Chinese, the British — whenever we could,” he said.

“All the [telephone] linesmen in the country were Jewish, so we were able to tap into phones quite easily. We’d do things like that.”

Jaffe returned to the United States in 1949 and worked in his family’s department store chain. He moved to Delray Beach after retiring. He donated his collection of books and art to Florida Atlantic University, which opened the Arthur and Mata Jaffe Center for the Book Arts in 2007.