



October 2021

Sara Station – Clandestine HF Wireless Station, 1939

Covert communications between Palestine and London
Colonel (Retired) Daniel Rosenne

Introduction

The British 1939 White Paper (Palestine Statement of Policy), issued by the Neville Chamberlain government, limited Jewish immigration to Palestine, and restricted Jewish land ownership.

The Zionist movement rejected the White Paper and led a campaign against the British government. The campaign was suspended in June 1940, after the German invasion of Western Europe. The Zionists unconditionally supported the war efforts against Nazi Germany.¹

The British censorship, imposed in September 1939, restricted the posts, telegrams and telephone communications in Palestine, and obstructed all coordination between the Zionist establishments in London and Palestine.

The Signals Service of the 'Haganah', the underground Jewish paramilitary organization, solved the problem by establishing a covert HF radio link connecting the political department of the Jewish Agency in London to the Jewish Agency offices in Palestine.

This HF link, operated since August 1939, used a 'Homemade' 500 Watts CW transmitter, using two 813 vacuum tubes.² A special underground secret facility (Nicknamed 'Slik', usually used as illegal arms cache) was built for hiding the transmitter, which used a 15 m telescopic antenna that was raised only during night hours. The station was built in Kibbutz Gvat, in Jezreel Valley.

Transmissions were one-way. Each secret telegram was transmitted several times, and reception was confirmed by 'innocent' telegrams. All telegrams were coded using Haganah Ciphers.³

The secret transmitting station in Gvat was operated by a Haganah Signal Service female operator, Sara Pepis, working daytime as a dairy farmer, and the station was named 'Sara Station' after her. The receiving station in a London safehouse was operated by two other female operators, Tamar Eshel and Shulamit Arlozorov, students in daytime. The reception in London was done throughout the London Blitz. The operators continued receiving during air raids, and never stopped reception to take shelter.

Reception in London began by purchasing a Halicrafters shortwave receiver and erecting a simple long wire. After several months, the receiver was confiscated for the military effort, and reception was done using a broadcast receiver with short waves.

¹ David Ben Gurion, the Head of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, declared: *"We will fight the White Paper as if there is no war, and fight the war as if there is no White Paper"*.

² Parts to build the transmitter were purchased in Cairo.

³ In another 'White Paper', published by the British government on 24 July, 1946, the content of Haganah ciphered telegrams was revealed, showing the British broke the Haganah codes, apparently since 1942.

The station operated in Gvat until 1943. The RAF built the Ramat David RAF air base in 1942, and due to the close proximity to Gvat, the station was transferred to Tel Aviv.

1939-39 [Cmd. 6019] Statement with regard to British policy in Palestine (Policy in Palestine)



597

PALESTINE

Statement of Policy

*Presented by the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Parliament
by Command of His Majesty
May, 1939.*

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Cmd. 6019

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The British 1939 White paper

Printed in England. Sept. 1938. 1s. 7½d. net.

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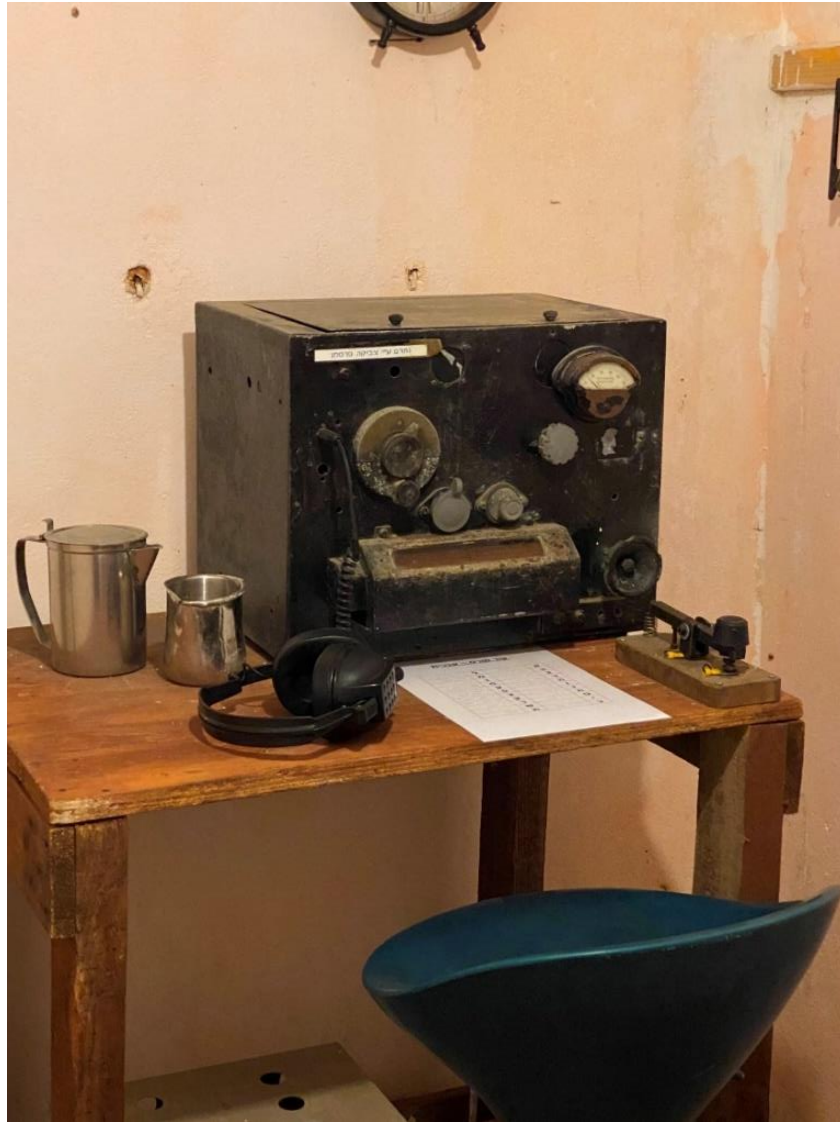
המספרים הנכללים על פנקסים יצאו לפי
הוצר הפועל ומסודרת
מחלקת הרגיסטרציה
28 JUN 1940
נאכלל ביום
7610

MARK YOUR REPLY *Via Imperial*

NO ENQUIRY RESPECTING THIS TELEGRAM CAN BE ATTENDED TO WITHOUT PRODUCTION OF THIS COPY.

Repeat Telegrams 130 and 135

Source: The Association for the Commemoration of the Fallen Soldiers of the IDF Signal Corps



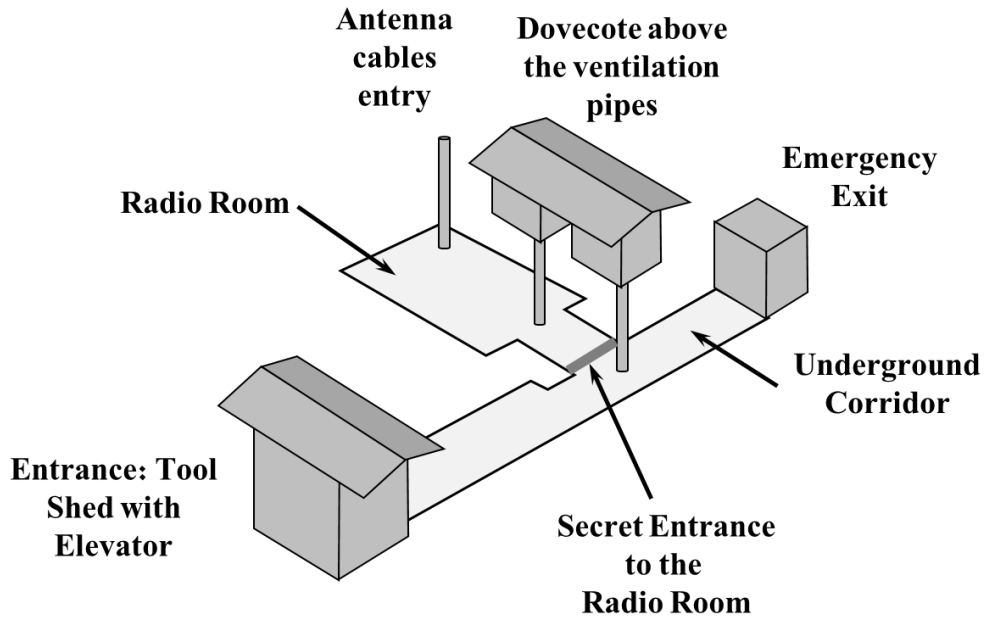
Restoration of the operating table and Secret Transmitter
Restoration done by the late Zvi Pressman. Photo: Daniel Rosenne, 2020

The secret 'Slik' in Gvat

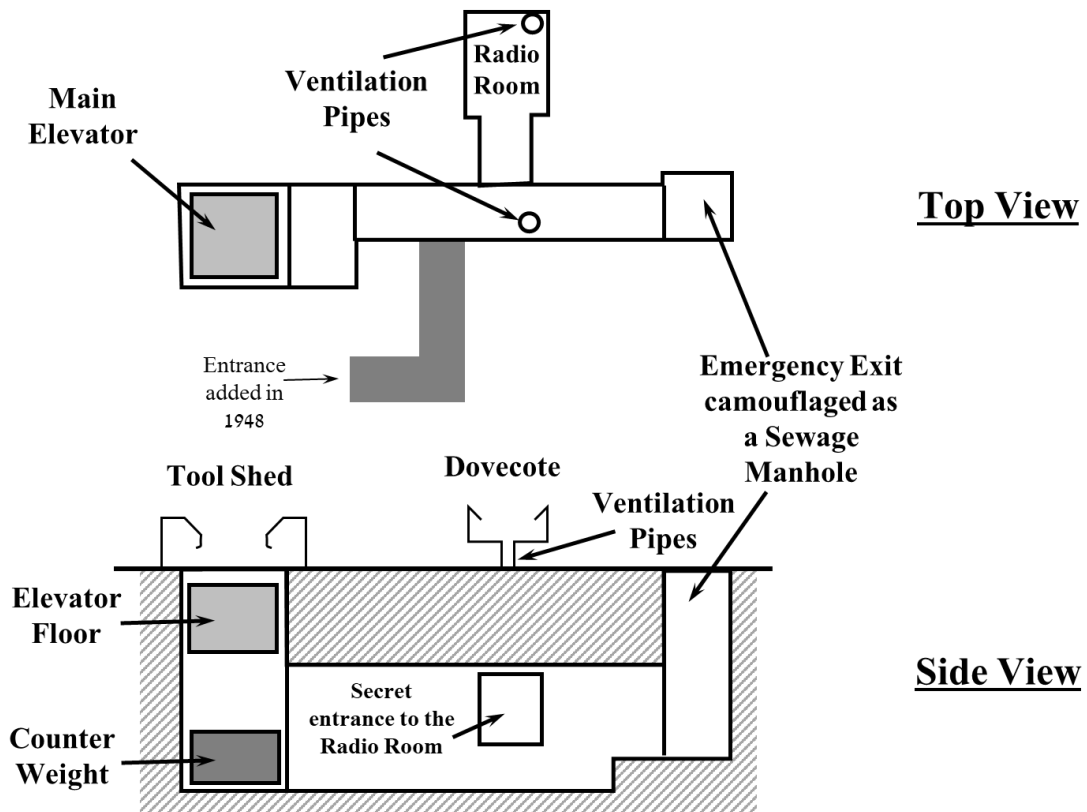
The Gvat transmitter was hidden in a secret underground cache, built as a “cache within a cache”: the first cache was an underground corridor, 11 m long and 80 cm wide, with entrances on both sides: on one side using a special elevator hidden in the floor of a tool shed. On the other side, the entrance was hidden in a sewage manhole.

A secret door in the side of the corridor was the entrance to the second cache – the radio room, 2 by 3 m. The ventilation and cable entrances to the radio room used metal pipes, that were concealed by a dovecote.

The station's existence was kept secret from local Gvat inhabitants, and its existence was known only to a handful of trusted Haganah members. The British forces carried several searches for secret arms in Kibbutz Gvat, but the 'Slik' was never found.



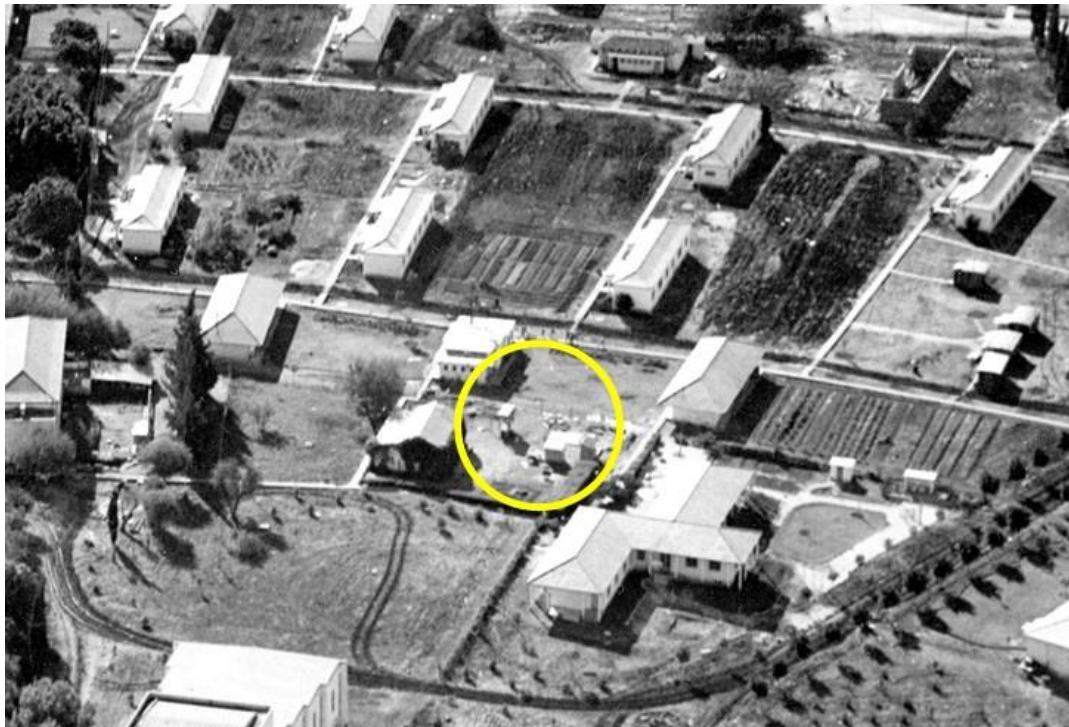
The Gvat underground 'Slik' – General Overview



The Gvat underground 'Slik' – Top and Side Views



Ventilation pipes of the radio room are the base of the Dovecote
1943 photograph, courtesy Haganah Historical Archive

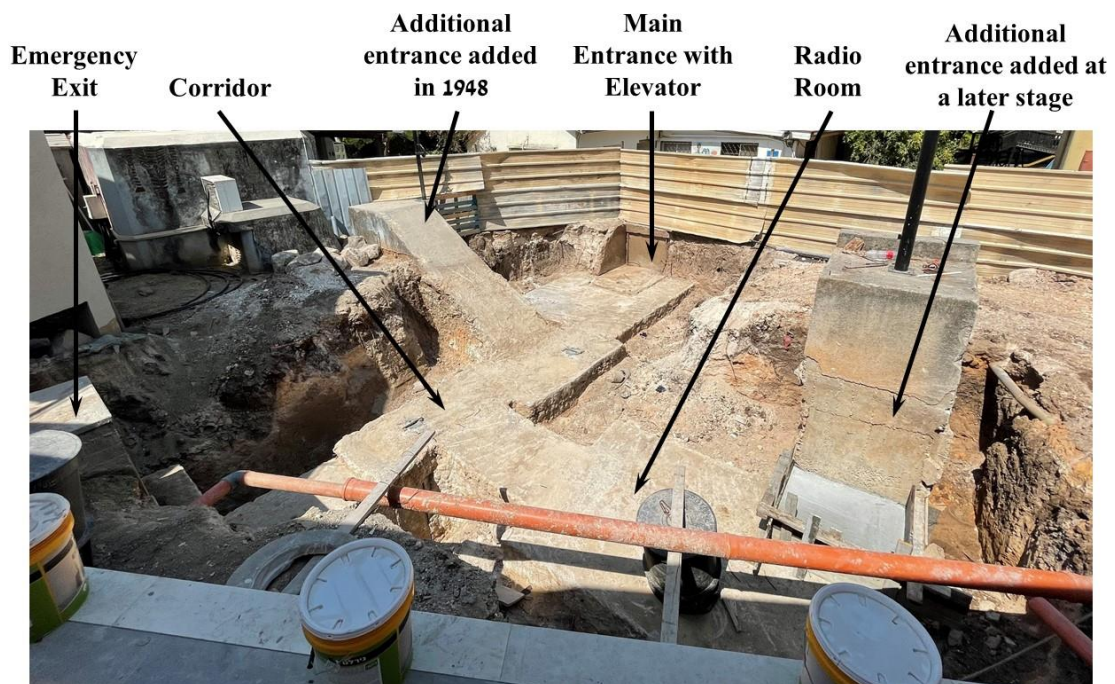


Dovecote and Tool Shed, 1946
Photo by Zoltan Kluger, Courtesy the Central Zionist Archives

Restoration

The underground 'Slik' was used as an air raid shelter during the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, and later abandoned. It was restored in 1970, and became a heritage site, demonstrating the efforts to re-build the Jewish state and the dedication of the Haganah members.

The original underground structure, obviously built in haste, didn't survive the forces of nature, and was flooded in the winter. Recently a major restoration project was carried out: the 'Slik' was uncovered, dried up, sealed and recovered by a cement 'Umbrella'. It will soon re-open to the public.



The uncovered underground 'Slik' during Restoration, August 2021
Photo: Daniel Rosenne