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To learn about the project and participate in it:
jewcer.org/project/DAKAR-heroes-movie

Translated from Yediot Ahronot-America in Hebrew by Ruth Kohn
DAKAR, The Final Deep Dive - The Film

Independent film maker Avi Struslon is collecting all the findings regarding one of the great mysteries in the history of the State of Israel: the disappearance of the Dakar submarine. He will pool together his personal resources and the good will of individuals, organizations and institutions the world over to create an authoritative motion picture, the first of its kind on this fascinating topic. He is the first person to conduct an investigation of this scope, one that presents significant new findings, including information still unknown and which only now being disclosed. He calls on everyone who has feelings on the issue to participate in the project.

Ilanit Solomonovich Habet, Yediot Ahronot, Published on 30.03.18, 11:53

It is 1965. The State of Israel is barely 17 years old. Israel knows it must acquire new submarines to strengthen its power at sea. The Royal Navy of the United Kingdom responds to its call and provides it with two submarines, which will later be named Leviathan and Dakar. A distinguished delegation of officers and naval personnel stationed in Portsmouth, Great Britain, works for a full two years at the expense of the UK and with its assistance. The group adapts and upgrades submarines that had served in Her Majesty's Navy during World War II for use by the Israeli Navy. The submarines are to arrive in Haifa, where the families of the crew members are waiting. Instead of the Dakar, however, to everyone's surprise, a different submarine, the Dolphin, emerges from the waters. It was purchased through the same order but its purchase had been kept secret.



Avi Strulson

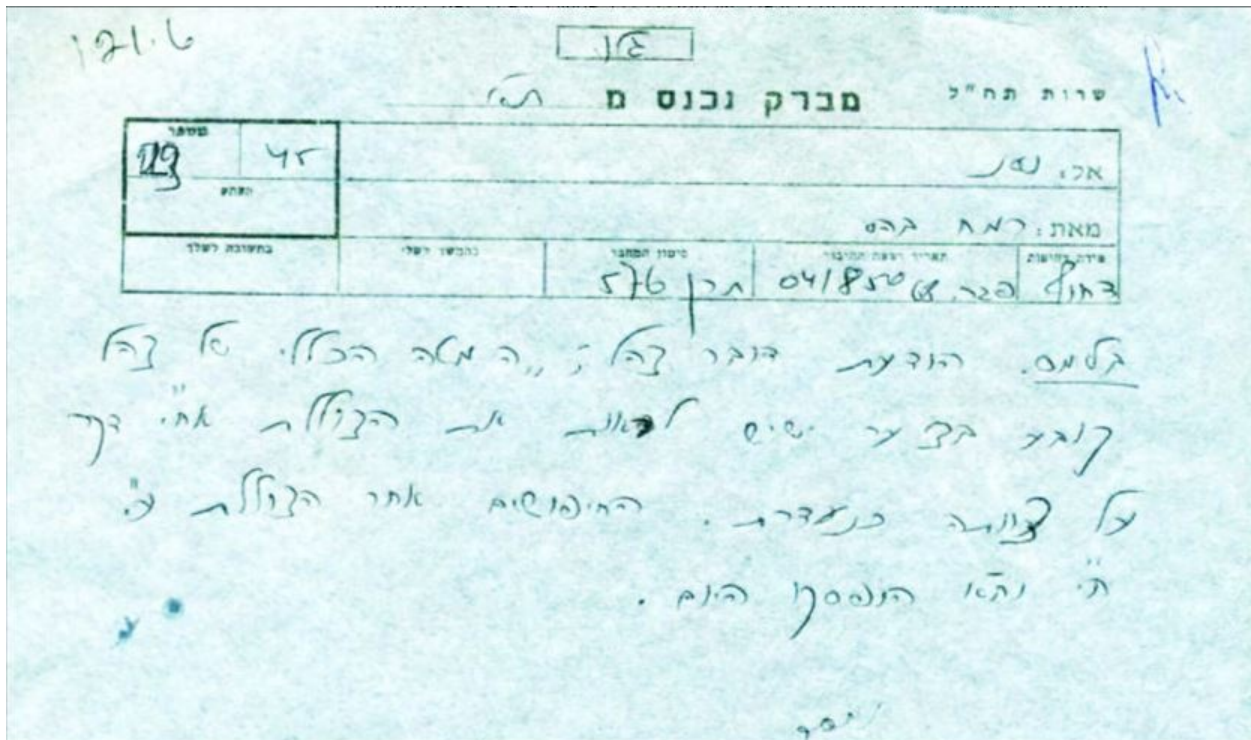
For the next 20 years, searches for the missing Dakar were conducted along the Egyptian coast. The mystery of its disappearance was never solved. Until the Dakar was found in 1999, thirty-one years after its disappearance, countless hypotheses were raised, countless reports were received, and the Israeli Navy consistently denied each of them. At the same time, the Navy never abandoned the desire to find the Dakar.

Many theories emerged. One of them was that the commander of the submarine, Major Ya'akov Raanan, who was asked to spend another day at sea in order to arrive at the Port of Haifa on the day of the planned ceremony, decided to carry out a "small operation" on the coast of Egypt. Psychologists and other professionals who analyzed Raanan's personality concluded that he might have deviated from the

original plan. Others who knew him and testified to his uncompromising professionalism, maintain that he followed the plan. To complicate matters, the Dakar's buoy was found on the shores of Khan Yunis, Egypt, which helped to cement the inescapable conclusion that the submarine did indeed sail towards Egypt.

From the moment of the Dakar's disappearance on the night between Thursday and Friday -- the official date is January 25, 1968 -- and when it became clear that its signal was lost, the search and rescue operation began by air, special forces, and ships from neighboring countries. A call to international rescue forces soon came out in an effort to identify its location, but to no avail.

Reports on the developing drama were not being forwarded to the crew members' families in real time. Obviously, there was no email or WhatsApp. There was not even a procedure in place to notify families in cases of disaster. There were only rumors reaching their ears from broadcasts by foreign media, including the BBC and the Voice of Zion for the Diaspora radio network.



1968 Israeli press release announcing the official loss of the submarine and its crew presumed missing. Search is called off.

Avi Strulson, as a seven-year-old boy during Israel's early seventies, liked to watch the nation's only television channel. He especially liked the Friday night news broadcast. The curious child was first exposed to the story of the Dakar when he watched the footage of the sailors descending into the belly of the submarine. He recalls that his mother, Orna Strulson, the respected director of the community center in the Bavli neighborhood of Tel Aviv, told him about the disaster that ensued in a way appropriate for his age. The story was etched in his memory and has not left him to this day.

Strulson has extensive experience in issues related to missing persons and mysteries. During his military service he worked in the Air Force's film unit as a director and screenwriter. He was exposed to the story of Ron Arad's abduction; the message he got from the media was that nobody cared. He joined the team that founded the Association for Ron Arad in 1991, alongside Yoske Harari, a Palmachnik **[By translator: member of the elite fighting force of the Haganah, the underground army of the Hagana during the period of the British Mandate]**, who later served in key positions for the State of Israel. The Association's goal was to keep the story of Arad's abduction on the public agenda. The team traveled around the country and lectured to the public about the plight of Israeli POWs and MIAs.

As time went on, Strulson arrived in the United States. He was trained as a mathematics teacher but also acquired a degree in film making, building on his work in the Israeli Air Force. In New York, he was appointed principal of the middle and high school for the Bukharian Jewish community by Lev Levayev, who founded the school. Strulson administered the school very successfully for four years until the collapse of the real estate market in 2008, when it was decided that parents should take part in financing the educational institution, and the school shrank significantly.

He then became a teacher at a yeshiva in New Jersey. "Every Israeli teacher, no matter his background, automatically becomes a teacher of Jewish history and tradition, which happened to me," he says. As part of the high school classes, the students demanded lessons in Israeli combat history. "I gave a lesson on the Dakar. Being stationed on a submarine, I told them, requires high professionalism, and perhaps the highest combat spirit there is. I covered the technical challenges, as well as issues like the Agunot **[By translator: wives left behind in a state of uncertain marital status]**. I had a lot of background material. And right there, as I was preparing the lessons, the idea was born to make a motion picture out of this material."

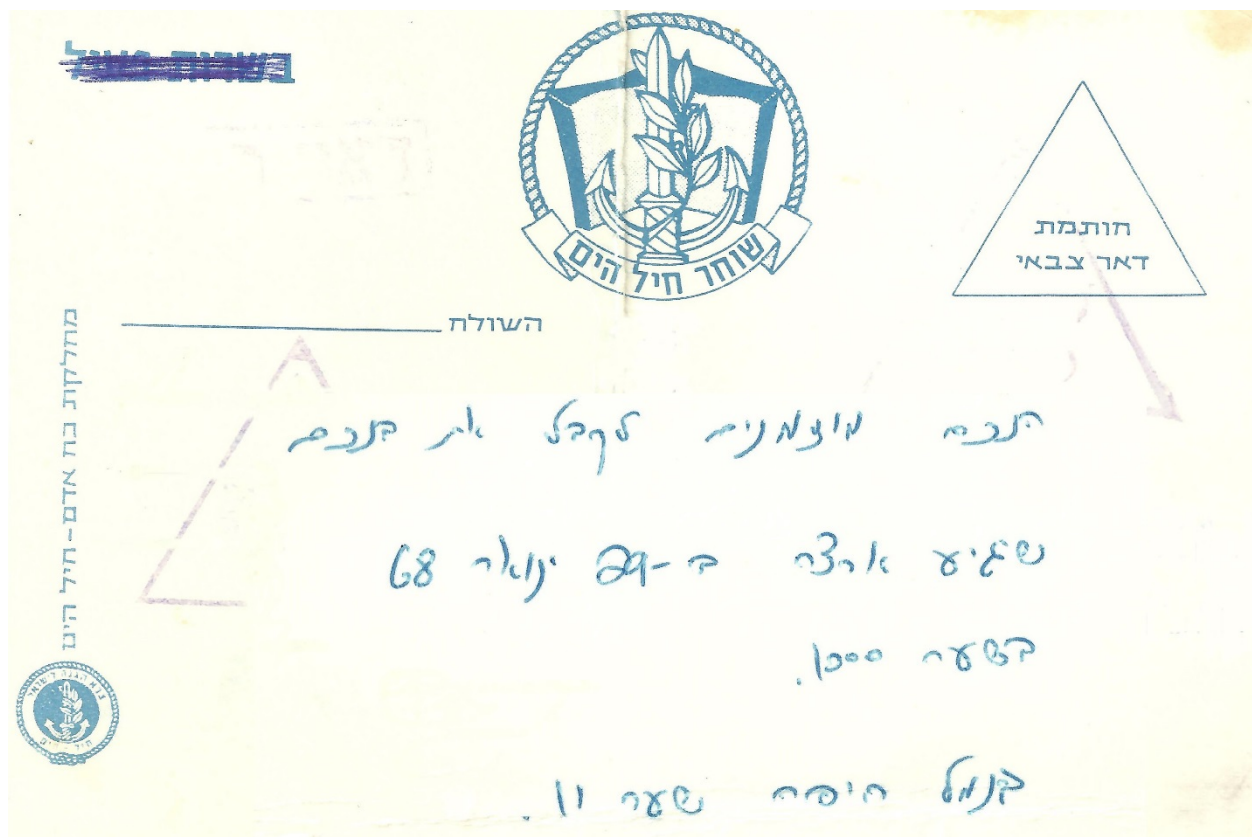


Dakar's project manager Lieut. Col. (Res.) Yechiel Gaash (left) with Avi Strulson

Avi then conducted additional research for two and a half years, reading extensively and making contact with every possible resource involved in the story of the Dakar. His investigation covered everything from Israel's acquisition of the submarines to finding the Dakar and beyond. He connected with Nauticus, the company that found the Dakar in the depths of the Mediterranean at probably its deepest point. He had conferences with various branches of the Israeli Navy, including Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Yechiel Gaash, the officer who turned down promotions until he found the submarine and dedicated himself fully to solving the mystery, retiring from military service only when the Dakar was found. Strulson met with the families of the victims, organizations and various other parties involved directly or indirectly. He left no stone unturned and reviewed every document he could find. His mother traveled throughout Israel to secure many of these documents.

Much of his material came from Israel's military, which is known for its secrecy. He was dogged in his pursuit of the truth: running, meeting, interviewing, traveling, and evaluating each new piece of information. "Though I'm not a family member of any of those who perished, the mystery fascinates me, the things I learn lead me from one item to another, and the desire to present a comprehensive and reliable historical narrative does not let me rest" he says. "The docudrama I intend to produce will provide the sailors' families with closure on this tragedy after 50 years." Avi knows he will not be able to include all this material in the film. "Whatever remains on the editing room's floor will comprise a study curriculum for future generation and the story of the Dakar disaster will remain alive for ever."

Avi, who is very thorough, does not neglect any detail on the way to his target: "I'm starting out on my own, not relying on any other source of funding. I have had no other investor and I funded every aspect of the project out of my own pocket. This endeavor would not be possible without my wife, who takes over the responsibility for our house and our son on the days I travel, after my regular work hours, to meet with people who can help with the project. Among the significant participants is Micha Riss, owner of the "Flying Machine" branding company, who was one of the project's first supporters." Strulson has been an expert at recruiting good people to support his projects since the days he served in Israel's Civil Guard [auxiliary police]. Now he is getting invaluable help in writing the script from Bob McKee, the guru of Hollywood screenwriters.



Parental invitation to the joyous welcoming ceremony of their son in Haifa, Israel, an event which never happened.

Why is this film important? Strulson: "There are several aspects. An important one is the need for closure for the families. A Family Committee was established just after the disaster. They went through a series of traumas, as did the nation. The whole world saw the pictures of the bewildered family members who stood on the dock at Haifa and returned home without their loved ones and helpless. The families never received an official notification of the Dakar's disappearance and learned about it from the media. The government shared little to no information

with the families, and the families insisted on a stronger government commitment to investigate the Dakar's loss. They were shocked to learn the searches were stopped, the submarine was declared lost and its people MIA. This contradicts the Israeli military principle that you don't leave behind a soldier on a battlefield, dead or alive. Many considered the issue closed when Chief Rabbi of Israel Rabbi Goren allowed the Agunot to remarry within the first year.

Tzipi Shachar, whose brother lost his life in the Dakar and who has become the spokesperson of the sixty-nine families who lost loved ones: "In the first period after the tragedy, whenever I saw a Navy sailor, I gasped and ran to look at his face, hoping that I would meet my younger brother, Haim Ber Zeev Reichberger, who was 21 years old when he died, a few weeks before he was to be discharged. My brother was the sonar operator on the submarine. The public no longer remembers the particular families; it all became history. Despite this, the story is still alive and well, and children in schools are still writing compositions about it. The families are still living the experience and a dark cloud is hovering over every holiday and nothing is complete anymore. The Dakar disaster is a national trauma." Tzipi Shachar continues: "This was the first time so many soldiers were killed not in war. What made the story even more powerful is the mystery. We, the families, don't even have the bodies to bury, and therefore commemorating the event by the film will serve as a substitute that will preserve the memory of our loved ones forever. This way the maxim that no soldier may be left behind, dead or alive, will be honored."

Avi adds: "The Nauticos people, who are not Jewish, saw the national importance of searching for the Dakar for the sake of the Jewish people. For this help, Vice President Thomas Dettweiler received from Israeli President Moshe Katsav the President's Award, the highest possible honor for a contribution to the State by a non-Israeli.

Strulson's film will present surprising facts the public has not been aware of. He forged a cooperative relationship with the Israeli Navy. Through interviews with its personnel, he learned that the Navy was open to hearing opinions that contradicted its earlier positions and was willing to test them in the field. Cooperation between the US and Israel led to finding the Dakar. Many of those involved in the efforts to locate the lost submarine, especially the Americans, say that finding the Dakar was the most significant event that happened in their professional life," Avi says.

Strulson has launched a crowdfunding campaign to help get the project off the ground. "The goal is to give the public the opportunity to take part in the project, so I created a range of unique and meaningful perks for those who choose to contribute. Dr. Amir Givon, the owner of Jewcer, the crowdfunding platform, found this to be a project of great importance and on his own initiative is working relentlessly to help bring the project to life.

The script will be based in part or in whole on interviews with key personnel connected with this drama inside the Israeli and the American Navy. The story will be reenacted because very little film footage exists. The budget is needed for production. Avi Strulson is ready to proceed to the last, most important stage.

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