

# Langhorne Couple Leaves Comforts of Home, Does Army Hitch

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*This is the army Mr. Jones;  
No private rooms or telephones.*

Nor are there air conditioners, microwave ovens, VCRs or any of the conveniences that have become part of our daily existence since World War II, when that song was written.

Teddy and Bill Diamond of Langhorne chose to leave the creature comforts of their modern American home to join the Israeli army for three glorious weeks: three weeks of barracks life (separate barracks for men and women), army food, army clothing and menial mundane tasks, all for the price of a round trip ticket to Ben Gurion and a \$45 registration fee.

DAVID GOLDBERG, PRESIDENT of the Philadelphia Region of the Volunteers for Israel program since its inception in 1985, explained why army stints by volunteers like Teddy and Bill are essential. "Because of the vast manpower shortage people are needed on the military bases for warehousing, filling duffel bags and packaging the food which comes in large bulk."

"There were 16 people in our group of volunteers, some older than us, some younger, and from all walks of life," said Bill, a retired cabinet maker.

Some of the participants had been to Israel before but had seen it only from tourist buses. For the Diamonds, this was their fifth trip. The reasons for entering the program were as varied and diverse as the people themselves. Most of them agreed: "We wanted to see the real Israel." Although a wide spectrum of careers was represented by the volunteers,



**BILL AND TEDDY DIAMOND**, dressed in their Israeli Army fatigues, take a moment's break from volunteer soldiering. Their experience gave them an "insider's eye view" of life in Israel.

many were retired and anxious to live the fantasies they had nurtured during their working lives—to see Israel from the inside rather than from the outside looking in.

AN ISRAELI ARMY RESERVIST was in charge of delegating the duties of the participants and coordinating their work with the tasks of the army personnel and native civilian volunteers. Older Israeli citizens consider it part of their patriotic obligation to donate two hours of work to the military several days weekly. This job presented quite a contrast to his regular position as a bank vice president.

One of these older citizen-volunteers met Teddy as she was emerging from the barracks wearing her army

uniform for the first time. "She saluted me and I was too shocked to respond to her greeting. There was no doubt in my mind that I was in the army after that!" said Teddy.

"We had no military duties and they put us in a program we could handle. Younger people were assigned to places where the work was more strenuous," explained Bill.

**MODEST AND UNASSUMING**, Bill makes light of anything he does. Yet, wherever he goes he leaves the imprint of his skill as a cabinet maker and woodworker. No task is too menial—or too challenging—if wood is involved.

During his three weeks in boot camp, Bill made screens and shelves for the toiletries and incidentals for the barracks, an ordinary task for the average carpenter. Could this be the same master craftsman who, as a member of Congregation Beth El in Fallsington covered the walls of the synagogue with intricate plaques, a book case and a show case designed for the Holocaust Torah? An inscription under a magnificent Menorah declares that it is: "We express our gratitude to Bill Diamond. His creative hands and generous heart have beautified our House of Prayer."

Even volunteers in the army get a chance for R & R—rest and relaxation. "The only time we wore civilian clothing and had to use our own money was when we left the base. The program provided for a sightseeing trip one day a week. We were accompanied by excellent guides. We visited Masada, the Dead Sea and Old Jerusalem. A course in elementary Hebrew as well as lectures and discussions rounded out the day," said Teddy.

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## Army Hitch

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"ON SHABBAT everyone left camp," she continued. "The army found private homes for those who had no contacts in Israel. We visited our son who is getting a doctorate at the Hebrew University. He has been in Jerusalem for six years. We always came back from our brief furlough refreshed and raring to go for the next week's work!"

When the three week hitch was drawing to a close, a final festive dinner was served. Each of the participants received a diploma and had an opportunity to talk about how the three weeks affected each of them. The lone Christian participant was presented with an Israeli flag by her fellow soldiers. She accepted it and paid tribute to all the volunteers: "I wanted to see Israel in a more meaningful way," she began. "I met people with incredible courage, dedication and a sense of community. I loved being part of the family. I enjoyed having 15 mothers!"

Bill Diamond seconds this feeling: "I would go again if I could."

"THE VOLUNTEER army serves more than the purpose of freeing the soldiers from mundane tasks," concluded Goldberg. "It boosts the morale of Israelis and gives them a different perception of Americans. It binds the Jews of the diaspora to the Jews of Israel, resulting in better understanding of both."