

Alber Schilton And His Classmates



This is a photo of my elder brother Alber Schilton and his classmates. I don't know what grade this was, but the school was the Bene Berit Jewish high school. The man sitting in the center and who has glasses was some French teacher. My brother Alber is standing just behind him. On my brother's right is his friend Jul Barbut, and right beside him is Pepo Eskenazi. These last two, Jul and Pepo were my brother's best friends. I used to know them, too. They used to gather in one home every afternoon and study together. They also used to go out together at weekends. These two were his closest friends. I don't know any of the other students in the photo.

Alber Schilton finished the Jewish Lycee. He studied at the Bene Berit Jewish Lycee from primary school to the end of the lycee. I still remember the name of the headmaster of the school; it was Dr. Markus and the teachers were French. After he finished school, Alber worked in different places as a clerk. He worked as a translator at a translation bureau in Karakoy [a district in the European side of Istanbul]. Then when he was 23-24 he got it into his head to leave for Israel. At that time people were contracting what was called "marriage blanc" [french for 'white marriage', meaning a marriage in name only to serve a certain purpose, in this case, entrance to Palestine] in order to go to Israel [Palestine]. They married some girl or boy and divorced when they got to Israel. That is what my brother did, too. He married a girl and they left for Israel. There they got divorced and my brother went to a kibbutz. I don't remember the dates really. He stayed at different kibbutzim for 2-3 years. He went to the Kibbutz Massada [in the Jordan valley] and stayed there the longest. I don't remember the names of the other kibbutzim he stayed at. He did a lot of different kinds of jobs there, picking bananas, cleaning etc... He would do whatever they told him to do. Then suddenly we heard he had become a soldier. This was during World War II, 1939-1945. In those times de Gaulle was in France and he was calling for volunteers to the French army. And Alber, while in Israel, joined the French army. He liked France and the French very much and he joined their army. He went to Africa with de Gaulle's army. They fought there for a long time against the Germans and then they went to Italy. He used to write us letters, saying he was OK, or saying that they were having very difficult times. Then he wrote that he hoped to come back from the war

alive and we understood here that his life was in danger. He was fighting the Germans. They fought them in Africa and they fought them again in Italy. The French army was allied to the American and British armies. There was a big battle at a place in Italy called [Battle of Monte] Cassino, near Naples. Alber died during that battle. They buried him at the military cemetery in Naples. He had died during a bombardment.

One day, (I don't remember when) I received a letter from the French Consulate in Istanbul and the letter said that they regretted to inform us of the death of my brother. They wrote that he had died in such and such a place and in such and such conditions, and that they wanted to talk to me. So I went to the consulate. The Consul himself received me and told me in a very serious and calm manner what had happened. He gave me my brother's belongings and told me how he had died. There was a terrible battle at [Monte] Cassino and Alber had died during the bombardment together with all his soldier friends who were with him at the time. The Consul gave me a big envelope and Alber's belongings that were in his room. His wallet, photos and all our letters were inside the envelope. Then the Consul told me that the French government was going to give my mother a lifelong salary and they did until she died.