

Detroit

A New Home Front

Russian veterans of World War II help Exodus Jews.

RUTH LITTMANN STAFF WRITER



Lev Kuperstein and Pavel Chitrik fought Nazis during World War II.

Photos By Glenn Triest



Pavel Chitrik watches other Russian Jewish veterans play chess.

Russian veterans of World War II now living in Detroit have not forgotten the Jews they defended against Nazi invasions of their homeland a half century ago.

Today, these veterans are fighting a different battle. With an army of 266 people, they have set out to raise money for the United Jewish Appeal's Operation Exodus campaign, which has helped hundreds of thousands of Russian Jews relocate to Israel.

"We feel we must do it. We have a duty to help our people and Israel," said Lev Kuper-

stein, secretary of the veterans' organization.

Over the past three years, the Committee of World War Two Veterans From the Former Soviet Union has contributed \$1,444 to Operation Exodus. The group has made donations to other Jewish causes, including \$3,000 to the B'nai Zion Haifa Medical Center in Israel and \$6,800 to the Jewish National Fund.

Organized 13 years ago, the Russian veterans group started with only 39 members. As more Russians immigrated to Detroit, that number increased nearly sevenfold. The average age of a Russian World War II veteran is 70.

The group plans fishing trips and celebrates Jewish holidays

together. Each year, members celebrate Memorial Day with American veterans.

"We try to work together, but we have our own duties, too," Mr. Kuperstein said.

For instance, Pavel Chitrik, an Orthodox Jew whose life was miraculously saved several times during the war, serves as president of the veterans group. A retired accountant, Mr. Chitrik moved to the United States 14 years ago and has since used his skills to help Russian emigres fill out their taxes. He charges \$5 and donates the money to Operation Exodus.

Members of the veterans organization also help Russian Jewish emigres prepare for U.S. citizenship examinations. In

two years, 48 people have taken classes taught by veterans.

The group also gathers for informal social events — like chess games at the Oak Park Jewish Community Center — or more resplendent affairs like collective Jewish weddings. For some of these programs, the veterans group works in conjunction with other local Jewish agencies.

In 1989, the group published *Veterans About Themselves: On the Defeat Of Nazi Germany*, a book profiling members' experiences during the war.

The forward reads: "While justified attention was given to the 6 million Jews who perished in the ghettos and concentration camps in World War Two under Nazi tyranny, facts about

the armed struggle and the sacrifices of a half million Russian soldiers, men and women who contributed to the liberation of

"We have a duty."

— Lev Kuperstein

Jews and non-Jews from a certain death, had been partially ignored for over four decades.

"On the Defeat of Nazi Germany opens a fresh page in the history of our people ... More Jewish soldiers, including many volunteers, were represented per capita than any other nationality in the Soviet Union." □