



COMING FULL CIRCLE

Rav Shimon Alster Merits Visiting His Father's Kever after 73 Years

BY C.B. WEINFELD

The Trek

It had taken over seven decades, but it was time.

Rav Shimon Alster, *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Gedolah of Cliffwood, NJ, and *rov* of Bais Medrash Torah U'tefillah on Bedford Avenue in Flatbush, reverently approached the *kever* where his father, Reb Yosef Shmuel Alster, was laid to rest back in September of 1946, just days before *Rosh Hashanah*, exactly a year after the end of the Holocaust.

Reb Yosef Alster and Reb Nathan Lindenbaum were two respected members of the Antwerp *kehilla*, Kehillas Moriya, in New York. They were diamond dealers, returning from a trip to Belgium

Baker George) from Brussels, which tragically crashed in a remote forest on its way to Gander Airport, killing 26 of the 44 people on board. It was the first fatal crash of a commercial airliner in world history, and it made international headlines at the time.

Reb Yosef and his wife, Gittel, were originally from Galicia, Poland. They were raised in Antwerp and were married there. They were childless for many years before they finally celebrated a blessed event, the birth of their first, and only, child. Not long after that, tragedy struck and the young boy was destined to grow up without his father.

Orphaned at a tender age, Rav Alster was raised by his devoted mother, his spiritual growth overseen by his father's *rabbeim* and *roshei yeshiva*. Today the great-grandfather of a large family, the orphaned son stood at his father's *kever* for the first time, 73 years after his *petirah*.

Rav Alster was joined by a *minyán* including his two sons, several daughters and a grandchild, members of the Lindenbaum family, along with five *misplatteim* of his *shul* who

had generously donated their time to travel to Gander. These included Reb Moshe Shimon Blumenkrantz, Reb Leib Hanover, Reb Yossi Lamet, Reb Brachya Schuk, and Reb Moshe Wachs.

The group first took taxis to Glenwood, Newfoundland, and then boarded the ATVs on a special access road to southwest Gander. This Southwest Access road was a gravel path that had been created in the past few years to en-



ATVs used to reach the crash site.



The trip had been a grueling one, involving two flights, a lengthy ATV ride over rugged terrain, and an exhausting uphill hike. As Reb Yossi Lamet recalled, "We left Sunday evening at 6:40 from LaGuardia Airport on a flight to Toronto, which landed at 8:15. We then took a 10:40 p.m. flight to Gander, Newfoundland, as there are no direct flights from New York. We landed at 3 a.m. (1:30 a.m. New York time) and headed to Sinsbad's hotel for a few hours of rest. In the morning after *Shacharis*, we rented several ATVs, which were capable of traveling through extremely narrow and elevated dirt roads."

Those who joined the trip were warned to dress carefully with hiking boots and face masks, as well as mosquito repellent, for what would be a bumpy trip over the rocky and swampy terrain.

able mining in the region. Until then, access to the crash site involved a way more complicated and intense journey, which had to be traversed mostly on foot or horseback through dense forest.

The group could have hired helicopters to take them to the crash site, but they are dependent on favorable weather conditions, while the ATVs can be utilized regardless of the weather. Since the group was on a tight schedule, it was not worth the risk.

Reb Yossi mentioned that one of the ATV

AIRLINER MISSING WITH 44 AFTER HOP OVER THE ATLANTIC

19 From New York Area Among Those Aboard Belgian DC-4 Lost in Newfoundland

AIR-LAND SEARCH PHALS

Navy and Civilian Craft Join in Hunt—Pilot Says Here He Sighted Wreckage

By G. L. INFELDERBERG
Special to the New York Times
GANDER, Nfld., Sept. 18.—A Douglas DC-4 transportation airplane operated by the Belgian airline and bearing forty-four passengers and bearing forty-four passengers is missing somewhere in the fog-ridden forests of Newfoundland. It was almost certainly in the process of having crashed on ground a forest leading to the Newfoundland building this information beyond question.

CITY DAILY NEWS
ATLANTIC PLANE MISSING WITH 44
Wallace Temporarily Silenced

New York Times
ATLANTIC MISSING; BELGIAN AIRWAYS IN SEARCH OF WRECKAGE
OVER THE ATLANTIC
TRUMAN SILENT UNTIL AFTER SECRETARY



Rav Shimon Alster with Nathan Lindenbaum.

drivers introduced himself as a nephew of one of the original rescuers, Bruce Shea. Shea was a hunter who was the first to arrive at the crash site so many years earlier and helped with the complicated rescue operation.

After two hours of traveling to the "middle of nowhere," they approached the region of the crash site and turned off to Sabena Road, after which the trip became more treacherous. "Now there were no longer any gravel roads, but extremely narrow, rocky dirt paths, carved out of the forest, surrounded by steep cliffs," recalled Reb Moshe S. Blumenkranz.

The next half hour involved a challenging and very bumpy ride through rivers of mud, which splattered their faces and clothes. The group wore construction masks to protect their faces from the elements and tree branches, which were obstructing the path. The ATVs made their way across rocky cliffs as they



wended their way upwards, towards the top of a mountain, where the plane had crashed, as the pilot had mistaken it for the runway. Thank-



The monument in the Beth Israel Cemetery in Woodbridge.

fully, the skies were clear and the weather held up or the journey would have been far more dangerous.

The final climb was a difficult one involving an uphill hike through a remote forest. The trail was tough and arduous, and on some of the challenging parts, the *rov* had to be helped by members of the group, who took turns supporting him on this final ascent.

Finally, after their three-hour journey into the "back of beyond," in the heart of the ice fishing and mining region, on the eastern tip of Canada, the group of sixteen arrived at the St. Martin-In-The Woods Cemetery, the burial site of the members of the Sabena flight who did not survive.

It was already early afternoon after a long and grueling trip as Rav Alster and entourage reverently approached the *kever achim*.

Asking Forgiveness

Before reaching the *kever*, Rav Alster turned to Reb Yossi and asked him to go ahead. "I would like you to ask my father *mechilah*," said Rav Alster. "because the *seforim* write that if a child has not been at his father's *kever* in fifty years, he is obligated to send a *shliach* to ask forgiveness prior to approaching."

Although there is a monument for both *niftarim* at the entrance to the Moriya Chelka in the Beth Israel Cemetery in Woodbridge, NJ, this was Rav Alster's first time at the actual burial place of his father.

Reb Yossi obliged, asking the *niftar* for



Correspondence between Mr. Marcel Lindenbaum and representatives of Sabena airlines.

mechilah. Then the somber entourage proceeded to the site. This was the first time ever that a *minyana* had been there.

The immense difficulty in reaching the site was the reason that this visit, long overdue, had been delayed for so long. Although three of the orphaned children of Mr. Nathan Lindenbaum undertook the grueling trip on horseback back in 1973, it was still a tremendous challenge. Until recently, the dirt road leading to the crash site, on a steep hill in the middle of a thick forest, was virtually impassible for all but the most experienced trekkers.

There was correspondence throughout the 1960s between Mr. Marcel Lindenbaum and representatives of Sabena airlines, as well as members of the Gander authorities. All the letters from that time reject his request for assistance in visiting his father's grave. They state that the forest is too dense and the conditions do not allow for ordinary people. Access to the site is limited to experienced hikers and woodsman.

Rav Alster also contemplated making the trip many times in the past, but was unable to - until now.

At the Kever

The only son of Reb Yosef Alster, accompanied by his children and grandchildren, respectfully approached the *kever*, which

was surrounded by a fence and marked by a plaque commemorating the crash and rescue of the survivors. The mass grave is dotted with crosses, as well as, *lehavdil*, two *matzeivos* in memory of Reb Yosef and Reb Nossion. (While Sabena Airlines was in business, they carefully maintained the site. Since they are no longer in operation, the site has fallen into disrepair, a matter that Mr. Nathan Lindenbaum has pledged to correct.)

Nearby, half-buried just a short distance away, was the fuselage of the plane, surprisingly intact, as only half the plane exploded in a fireball, while the other half remained relatively whole. Remains of the propellers and wings are scattered throughout the site, as it remains mostly untouched and closely resembles the crash scene of 1946.

There are no words to describe the emotions of a child, now a great-grandfather, as he stands at the *kever* of his father, whom he lost when he was a young child, over seven decades ago.

Time stood still as *TeHillim* was recited in the order of the "chinnuch" of a new *bais hachaim*, followed by a *siyum*. Then a heartfelt *Keil Molei* was recited, followed by *Kaddish* and *Mincha*. Rav Alster then gave a moving



Rav Alster with his son, Rav Mordechai.

drasha, explaining the *kedusha* of *kevaras Yisroel*, the eternity of *nishmas Yisroel*, and the significance of the *makom hakever*.

Audible sobs were heard as his son, Rabbi Mordechai Alster, expressed, "*Zaide*, in those horrific moments when the plane was going down, you were probably saying *Shema*. Did you think about whether anyone would hear your *Shema*? *Zaide*, I am here to tell you that all your grandchildren and great-grandchildren are proudly saying *Shema Yisroel*. This is all your *zechus*."

Mr. Nathan Lindenbaum, who is named



The rescue mission.



Charlie Baker George - The Book



It was a cold, inhospitable Wednesday morning on September 18, 1946, when a Sabena Airlines DC-4 airliner disappeared off the radar, after crashing into a remote mountain top due to pilot error.

The captain of the plane was Jean Ester, who had flown with the Royal Air Force during the war, and his co-pilot was Alfred Drossaert, who had more flying experience. They were joined by a navigator, engineer, radio officer, and two hostesses. Of the crew, only hostess Jean Rookx survived.

Although the exact reason for the crash has never been established, experts say that the pilot's unauthorized decision to come in from the Southwest leg and the fact that he was only 2,000 feet above land when coming into the "high cone" (where it was customary to be at 4,000 feet or higher) were contributing factors. In the semi-darkness, the pilot confused the steep hills surrounding Gander for the runway. By the time he realized his mistake and pushed ahead on the throttle, it was too late to prevent a crash landing. However, their final efforts to prevent the crash placed the aircraft in a "stall" position, which softened its landing through the trees and saved numerous passengers.

The airplane struck the tops of the trees and ripped in half, the wings and propeller soon being shorn off. Twenty-six people lost their lives, of which ten bodies were able to be identified. The eighteen survivors were miraculously rescued four days later.

Captain Samuel P. Martin of the US Army Medical Corp was credited with leading a "miracle" rescue effort

of the 18 passengers who survived. It took Dr. Martin and a group of rescuers 36 harrowing hours to reach the site, where they expected to find four survivors. They arrived to find 21 survivors. Five others survived, but died the night before they arrived, and three more died in the hospital.

The rescue mission was fraught with danger. The US Army and the Coast Guard considered their options, one of them to come in via riverboat and then cut through the bush. Another possibility was to have rescue pilots land near a lake five miles away and have the survivors brought there. Both were deemed impractical. And then Martin suggested using helicopters.

"He knew that he would never be able to get those people back the way he came in," said Frank Tibbo, "because the trip would kill them. He claimed the only way to get those people out alive was to get a helicopter."

Yet there was one major issue: At the time, there were no helicopters in Newfoundland. However, there were some helicopters available in the US, yet they couldn't be flown that far and wouldn't fit into an airplane. After brainstorming for ideas, the army found two helicopters that were about to be put in storage. In a fantastic feat, engineers took them apart and put them aboard two C-54s, which is similar to a DC-4. They flew all night to Gander, unloaded them, and spent hours putting them back together again. Rescuers then flew to the crash site to save the victims, who were in critical condition.

Lieutenant August Kleisch, one of four helicopter pilots who took part in the rescue, wrote in his official report that it took four-and-a-half hours to assemble one of the helicopters. While the helicopters were rebuilt, Dr. Martin tended to survivors. "He worked almost three days complete without any sleep, and in so doing saved several of the victims," said Tibbo. "If he hadn't been there, there would be more people that would have died."

Tibbo carefully detailed the coordinated rescue effort to bring the survivors from the crash site to Gander. Not all the survivors were removed via helicopter, which was

then considered a risky and dangerous flight, with potential rotor problems.

"The helicopter landing pad was a couple of hundred feet from the crash," he wrote. "The helicopter would go to the edge of Caribou Lake; the survivors would then get into a small raft and be pulled to a waiting float plane. They would take off and fly to Gander and land on the runway." The survivors were then taken to the hospital for emergency care, while the victims were hastily buried in a mass grave. Ms. Jean Rookx, the only surviving crew member, spoke to the media about how the survivors remained alive during the harrowing four days until their rescue:

"Being a hostess, you see, has a certain responsibility; the hostess has to see that her guests are happy and comfortable. We kept our arms around each other for warmth. We had only swamp water to drink, and the dead were around us, some of them relatives of the living.

"Thinking back on it all, it amazes me. What I mean is, how those people in the plane crash acted. They were all plain people and yet they were heroes. They did not lament, they did not give up hope, not so anyone else could hear them, even if inside they had no hope. They tried to help each other. They were all ordinary people, and yet they are all great heroes. It makes me very, very proud to be their friend."

"Officials at the scene discussed the disposition of the 26 dead. Everything up to now had gone according to plan. There were no accidents, no injuries and no mishaps. The helicopter pilots themselves admitted that everything had to go like clockwork for the rescue mission, just completed, to be successful. The sentiment expressed by all was, let's not push our luck, we can't risk lives to bring out the bodies. A cemetery was established at the site and the bodies were buried there. A flyover funeral was conducted from the air with the participation of a local priest, and a Rabbi who flew in from New York and conducted the service in Hebrew."



Rav Alster with his son, Rav Eliezer.

after his grandfather, was also present, and expressed his satisfaction that he merited to be at his grandfather's gravesite, where he personally said the *Keil Molei* for his grandfather. We spoke on the *yahrtzeit*, 22 *Elul*, and he expressed his gratitude that this emotional visit took place. "My father rarely spoke about his father's tragic passing," Mr. Lindenbaum recalled. "He was sixteen years old when he lost his father, and had three younger siblings. I assume it wasn't easy for him to talk about."

After a few moments of contemplation, during which the assembled took leave of the *kedoshim* buried in the *kever achim*, it was time to leave.

The trek back to the hotel commenced much the same way, first with a downhill hike, followed by two-and-a-half bumpy hours on the ATV. Finally, the group arrived at the hotel, exhausted and covered in mud. They freshened up a bit and then held a *seudah* on Monday evening. They were joined by Dr. Peter Blackie, an elderly Gander aviation historian, who shared his knowledge about the crash and its aftermath. He gave the group a copy of the book titled "Charlie Baker George - The Story of Sabena OOCEB."

This book is a fascinating account of the crash and rescue. It was, as mentioned, the first commercial airliner crash in history, and the daring rescue by helicopter and rubber rafts that followed is something that was extensively reported on at that time as an unbelievable story of heroism and endurance.

The following morning, they took a flight to Halifax, then to Montreal, finally landing in LGA, exhausted yet exhilarated. It was a memorable trip for everyone, but especially for the *rosh yeshiva*, orphaned since childhood. There was a sense of closure, fulfilling an obligation many years overdue.

Reliving the Memories

There are so many memories and poignant facts to the story.

With *siyata diShmaya*, a young *yasom*, a child who lost his father in such a tragedy, not only grew up wholesome and healthy, but became a respected *gadol baTorah*, a *rosh yeshiva* and *rov*.

Rav Alster recalled in a powerful tribute written for the occasion, "It is said in the name of the *Chazon Ish*, that if one lived three hundred years, he would be able to look back and understand all the facets of his life as a picture

woven into a beautiful tapestry. One is not able to comprehend events as they unfold, but over time one has the ability to look back and realize the significance of many occurrences.

"My grandfather, Reb Berish Alster, left blood-soaked Poland right before World War I, which was the beginning of a chain of miracles that saved the family. Reb Berish went to Holland and later Antwerp, Belgium. When the



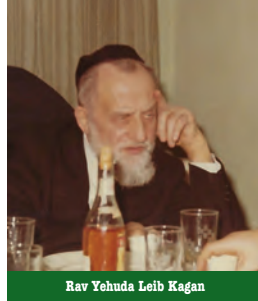
Yosef Alster at his wedding with Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, his *rosh yeshiva*, and his uncle, Rav Chaim Ahron Biron.

Nazis attacked, many decided to remain, certain the war would soon pass. They were all later deported. My parents decided to drop everything and escape, convincing their parents to join them. They crossed through France by bicycle, until they arrived in Portugal and waited for permits to enter the US or other countries.

"My father was allowed to enter the US, arriving in 1940. The rest of the family received permits to Cuba and remained there until the end of the war. My father engaged in diamond trading and prospered after the war.

"My parents (Reb Yosef and Gittel) got married in 1935, but were childless for many years, until I was born to their great joy. In *Elul*

of 1946, my father returned to Antwerp to see what and who remained after the war, and to take care of business matters. On his return trip on September 18, as the airplane was about to land in Gander, Newfoundland, it hit a mountaintop deep inside a forest. My father was *nif-*



Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan

tar and was buried there in a mass grave. It took a few days before rescuers would arrive at the crash scene to save some of the survivors.

"I grew up with only my mother, but when it came to decisions of my *chinuch* and Torah learning, my father's close *shaychus* to his *rabbeim* and *roshei yeshiva* benefited his only son. Specifically, Rav Zelig Schiffmanovitz, a *Slabodka talmid*, advised my mother to send me to Eretz Yisroel to learn and to grow. My mother accepted his advice, sending her only son overseas as a *mesivta bocher* to Eretz Yisroel, a decision that required great *mesirus nefesh* and

was unheard of at that time. I enrolled in Yeshiva Kol Torah, where I was *mazlich* to forge a *keshet* with the *gedolei Torah* there, my *rabbeim*, and the *rosh yeshiva*, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach.

"Upon my return to the U.S., I consulted with Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, my father's *rosh yeshiva* in Antwerp, about where to learn. He advised me to learn in Yeshiva Chasan Sofer under Rav Binyomin Paler, son-in-law of Matersdorfer Rov, who headed the *yeshiva*.

"Rav Kagan was a *mechutan* with the Rov, as his son, Rav Yisroel Meir Kagan (today *rosh yeshiva* of Yeshiva Toras Chaim of Denver) is the Rov's son-in-law. I attribute all my success in Torah to that advice and decision. In this manner, my father was *zocheh* to influence my *hatzlacha* in learning through his close and enduring connections to Rav Zelig, who sent me to Eretz Yisroel, and to Rav Kagan, who directed me to Rav Paler.

"Looking at the sequence of my father's life and that of my own, it seems that with my birth, he completed his life's mission on this world. His close *shaychus* with his *rabbeim* who kept a *keshet* with me ensured that my life was an extension of his own. Through this, my father's *hashpa'ah* lives on in the *doros of bnei Torah*."

Rabbi Mordechai Alster adds: "My father credits his father's *roshei yeshiva*, and especially Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, for serving as his adopted father and role model who took an interest in his spiritual growth, and directed and advised him in every step."

Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan, *rosh yeshiva* at Yeshivas RJJ, was a nephew of Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzensky. He was the *rosh yeshiva* and *av bais din* of Antwerp when Reb Yosef Alster learned in the *yeshiva*. The *yeshiva* was established by Rav Shimon Shkop, the *rov* in Antwerp. Rav Eliezer Yehuda Finkel sent a letter to Rav Amiel appealing him to hire Rav Elchonon Wasserman's son, Rav Simcha, to say a *shiur* in the *yeshiva*. However, Rav Yeruchem Levovitz, the renowned *meshgiach* in the Mir, recommended that he hire Rav Kagan as the *rosh yeshiva*. The *yeshiva* was renowned for its exceptional *bnei Torah*. (Reb Nathan Lindenbaum, who was *niftar* in the crash, was Rav Amiel's son-in-law.)

Rav Kagan, who served as the *kohein* at Rav Shimon Alster's *pidyon haben*, was later asked to head the *bais din* to give a *heter agunah* for the infant's mother.

Permission to Remarry

Rav Yehuda Leib Kagan headed the *bais din* of *rabbonim* who convened to study the evidence, and ultimately gave the two *almonos* a *heter agunah*, permission to remarry.

The complicated *heter agunah* was orchestrated by Rav Reuven Agushevits, a



Rav Reuven Agushevits





close *rebbe* of Reb Yosef, who was also one of the *roshei yeshiva* in Rav Amiel's *yeshiva* in Antwerp. Rav Agushevits, a *Slabodka talmid*, was born in Sislovitz and was a close childhood friend of Rav Aharon Kotler. He emigrated to America in 1929, and when Reb Yossi Alster came to the United States in 1940, he reestablished the connection with his *rebbe* and learned *bechavrusah* with him every night. In fact, in the introduction to his *sefer Biur Reuvein on Bava Kamma*, it is mentioned that many of the *chiddushim* originated during his *sefer* with Reb Yosef Alster.

Upon hearing of the unspeakable tragedy, which took place on 22 Elul, Rav Agushevits wasted no time booking a flight to the crash site in Gander. He originally arrived with the hope of identifying the bodies, for which he brought dental records. When that did not work, as the bodies did not remain intact, he spent a harrowing week there, interviewing survivors in the hospital to verify that they were on the plane. He also took part in a fly-over funeral, saying *tefillot* for the *neshamas* of the *niftarin*.

Since it was days before *Rosh Hashanah* and the funeral was delayed due to bad weather, he was forced to remain in remote Gander over *Rosh Hashanah*, without a *minyan* or Jewish community for hundreds of miles. This was true *mesirus nefesh*, ultimately enabling the two grieving widows to receive a measure of closure.

The following is an excerpt, translated from Yiddish, of Rav Agushevits's written report of his role at the crash site. It is a technical report, but there is no mistaking his *mesirus nefesh* and efforts to ensure *kavod hameis* in whatever way he could. Bear in mind that this was 1946, well before the era of instant communication, in a rugged area that was basically inaccessible to all but trained military personnel. Rav Agushevits was trying his best to preserve *kavod hameis* in the chaotic atmosphere following a fatal crash and one of the most daring rescue activities ever carried out.

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I arrived in Gander at half past 12 a.m. Newfoundland time September 23. A representative took me to the customs house to check my papers, and then took me to the lounge of the airline. I sat in the lobby of the lounge for about two hours, until the same representative returned and took me to one of the hotel rooms (leased by) the airline. Feeling the weight of my mission, I couldn't fall asleep.

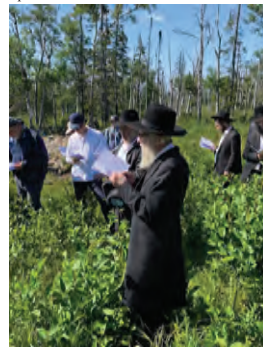
According to what they had told me in New York, they were supposed to bring the

victims to Gander Sunday night and Monday morning. (The families originally thought the victims would be removed from the crash site and given a proper burial, which was later deemed impossible.)

I should have found a hotel in which I could be near the airfield to which they would be brought, to be prepared to properly carry out my mission, and now, who knows where they took me? Who knows if I am not already too late?

I approached the manager of the hotel, Mr. Hill, who began banging on doors, trying to get answers. He telephoned here and there until he fought his way to the director of the airline, Mr. Perier, who lost two children in the crash. Now I became aware that the victims wouldn't be brought to Gander, but they would be buried there, at the site of the accident, and that practically speaking they had already begun the burial. They told me we can no longer go to the site, because the army is not prepared to endanger the lives of their pilots for the purpose of identifying or retrieving the dead. (Many of the deceased were incinerated in the explosion that broke out shortly after impact, and their bodies could not be properly identified.)

Since I am standing by, he sent me to Mr. McGrath, the one in charge of all the matters. Meanwhile, Mr. White, a representative of the company, came and asked me to officiate at the flyover funeral. (It was too dangerous for the pilots to land in the region.) I accepted the responsibility on condition that they would set a Star of David at the gravesite, just as they *lehavdil* set a cross at the site. Then I met a Jewish person, Mr. Shulman, a news photographer who came from New York. He intro-



duced me to the president of Newfoundland Broadcasting Company, Mr. Gallagher. He assured me that the Newfoundland authorities would send death certificates to the families of the victims. I learned that the airplane had split in half and those who were in the forward part (including the pilots and most of the crew) had died. Those who survived the accident, however, did not accept that as a rule.

Before nightfall, I met Mr. McGrath. I gave him the dentist report, but the next day he returned it, saying that he could accomplish nothing with it. (The bodies were not intact enough to use dental records.)

The next morning, I went with Mr. Gallagher and with Mr. Schulman, the photographer, to the hospital. I questioned passengers Mr. Kronegold and Mrs. Keyser (both Jewish survivors) and the lone stewardess who survived (Mrs. Jean Rooks). Mr. Kronegold had seen Mr. Alster and Mr. Lindenbaum on the airplane when they departed Shannon. Mrs. Keyser had been sitting near them, and she saw how a few minutes before the accident they rose from their seats. But the representatives had told them to sit in their places and buckle up.

The stewardess only said that she had seen all the passengers sitting in their seats at the time of the accident. I took down this testimony on a paper, and together with two other Jewish people, Mr. Schulman and Kronegold, signed it. The same day, Tuesday, was supposed to be the funeral, but because of the request of the Belgian minister that it be broadcast to Belgium, the funeral was pushed off to Wednesday morning. Tuesday night we had a meeting about how to organize the funeral.

Wednesday morning was cloudy and the funeral had to be delayed until 2 p.m., after which it was delayed again. By the time we returned, it was already evening, so I needed to stay in Gander over *Rosh Hashanah* until after *Shabbos*. (*Rosh Hashanah* was Thursday-Friday.) After coming back from the funeral, I met a spokesperson of the company, Mr. Alexander, who just returned from the site of the accident. He let me know that they are still missing bodies, which filled me with pain. When I later met the commander of the American division there, he told me that the State Department asked him to come help me on my mission. I asked him to work that they should search until they found enough to identify all 26 missing bodies.

Meanwhile, I was waiting to hear back from Mr. Spencer, the appointee over all that was done at the accident site. *Shabbos* morning, I came to his office. He told me that they had found ten whole bodies that they could

identify by name and that they had buried in separate graves. They also found enough limbs of the other 16 missing bodies that they were able to account for the total of 26 bodies.

He sent all of this to me later in the official report of the Newfoundland authorities. This report together with a list of those identified by name, and the document of the testimony I took at the hospital, I sent to Rabbi Shmuel Brodt, the rabbi of the Antwerp community.

It is with this evidence that the *bais din* convened and gave the *heter* for Mrs. Alster and Mrs. Lindenbaum to remarry.

Crossroads of the World

Although Reb Nathan and Reb Yosef were tragically among the fatalities, there were eighteen people - seventeen passengers and



one crew member - who miraculously survived. Their epic survival and rescue is told in the gripping volume, "*Charlie Baker George - The Story of Sabena OOZBG*," written by Frank Tibbo, an air traffic controller in Gander at the time.

In the mid-1940s, the airport in Gander, Newfoundland, one of the wonders of modern aviation, was among the busiest in the world.

Gander had especially been chosen for the construction of an airport in 1935 because it is very close to the great circle route between New York and London. On January 11, 1938, Captain Douglas Fraser made the first landing at "Newfoundland Airport," now known as Gander International Airport, or "CYQX," in a single-engine biplane.

During the Second World War, about 10,000 Canadian, British and American military personnel lived in remote Gander, a rugged region of mainly ice fishing and hunting. The area became a strategic post for the Royal Air Force Air Ferry Command, with approximately 20,000 fighters and bombers stopping at Gander en route to Europe.

After the war, the airbase became a civilian airport, and the location of the town was moved a safe distance from the runways. The town soon grew, as the airport was used as a refueling stop for transatlantic flights, which were unable to make the lengthy journey from New York across the Atlantic without stopping to refuel. Since nearly every passenger plane had a scheduled stop in Gander, it soon was dubbed "the Crossroads of the World."

Today, since most trans-Atlantic flights complete the journey without stopping, the airport in Gander is obscure and neglected, a far cry from its former busy history. Yet, when our story unfolds, Gander, with its four runways, was the largest airport in the world. It truly was a focal point for most overseas travelers.

Though sadly Reb Yosef Alster did not merit to survive, his legacy lives on through his son and generations of *lomdei* and *marbitzei Torah*. May the memory of R' Yosef Shmuel ben R' Yissochar Dov (Alster) and R' Nossan Nota ben R' Mordechai (Lindenbaum), who was survived by a beautiful family, be a *zechus* for their descendants.