slepped along as a sidekick. Finally, it was a privilege to have been Lou’s student at the Seminary College. I may not have always agreed with how Lou read the texts that we studied in class, but I came away with a profound appreciation for how he applied the inquiry method even if our conclusions differed. The world of Jewish education has grown tremendously because of Lou’s contributions.

_Edwin R. Frankel_
_Ritual Director, Congregation Agudas Achim, Bexley, Ohio_

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**Morton M. Steinberg**

*Irving Robbin, z”l (1922–1990)*

Irving Robbin served as president of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin for eighteen years, longer than any other president of any Ramah camp. He then served as president of the National Ramah Commission from 1987 to 1989. He died suddenly of a heart attack in 1990 while on a vacation in Hawaii.

As a camp president, Irv Robbin was a visionary who dreamed dreams, shared them with his board, and challenged his fellow board members to turn those dreams into reality. He oversaw a great expansion of Ramah Wisconsin, both in facilities and in enrollment. He served as a guide to Rabbi Burton Cohen during his final summers as camp director at Wisconsin, as well as to Rabbi David Soloff, during his first years as camp director.

“He was a decisive leader and extremely ethical,” recalls Rabbi Soloff. “He was deeply committed to planning. He would say, ‘You have to have a plan. Hevreh, how are we going to get this done?’ Once the vision was clear, his comments were directed to accomplishing the task. And he was always the first person to step forward with resources to implement the plan.”

Irv’s leadership garnered him the respect, admiration, and loyalty of his board; the professional leaders of the camp; and an entire generation of campers’ parents.

Irv grew up in an Orthodox family on the “old west side” of Chicago. He became a very successful businessman. Beginning in the 1950s, he built his business into one of the foremost independent jewelers in the Chicago area. But his passion was Jewish education. He was a founder and the first president of the Northwest Suburban Jewish Congregation in Morton Grove, Illinois. He later moved to Highland Park and became active at North Suburban Syna-
gogue Beth El, eventually becoming the chairman of its board of education. He also served as president of the Chicagoland Solomon Schechter Day Schools and was a founder of the first Schechter high school in the Midwest. He first became involved in Camp Ramah in the early 1960s when seeking a summer camp for his daughters to attend. He was a pillar of the Chicago Jewish community. But he was more than that.

Irv Robbin impressed people as being mild mannered yet self-assured, a caring person, meticulous in habit and dress. He possessed a reassuring quality and always displayed casual confidence about himself and his views. He spoke calmly, but with an intensity that at times he could barely contain, especially when he spoke about Camp Ramah or Jewish education or Rabbi Phillip L. Lipis, z’”l, or General George S. Patton.

Irv’s appearance, lifestyle, interests, and pursuits did not reveal his experiences in World War II, and he seldom spoke publicly about that aspect of his life. He no doubt felt he had done just what every other American in their twenties or thirties did from 1942 to 1945: they accepted their duty to serve their country, and they performed it modestly, without flourish or fanfare. But it was his experiences in that war that impacted the direction of his life and that eventually would affect the development of Camp Ramah.

Irv was only nineteen years old when the United States entered World War II. He soon enlisted in the Army. He became a member of F Company, 110th Regiment, 28th Infantry Division—part of the famous Third Army under the command of General Patton.

The 28th Infantry Division landed at Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, just a few weeks after D-Day. It entered combat against the German army on July 22, 1944. Private Irving Robbin fought the Nazis in Normandy and across northern France. He helped liberate Paris in August 1944, fought on into Belgium, and fought in the devastating Battle of the Hurtgen Forest, where one soldier recalled: “The days were so terrible that I would pray for darkness, and the nights were so bad I would pray for daylight.”

In December 1944, when victory seemed assured and the fighting was at a lull, the 28th Infantry Division was stationed in and around the small town of Wiltz, Luxembourg. But on December 16, Hitler launched the largest and most brutal counteroffensive of World War II. It became known as the Battle of the Bulge. Over 200,000 heavily armed German combat troops, supported by thousands of tanks, attacked directly into the American lines. The very center of that powerful onslaught was at Wiltz. This is how the U.S. Army’s official historian described the resistance put up by Irv’s regiment: “The 110th Infantry . . . held off four German regiments. . . . That was around two thousand [American] men versus at least ten thousand [Germans]. . . . Considering
the odds, nowhere on the first day of the German offensive was there a more remarkable achievement by the American soldier.” But despite their determination, Irv’s platoon of perhaps forty men was surrounded by German soldiers outside of the small town of Clervaux. On December 22, they were forced to surrender.

The first thing the Germans demanded of their new prisoners was to identify the Jewish soldiers, but the captured Americans, bonded by combat into an unshakable brotherhood, refused to do so. They all threw their identification tags into the deep snow. Irv’s life was spared by his comrades’ loyalty.

For the next three weeks, in the bitter cold of winter, the American captives were marched over frozen roads toward the German city of Koblenz. The Germans did not provide adequate rations to the prisoners, who were forced to scrounge what they could on their own to survive. Irv had studied German in high school and spoke Yiddish. He was able to obtain food for his unit by writing out notes for German civilians addressed to “General Patton” informing the general that the holders of the notes should not be treated harshly because they had assisted American soldiers. At Koblenz, the prisoners were packed into unheated railroad box cars and transported to Stalag 2A, a prisoner of war camp in Neubrandenburg, about fifty miles north of Berlin. Irv wrote that in the box cars “one body was pressed against the other — our rations were tea, two slices of bread and three pieces of cheese. One can easily imagine the stench. . . . When [Allied] air planes flew overhead . . . we were like dead ducks waiting to be strafed by our own planes. . . . [W]ith God’s help we finally arrived at Neubrandenburg.” And there they remained, under extraordinarily harsh conditions, for the next four months.

At Stalag 2A, Irv cared for the sick POWs. He was respected by the men, not only for his performance as a soldier, but also because of his principles. (After liberation, and while still in the prison camp, he was appointed Regimental Sergeant Major, the highest enlisted rank in that unit.) Throughout his tour of duty, Irv carried a miniature pair of tefillin. Even after he was captured, he was able to keep his tefillin with him by hiding them under his armpit.

On April 28, 1945, with the Russian Army approaching from the east, the German guards abandoned Stalag 2A. On that day, Irv began writing a diary with the following words: “The hour of our liberation is rapidly approaching.” Irv’s diary is a beautifully written story of courage, compassion, dignity, and love. It relates his day-by-day, at times hour-by-hour, experiences in leaving Stalag 2A and returning to the United States. It is a remarkable and fascinating story of the return of a combat soldier, an American hero, from World War II. A copy of that diary is in the permanent collection of the library
at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin. It was following his release from Stalag 2A that Irv visited sites revealing the horrors of the Holocaust, and it was there, on the ashes of our people, that twenty-two-year-old Irving Robbin vowed to make Jewish education a priority in his life.

Following the war, Irv married his childhood sweetheart, Janet Schwartzberg, and together they raised their daughters, Karen and Sheryl. Both of their children attended Ramah Wisconsin and met their future husbands there. Karen married Dr. David Benson, and today they reside in Highland Park, Illinois. Sheryl married Rabbi Daniel Landes, who serves as director of the Pardes Institute for Jewish Learning in Jerusalem, where they make their home. In the early 1970s, Janet was instrumental in establishing the Tikvah program at Ramah Wisconsin.

It was with Ramah that Irv’s passion for Jewish education, kindled many years earlier, found its greatest reward and where he so delighted in his achievements. He devoted his time and energies and resources to Ramah. He enlisted others to join him in his mission, others who became leaders of Ramah in their own right to carry on the vision of a great leader. Irv Robbin was a hero of his country, a hero to his people, and a hero of Camp Ramah. Zecher tzaddik livrachah.

MORTON M. STEINBERG is a senior partner at the law firm DLA Piper LLP (US). He served as president of Camp Ramah in Wisconsin for nine years and then as president of the National Ramah Commission (NRC) from 2003 to 2007. He is currently chairman of the board of trustees of the NRC. While president of the NRC, he also served on the Leadership Council for Conservative Judaism and was an elected delegate of MERCAZ USA to the 35th Zionist Congress in Jerusalem. A product of the Conservative Movement, Mr. Steinberg was a camper, counselor, and waterfront director at Camp Ramah in Wisconsin.

REUVEN ROHN AND RUTH ROHN

Aryeh Rohn, z”l (1919–2003)

A bald, stocky, yet diminutive middle-aged man grasps the pulley and zooms down the cable suspended among the trees. There goes Aryeh Rohn checking out the safety of the main attraction of yom yarid (Carnival Day) at Camp Ramah in the Poconos. The line supports his weight, and the ride is