HANDEL, Michael

PJ 6-16-9 OBITUARIES

Michael I. Handel, 58, dies; war scholar, professor, author

PORTSMOUTH — Michael I. Handel, 58, a Naval War College professor and scholar of military strategy and intelligence, died Thursday at home of cancer.

He was the husband of Jill (Schindler) Handel. Born on Nov. 1, 1942, in Haifa, in what was then British Palestine, he was the only child of Ilse Handel of Haifa and the late Otto Handel, refugees from Hitler's Austria. Most of his extended family perished in the Holocaust.

Mr. Handel claimed to have been a poor student early in life. After completing service in the Israeli army, he worked in a bank. "It was a disaster," Mr. Handel used to say. "I had dreams 30 years later that they were still correcting my mistakes."

After undergraduate studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the 1960s, he came to the United States to study for a doctorate at Harvard, which he completed in 1974. He returned to Israel for several years and became a tenured professor of international relations at Hebrew University.

Mr. Handel went on to become known as one of the main theorists of strategic surprise — how and why statesman and commanders have succeeded in using deception to defeat opponents — and as an interpreter of classic philosophers of war.

He began his career with a book on the strategies that weak states use to survive in international politics. In 1973, like other Israelis, Mr. Handel was shocked by the successful surprise attack mounted by Egypt and Syria, and turned his research toward uncovering its reasons. He produced a study analyzing the political, psychological and technical causes of Israeli misperception and self-deception in the period leading to the Arab attack.

Mr. Handel's second book, *The Diplomacy of Surprise*, compared the tactics of Hitler, Nixon and Sadat in launching bold political initiatives. His later book, *Masters of War*, compared the ideas of the Prussian Carl von Clausewitz, the ancient Chinese sage Sun Tzu, Machiavelli, and Mao Tse-tung, and was published in three editions over the years.

Among the subjects of his other major studies were Israel's political and military strategy, how wars are brought to an end, the role of intelligence in military operations, and how political leaders used intelligence and strategic deception in World War II.

In the mid-1980s, Mr. Handel started the journal Intelligence and National Security. A number of scholars tried to dissuade him, fearing that there would not be enough high-quality academic analyses in the newly developing field to sustain a journal beyond several issues. He persevered, co-edited the journal for the past 15 years, and proved his skeptics wrong by establishing it as a prestigious outlet for historical and theoretical studies on the subject.

Having become a U.S. citizen at the time he finished graduate school, Mr. Handel felt steadily drawn to the United States. About 1980, he returned to do research on a Ford Foundation fellowship, married, and became a professor at the Army War College, in Carlisle, Pa. There he instructed the elite of the Army officer corps and organized conferences that brought together military leaders, historians, political scientists and intelligence officials.

In 1990, he moved to the Naval War College, in Newport, to join its Department of Strategy and Policy, one of the principal U.S. centers of scholarship and teaching on military history. He excelled at teaching at Newport, and this year received the Civilian Meritorious Service Award.

Besides his wife and mother, he leaves two sons, Benjamin Handel and Ethan Handel, and two daughters, Yael and Sarah.

Burial was in Beth Olam Cemetery, Middletown.

A memorial service will take place at a later date in the Chapel of Hope, Naval Station Newport.