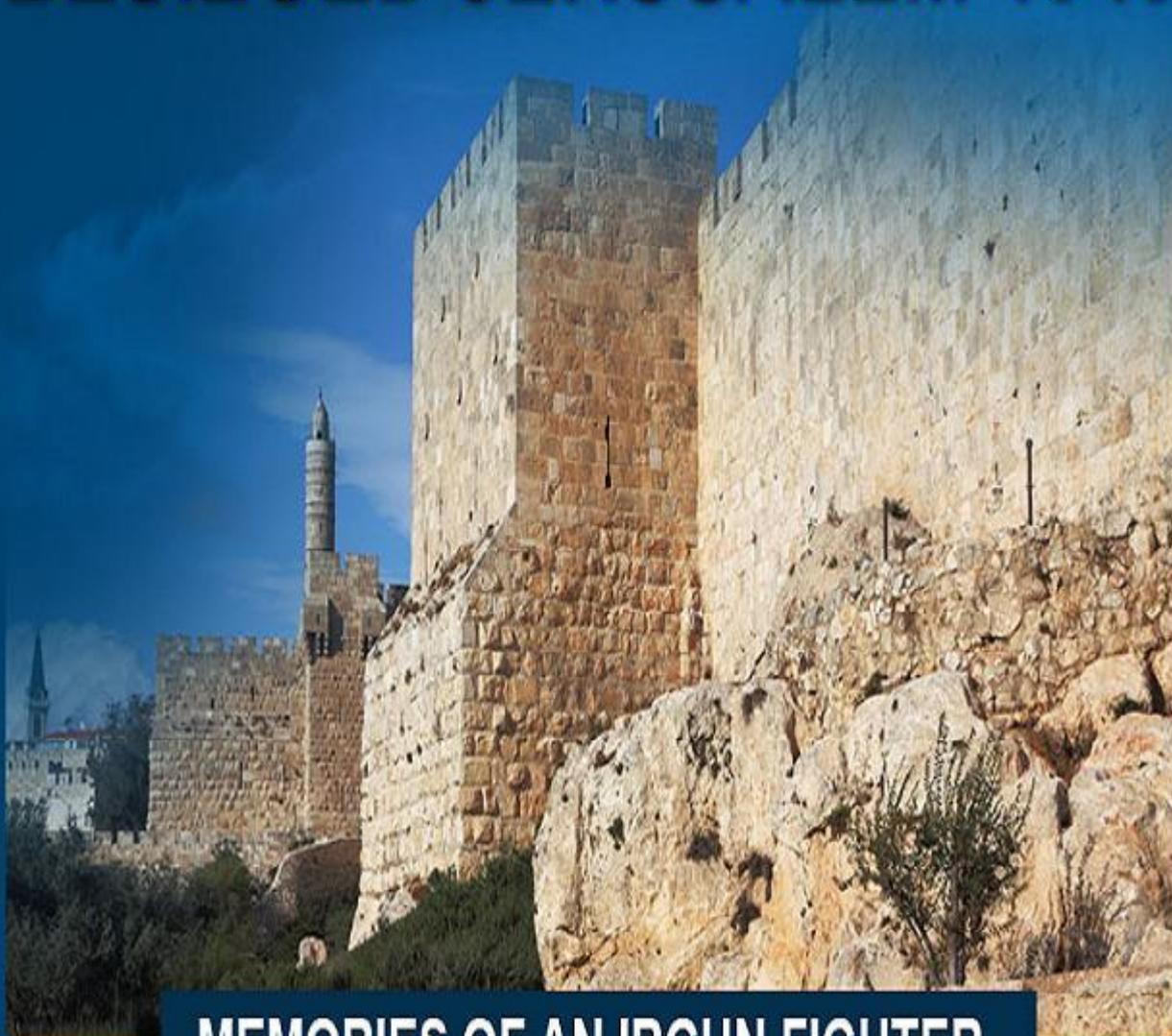


YEHUDA LAPIDOT

# BESIEGED JERUSALEM 1948



MEMORIES OF AN IRGUN FIGHTER

YEHUDA LAPIDOT

**BESIEGED JERUSALEM 1948**

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Second Addition

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## FOREWORD

Yehuda Lapidot, whose underground name was Nimrod, has written a fascinating book. He devotes a special chapter to the bitter days of the Season, when Irgun fighters were kidnapped and tortured by the Haganah and then handed over to the British police, who imprisoned or exiled them in Africa detention camps.

The author notes that it was hard for him, as for other fighters, to come to terms with the order to exercise self-restraint (Havlagah) in the face of persecution.

He asks the rhetorical question: how could our organization, which itself had once contravened a Havlagah order, exercise self-restraint at such a time? But he admits that, at the end of that difficult era, he realized that the injunction to avoid fraternal strife under any circumstances was justified. When the time came, the Jewish fighters united as a cohesive unit, the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi fighting side by side against the British rule.

Yehuda Lapidot took part in the battle for Deir Yassin. He stresses that the fighters chose to forgo the element of surprise and forewarned the villagers of impending attack by loudspeaker, so that women and children could leave unscathed.

This book deserves to be widely read, particularly by the young generation, so that they can learn of the heroic endeavors of those who fought for the rebirth of Israel.

Menahem Begin.

13 January 1992

## INTRODUCTION

This book is both a personal account of my experiences as an Irgun fighter and a discussion of the political and military campaign for Jerusalem during the 1948 War of Independence.

The first part of the book deals with the events of 1930s in Palestine, as seen through the eyes of a child and young boy who was born and grew up in the country. Arab pogroms against the Jews, and the British obstruction of immigration and of the development of the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine) impelled me to join the Irgun Zvai Leumi (known as IZL or Irgun). I describe my experiences in the Irgun, first as a new recruit and then as a fighter and commander in the Fighting Force. I describe in detail mainly those operations in which I played an active part, and hence this book should not be regarded as a comprehensive history of the Irgun.

After protracted struggle against the united forces of the Irgun, the Lehi and the Haganah, the British finally evacuated the country in 1948, leaving a scene of total chaos in their wake. They left Jerusalem, their last bastion, on May 14, 1948; the following day Arab armies invaded Palestine with the aim of liquidating the Yishuv and preventing the establishment of a Jewish state.

The second part of the book deals with the battle for Jerusalem which was attacked by the Jordanian army from the north and the Egyptian army from the south.

PART ONE

IN THE UNDERGROUND

## ROOTS

Grandfather Zvi-Moshe Lapidot was born in 1862 in the predominantly Jewish village of Liskave in the district of Grodno in White Russia. Grodno had been part of the Great Principality of Lithuania until 1569, when Lithuania and Poland were amalgamated into one great kingdom. In 1793 the whole region was conquered by the Tsar and became an integral part of the Russian Empire.

Under the Tsar conscription was compulsory (except for only children and the sick), for 25 years and conscripts were occasionally known to disappear without a trace. The Jews used every method known to them to escape service and exploited every legal loophole they could find. Some went as far as to mutilate themselves (amputating a toe would do the trick), but the most commonly employed subterfuge was to exploit the clause exempting only children.

Grandfather Zvi-Moshe had two brothers, Avraham-Gedalia and Zeev, but each had a different surname to enable him to pose as an only son. Grandfather was called Lapidot, Avraham Gedalia was a Zelikovitch and Zeev a Kaplan.

Zvi-Moshe grew up in Liskave and was given a religious education, first in a heder and then at a talmud torah. Jewish children did not attend state schools and spoke Yiddish at home. Reaching adulthood, Zvi-Moshe turned to business, having at an early age arrived at the conclusion that 'Torah should be combined with the way of the world.' After establishing himself in the timber business, Zvi-Moshe decided that he should find a wife and settle down. In his search for a suitable match, he traveled by coach to the nearby village of Kosovo to court Rivka-Rachel Goldin. Zvi-Moshe was greeted cordially by her family and conversation focused on the Torah and questions of livelihood. Seized with a strong urge to see his

intended bride, Zvi-Moshe broke with convention and asked that she be brought into the room. After due deliberation Rivka was summoned and it was love at first sight. Grandfather immediately turned to her father and asked if they could marry without delay.



**Grandfather Zvi Moshe Lapidot**

After their wedding they settled in Kosovo, where Zvi-Moshe worked as a timber merchant by day and studied 'talmud' at night. Kosovo, in Grodno District (known also as Kosov or Kosov-Polsky to distinguish it from the village of Kosov in the Carpathian mountain in Galicia) was a village of three thousand inhabitants, some two-thirds of them Jews. The Jews had settled there at the end of the sixteenth century and were

artisans and small merchants; some had small farms to augment their income. From the 1880s there were two rabbis in the village: Rabbi Menahem-Mendel Shereshevsky, who emigrated to Palestine in 1922, and Rabbi Shmarya-Yosef Karlich. The latter's son was Rabbi Avraham Yeshayahu Karlich, known as the Hazon Ish after his famous book of that name, and one of the greatest religious legislators of his generation. Hazon Ish, who was a neighbor of the Lapidot family, immigrated to Palestine in 1935 and settled in Bnei Brak. His brother, R. Yitzhak Karlich, was appointed rabbi of Kosovo after his father's death, and perished in the Holocaust with his flock.

Zvi-Moshe prospered in commerce and his wife Rivka-Rachel managed the household and raised the children, three girls and three boys, all of them Lapidots. My father, Yaakov-Shaul, the fifth child, was born in 1900. Talented but precocious, at the age of ten he felt that he had nothing left to learn at heder, and asked to be sent to a more advanced school. Since there was no yeshiva in Kosovo, he was sent to the famed yeshiva at Slonim, where his maternal uncle was a teacher. Slonim, near Kosovo, was a well-known town. Of the 15,800 inhabitants, 11,500 were Jews. The large yeshiva there had more than five hundred students in the second half of the nineteenth century. Father did not have an easy time in Slonim, but found solace in studying the Torah. He rose early and studied till late at night. During the cold winter days, when darkness cloaked the village, the yeshiva janitor would rouse the students by singing

"Awake, o sleepers, rise up to God's work.  
Sluggard, till when will you sleep, when will you rise from your slumbers?"

It was customary at that time for the more prosperous families in the village to invite the yeshiva students to eat in their homes.

This arrangement was known as 'teg' (days), since the boys would eat in a different home each day of the week. Thus, my father moved from family to family, eating potatoes day in day out. Only on Saturday, when he ate at his uncle's table, was he served meat in addition to the standard potato fare. Years later, when he had a family of his own and was living in Palestine, he abstained from eating potatoes, claiming that in Slonim he had eaten enough to last him all his life.

The Zionist renaissance in Russia left its mark on Grodno District. Young people recounted stories of the new settlement in Palestine and tried to win support for Zionism. At the beginning of the 20th century, Zionist associations were set up in Slonim and its environs, and the leaders took an active part in the early Zionist Congresses. In Kosovo and nearby villages, groups of prosperous people established associations for the joint purchase of land in Palestine. Grandmother was seized with the desire to make Aliya and desperately tried to persuade my grandfather to move to the Holy City of Jerusalem. A practical man, grandfather feared the unknown, preferring the familiarity and security of life and work in Kosovo. As grandmother grew more insistent, he nevertheless decided to assess for himself the opportunities of work there.

Grandfather journeyed to Palestine in a ship, which sailed from Odessa and anchored at Jaffa, the only port in the country at that time. After disembarking he toured Jaffa and set out for Jerusalem, where he visited the Western Wall and other holy places. Returning to Kosovo, he summed up his impressions in a word - "midbar", namely, a desert. The country was then undeveloped, even in comparison with the Jewish villages of White Russia. Grandmother was not convinced and continued her efforts to persuade him. The religious urge to live in the Holy City was so strong that it overshadowed any anticipated economic difficulties.

At that time the 'Manishevitz Association' had been set up in the town of Bialystok (near Kosovo) for the joint purchase of land in Palestine; grandfather paid his dues and became a paid-up member. When the association's emissary bought a plot of land in Kfar Uria, on the road to Jerusalem, my grandfather had no excuse to remain in Kosovo. My father was summoned from Slonim and after his bar mitzvah, preparations for the great trip began.

Emotion had triumphed over reason; grandfather packed his belongings, took his wife and five children (one who was married stayed behind) and set out on the long journey to the Promised Land. After a stormy journey, the ship reached Egypt and from there they made their way to Palestine by train. When they arrived they tried to set up home in Kfar Uria, but the local Arabs harassed them, forcing the group to disband. With their dream shattered, grandfather set out for Jerusalem. He bought an old house in Mea Shearim, renovated it and brought his family to live there. It was a large apartment house with several stores at the front. The apartments and stores were rented out, with the exception of one, which the family set up as a grocery store. The income from rent enabled the family to live in comfort and grandmother felt that her dream had now come true.

When the First World War broke out the Turks, who then ruled the country, joined the Germans against England and France. Although Palestine was far removed from the frontline, the inhabitants suffered greatly. Young men were forced to join the Turkish army and the authorities confiscated anything which had possible military use. Everything was in short supply, and as the war dragged on, the situation worsened. Jerusalem in particular, distant from the farming regions, was afflicted by famine. Finding it increasingly hard to feed the family, grandfather sent the children to various agricultural settlements on the coastal plain. My father, Yaakov-Shaul, was sent to work at the Ben Shemen Agricultural School, where he received food

and lodging in return for his labor. He soon became accustomed to farm work and found that he liked village life. In order not to compromise his principles and eat non-kosher food, he adopted a vegetarian diet. With the money he received for his work he bought food, which he would then take by horse-drawn carriage to his mother and younger brother in Jerusalem.

Communication between Jerusalem and the coastal plain was very difficult. The post was not operating, and there was no telephone. Transportation was irregular, and it was not always possible to find horses for the carriages. Before Passover, 1916, grandfather decided to visit his children on the coastal plain. First he stopped off at Ben Shemen to visit my father and from there he made his way to Rishon le-Zion to visit his older children. Passover was approaching and he had no time for a long stay. He bought a bottle of kosher wine from the Rishon cellars where his two childrens were working and headed back to Jerusalem. Since no carriage was available, he made the journey to Jerusalem on foot. The route was difficult and the heavy load slowed him down. With Jerusalem still a long way off at nightfall, grandfather spent the night in the monastery in the Arab village of Abu Ghosh, where he slept soundly beside his large bottle of Passover wine.

As the War continued, the situation in Jerusalem deteriorated. There was famine and disease in the city. Grandmother, who ate less in order to feed her family, became weaker, contracted dysentery and died on Rosh Hashanah. She was buried on the Mount of Olives, overlooking the Temple Mount. Grandmother's death was a heavy blow to the family: her five children in Palestine were still unmarried, and grandfather too, despite his forceful character, had been very dependent on her.

When the British conquered the country and the War ended, life gradually returned to normal. Those Jews banished from the country by the Turks began to return home. The Balfour Declaration, marking the decision to establish a Jewish National

Home in Palestine, instilled hope in the hearts of the Yishuv and the British were warmly welcomed. The 1920s were the beginning of a period of immigration and prosperity, and grandfather decided that the time had come to try his luck in the building industry.

The German Schneller orphanage was located not far from Mea Shearim. Built on a large lot, surrounded by a wall, the orphanage also owned many plots of land in the area between Schneller and Mea Shearim. This area was rocky and unsuitable for agricultural cultivation. The Jews of Mea Shearim, not on neighborly terms with the Christian inhabitants of the area, generally kept well away. Grandfather, however, made friends with the Director of the orphanage, a German Christian named Bauer, and he agreed to sell grandfather a plot of land outside the orphanage. Grandfather prepared the ground and in 1923 built a two-story house. It was the first Jewish house built in this area outside Mea Shearim. When construction was completed, grandfather tried to rent out the apartments, but no one dared live in such close proximity to the Schneller camp, for fear of the Arab bandits who frequented the area. Having no choice, grandfather moved his own family into the new building, and thus Zvi-Moshe Lapidot's family took up residence in an isolated house between Mea Shearim and Schneller.

Grandfather was on friendly terms with the residents of Schneller and his family lived there unharmed. Before long, several other Jewish families agreed to rent apartments in the building. Before the year was up, the whole building had been bought. Immediately after completing the deal, grandfather bought the adjacent plot and started on a second building. A year later there were twin buildings in the empty area between Mea Shearim and Schneller. As soon as the second building was completed, the Lapidot family moved in. Gradually more Jews started building in the area and when it was sufficiently developed, the inhabitants assembled and proclaimed the

establishment of a new quarter. Grandfather, one of the chief spokesmen, proposed calling it 'Geula' (redemption), since he had redeemed the land from the Germans. His proposal was accepted, and the quarter has borne the name ever since.



### The first building on 24 Malchei Israel Street

After the First World War my father returned to Jerusalem and was sent to study at Rabbi Kook's yeshiva, where he was an outstanding student. Not drawn to the rabbinate, he left the yeshiva after several years and joined his father and younger brother Mordechai in the construction business.

Grandfather continued to develop land in isolated areas. From Geula he moved on to Rehavia, where he built a house at 19 Ibn Ezra Street, and then at 21 Keren Kayemet Street (opposite the current Hebrew Gymnasium), where the internal staircase was a groundbreaking innovation in building design. After completing the houses in Rehavia, grandfather turned his attention to Kiryat Shmuel, then a new and undeveloped

neighborhood. There he and his younger son built two more houses (one at 9 Metudella Street; the other at 16). At this stage my father was beginning to feel that Jerusalem was too small for him and decided to move to Tel Aviv.

In the same year that Zvi-Moshe Lapidot started building in Jerusalem the Hirshberg family immigrated to Palestine from the town of Libau (Liepaja) in Latvia. The head of the family, Zvi-Hirsh, was born into a rabbinical family, which had been living in Libau for generations. His father, Shmuel, bestowed on his son a large house to enable him to dedicate his life to studying the Torah. When he reached maturity, Zvi-Hirsh married Pessia Blumenthal, who came from a Russia. She managed the household, looked after the tenants and ran the grocery store in the front of the building while her husband devoted his time and energy to Torah study. They had three daughters and three sons. My mother, Golda, was born in 1903.

During the First World War Latvia was caught between Germany and Russia. At times Libau was under German rule and at other times under the Russians. Three official languages were in use: Latvian, German and Russian. From being a wealthy family before the War, the Hirshbergs became impoverished: the tenants lagged behind with rent (some stopped paying altogether), and customers of the grocery store bought on credit. My mother was forced to leave school to help my grandmother run the household and look after her younger brothers and sisters.

After the War the economic situation in Latvia worsened and, to make matters worse, the government introduced compulsory conscription. To prevent the conscription of her eldest son, Avraham-Abba, my grandmother sent him away. The main destination of European Jews at that time was the United States of America, but she feared her son would learn bad habits there, and sent him to Palestine instead. There he engaged in a variety of occupations, from road building to construction,

always hoping to set up in business. With the arrival of his family, he began importing medicines from abroad. He eventually took his younger brother Yaakov into partnership, and the business he set up is known to this day as “Hirshberg Brothers”.

The Hirshberg family lived in Gruzenburg Street, Tel Aviv, and their neighbors were a young couple, Shifra and David Komarovsky, who were friends of the Lapidot family from Jerusalem. During the Passover festival, shortly after their arrival in Palestine, my mother set out with her younger sister, Hanna, and older brother, Avraham, on an organised trip to Hebron and Jerusalem, guided by Zeev Vilnai. The Komarovskys also took part and suggested paying a visit to the Lapidot family. This was the first meeting between my father and the Hirshberg girls. He later related that he was attracted to the younger daughter, Hanna, but in accordance with the custom of the time, began to court the older sister. In 1925 Yaakov-Shaul Lapidot married Golda Hirshberg. After their wedding, the young couple moved to the second house built by grandfather Lapidot in the Geula quarter.

My mother knew nobody in Jerusalem, and it was not easy for her to adapt to her new situation. But the communal atmosphere in the Lapidot household eased her integration. Two years later, when about to give birth, she traveled to Tel Aviv to be near her mother. Thus my older sister, Rivka-Rachel, was born in Tel Aviv although she was a true Jerusalemite. A year later the story was repeated, and I was born in Tel Aviv. The story goes that I did not stop crying until I was taken to Jerusalem. The next in line was my brother Aryeh, to whom fate was kinder - he was born in Jerusalem.

We lived in a two-room apartment next to the Sukenik family. The father, Dr. Eliezer Sukenik, who had come to Palestine from Bialystok, was an archaeologist (in 1947, as Professor of Archaeology at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, he came

into possession of part of the Qumran scrolls and was the first to realize their value and to begin to decipher them). The mother, Hassia, ran a kindergarten in the Zikhron Moshe neighborhood. They had three mischievous little boys: the oldest, Yigael Yadin, later Chief of Staff of the Israel Defence Forces, followed in his father's footsteps and became a world-famous archaeologist; the second, Yossi Yadin, became a renowned actor, and the youngest, Matti, was a pilot killed in the War of Independence.

## TEL AVIV

Although I spent my early childhood in Jerusalem, my family moved to Tel Aviv when I was just five. Our first apartment in Tel Aviv was on Rothschild Boulevard at the corner of Sheinkin Street. The building had recently been completed, and was considered modern for the time. It was a four-room apartment: two rooms were occupied by my mother's parent, and we lived in the other two. One room was allotted to the four children (my sister Hanna was born in Tel Aviv); the other was both a dining room and living room, and at night doubled up as my parents' bedroom. Overnight guests slept in my parents' room in winter and in summer on the large balcony.

We the children didn't have a great relationship with our grandparents. For a start there was the language barrier. Grandmother was incapable of learning Hebrew, and spoke only Yiddish til the day she died. Even the Arab who came to sell us eggs learnt to communicate with her in Yiddish. Grandfather, an ascetic who devoted his life to studying the Torah, refused to use Hebrew other than in prayer. He was a remote and austere character and I wonder if we would have been able to communicate much with him even had he spoken Hebrew.

Rothschild Boulevard was not paved in the thirties and travel was by horse-drawn carriage (droshke). The carriage station was opposite our home and the Arab drivers would take water from our courtyard to give to their horses. We thought we might be given preferential treatment because of this, but we were lashed just like the other children when we hung onto the back of the carriages for a ride.

At six I started the religious Bilu School, which was initially housed in a wooden hut in Bilu Street, and later moved to a permanent home in an ornate building facing Rothschild Boulevard. We recited the morning prayers together, studied a great deal of Torah and Talmud and were severely punished for

any misdemeanors. We kept the same class teacher from first grade to graduation. I remember one incident when our teacher, Shimon Monson, slapped a child who was creating a disturbance in the courtyard during recess. The pupil was hurt, both physically and emotionally, and ran home at once. An hour later, he returned with his older brother who burst into the classroom during a lesson and asked Monson to come out into the courtyard to clear the matter up. Monson refused and tried to push him out. A vociferous argument ensued, in the course of which the boy hit Monson in front of the whole class. We were stunned and feared he would start on us after he was done with our teacher. Before this could happen, the principal and several teachers rushed in and threw him out. After this incident all corporal punishment temporarily ceased.

On Saturdays we used to pray in the school synagogue. Mishori, the principal, was very strict about order and discipline and did not allow us to converse during prayers. A professional cantor, accompanied by the school choir, conducted the service. As a member of the choir, I took part in the prayer service from beginning to end, but sometimes a group of us would slip away before the end of the prayers. One Saturday four of us left the synagogue to play ball in the courtyard. We did not notice Mishori on the balcony and were caught red-handed. The following morning we were summoned to his office and informed that we would not be allowed to return to school unless we brought in our parents. Since we did not dare tell our parents what we had done, we continued to leave home each morning as if on our way to school, but would go to the Yarkon River and sail boats until school was over. After four days, the principal sent letters to our parents inviting them to school to discuss the fate of their sons. When my father asked me the meaning of the letter, I told him the whole story. He asked me if anything else had happened, since it did not seem feasible to him that pupils could be expelled from school for such a minor

offence. The following morning we went to school together. My father went into the principal's office whilst I waited impatiently in the corridor. The principal asked my father to punish me, but my father replied that he could see nothing wrong with my conduct; on the contrary, he felt the principal should be admonished for suspending pupils for no good reason. The outcome of the meeting was that I was reinstated and felt proud that my father had come out in support of me.

## INITIAL ENCOUNTER WITH THE IRGUN

In April 1936, an inflamed Arab mob attacked Jewish bystanders in Jaffa. Nine Jews were murdered and more than fifty were injured. The following day Arabs attacked the Jewish neighborhoods adjacent to Jaffa, murdering six more Jews and injuring dozens. Thousands fled to the center of Tel Aviv, but there was insufficient housing to accommodate everyone and makeshift tents had to be erected in a little park at the end of Sheinkin Street. Witnessing the scene as a boy of eight had a profound effect on me. I could not imagine what the refugees had done to make the Arabs kill them indiscriminately. But what most upset me was the fact that the Jews had not succeeded in defending themselves or retaliating. As children we always reacted when attacked; it seemed inconceivable that adults would not do the same. The following day all the neighborhood children grouped together and drove away the Arab shepherds who grazed their sheep in the empty field beside the government office building at the end of Sheinkin Street. Our excuse was that if Jews were driven out of Jaffa, we would not allow Arabs to graze their flocks in Tel Aviv.

The bloody incidents continued for many months, and at home there was continuous discussion of the attacks on Jewish settlements throughout the country. The Arab attacks, known as the 'Arab Revolt', were directed against Zionist achievements in Palestine. The Arabs demanded a halt to immigration and a ban on the establishment of new settlements. The Yishuv began to organize to defend itself against Arab onslaughts, and inhabitants of border areas were exhorted to volunteer for guard duty. In addition to the volunteers who operated within the framework of the Haganah, the authorities set up a Special Police unit, a kind of cross between army and police.

Kiryat Sefer Street in Tel Aviv was a border area where residents set up a look out post to deter attackers. We children

liked to visit the guards at their roof top post, and in return for the sandwiches and coffee we brought them, we were allowed to operate the searchlight. One evening fire was opened on the neighborhood, and we were asked to smash the street lights so the Arabs would not know where to aim their attack. We fulfilled our task with great relish and zeal.

In those days, the Jewish Agency policy was to display restraint in the face of Arab attack and to act only in self-defense. Attacks on Arab villages were not permitted and initiative lay solely with the Arabs. The Irgun Zvai Leumi, which had seceded from the Haganah in 1931, objected to this policy, arguing that acts of determent were a necessary tactic of war.

One day a car was attacked in the Galilee while en route to Safed. Four Jews were shot dead, including a child and two women. The murder aroused a storm of protest among members of Betar's Labor Brigade located at Rosh Pinna.<sup>1</sup> Three members of the Brigade, Avraham Shein, Shalom Jurabin and Shlomo Ben-Yosef (Tabachnik) decided to retaliate. They made their way to the road linking Safed to Rosh Pinna and fired on an Arab bus as it passed by. None of the passengers were hurt. They immediately left the spot and ran to hide in a nearby building. Spotted as they ran, all three were arrested and later tried by a military tribunal in Haifa. They were charged with unlawful possession of weapons and with "intent to cause death or injury to many people", both of which carried the death sentence. Betar leaders tried to save the three and hired Philip Joseph and Aharon Hoter-Yishai as their defense counsel. They suggested that Jurabin plead mental instability and that documents be produced confirming Shein was under eighteen. The three rejected this defense strategy, and

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<sup>1</sup> Betar was a youth organisation affiliated with the Nationalist movement. Members of Betar arriving in the country were required to spend two years in a 'Labor Brigade', where they worked during the day and trained in the evening for future service in the Irgun.

announced that they intended to turn the trial into a political platform, at which they would openly proclaim their views. In the end, the court did indeed pronounce Jurabin unstable and he was sent to a lunatic asylum. Shein and Ben-Yosef were sentenced "to be hanged by the neck". They accepted their sentence with extraordinary equanimity and started singing the anthem 'Hatikva'. The military commander confirmed Ben-Yosef's sentence, but later commuted Shein's sentence to life imprisonment on account of his youth.

When Ben-Yosef's sentence became known, political leaders in Palestine and abroad tried to persuade the British government to commute it to life imprisonment, but to no avail. On June 29, 1938, Shlomo Ben-Yosef prepared for his final hour. He took off the crimson garments of the condemned man, put on shorts and a shirt, laced his high work boots and awaited the arrival of the guards. He went to the gallows with his head held high, singing the Betar anthem. On the wall of his cell, he had written in his halting Hebrew:

“What is a homeland? It is something worth living for, fighting for and dying for too. I was a servant of Betar to the day of my death”. He also wrote a line from Jabotinsky's poem “to die or to conquer the Mountain”.

I was a boy of ten and profoundly shocked by Ben-Yosef's execution. I was particularly enraged by the charge of unlawful possession of arms, for which punishment was death by hanging. Did the government not know that the Arabs had formed fighting units in order to murder Jews? Was it not clear that the Jews bore arms only in order to defend themselves?

The following day I happened to be in Allenby Street in Tel Aviv and found myself in the midst of a mass demonstration protesting the execution of Ben-Yosef. I was standing on the sidelines watching the events, when suddenly policemen

equipped with truncheons attacked the demonstrators, hitting out in all directions. Wounded people, blood streaming from their heads, lay in the road without medical attention. I fled for my life and was haunted by the scene for many years to come.



Shlomo Ben-Yosef

### The White Paper

On 17 May 1939, another blow was inflicted on the Yishuv, when the British Government published the MacDonald (named after the British Colonial Secretary) White Paper. Amongst other things it stipulated that:

1. The objective of His Majesty's Government is the establishment within ten years of an independent Palestinian state in such treaty relations with the United Kingdom as will provide satisfactorily for the commercial and strategic requirements of both countries in the future.
2. Jewish immigration during the next five years will be at a rate which, if economic absorptive capacity permits, will bring the Jewish population up to approximately one third of the total population of the country.

3. The admission, as from the beginning of this year, of some 75,000 immigrants over the next five years.
4. After the period of five years no further Jewish immigration will be permitted unless the Arabs of Palestine are prepared to acquiesce in it.

As if the suspension of immigration were not enough, the document limited purchase of land by Jews to certain specified areas. Moreover, since the two sides had not agreed to this plan or to any other plan, the British Government announced it would implement it at its own discretion.

The White Paper, intended to destroy Zionist gains in Palestine, was greeted with strong criticism not only by Jews, but also by leaders in Britain and Europe. The Mandate Committee of the League of Nations declared unequivocally that the White Paper was a divergence from the aims of the Mandate, namely the establishment of a national home for the Jews in Palestine. The matter was transferred to the League of Nations Council, but was never discussed because the Second World War broke out at the same time.

In Palestine a mass demonstration was held against the White Paper. I watched from the sidelines and listened to the speeches. I did not understand a great deal that was said, but suddenly there was a commotion, and hundreds of policemen, some mounted, burst onto the demonstrators. The crowd was violently dispersed the mounted police hitting out brutally and I ran home as fast as I could.

Whereas in the Ben-Yosef affair, the British had acted as mediators between Jews and Arabs, in the case of the White Paper, Government action was clearly anti-Jewish. This was a Jewish-British dispute and not a dispute between Jews and Arabs.

The Irgun was quick to respond and the weapons, which had been used against the Arabs, were now directed against the

British. The Mandate Government's immigration offices were set alight, and at midnight mines were detonated to destroy telephone booths. I did not hear the explosion, but the following day we rummaged among the rubble to find the coins, which had been used to operate the telephones.

One morning I heard several shots followed by a commotion in the courtyard. My father, who used to leave early for work, remained at home that day. It turned out that several young men had fired on a bus taking Arab workers to the nearby Government Surveyors Office, and had fled through our courtyard. Shortly afterwards, policemen appeared in the courtyard with tracker dogs. I did not understand why my parents were so nervous or why my father had stayed at home, since he clearly had nothing to do with the affair. Only many years later did my father tell me that he had a pistol hidden at home and that the Mandate Government had issued emergency regulations according to which possession of arms was punishable by death. My father had feared that the British might search our home, had waited until the uproar had died down and had thrown the pistol into a cesspit.

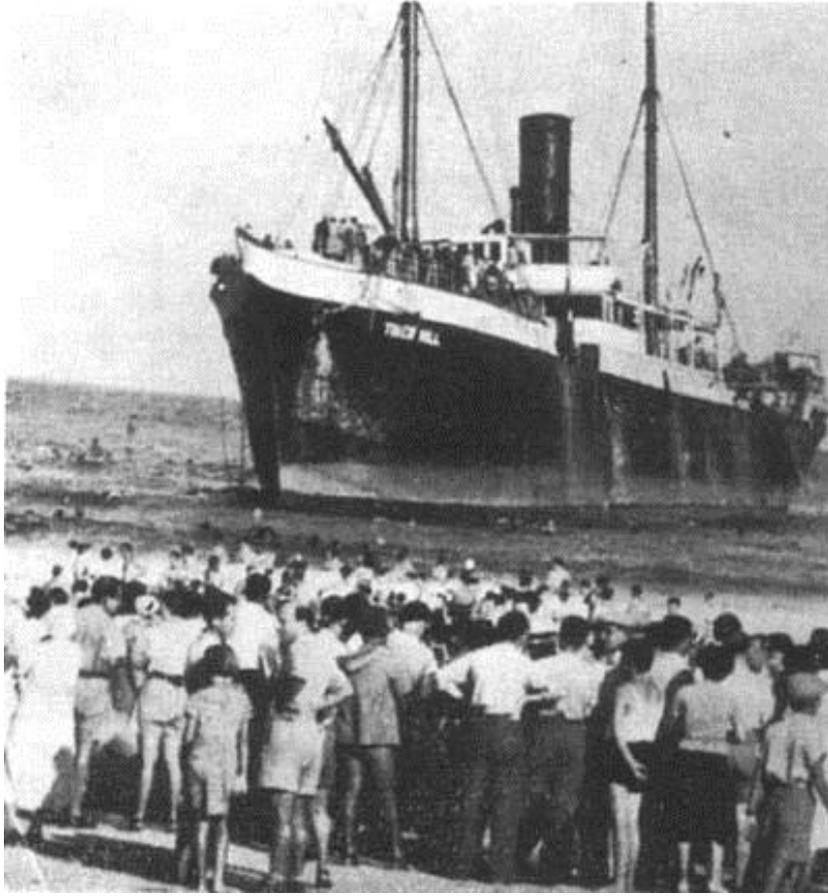
### The illegal emigration

On Tel Aviv beach in the summer of 1939, we were greeted by the unusual sight of a ship, some 100 meters from the shore, which had hit a sand shoal and was listing on its side. The 'Parita' had brought 850 immigrants to Palestine (mostly Betar members from Poland and Rumania), who had disembarked and were now scattered throughout Tel Aviv. We swam out to the ship and clambered on deck with the help of ropes. It was a thrilling experience for me to see a ship from close up and even to go on board and explore it. I paced the deck and could not understand how so many people had been crammed into so small a space for so long.



### The "Parita" on Tel-Aviv Beach

On September 1, 1939, about a week after the arrival of the 'Parita', a second ship anchored alongside it. Aboard the 'Tiger Hill' were more than 700 immigrants, but only some 200 managed to reach shore. The rest were discovered by the authorities, caught by the police and sent to a detention camp at Sarafend. The two ships were anchored there for some time. To me they symbolized the struggle against the British decrees banning immigration to Palestine.



The "Tiger Hill" on the Tel-Aviv" Beach

### THE PATRIA AFFAIR

On October 1, 1940, three vessels sailed from the Rumanian port of Tulcia - the Atlantic, the Milos and the Pacific, carrying some 3,500 immigrants from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia. At the beginning of November, the Pacific and the Milos reached Haifa, and their 1,800 passengers were transferred by the British to the 12,000-ton Patria. On November 20, the Atlantic arrived and 100 of its passengers were also transferred to the Patria. The British Government had decided to take drastic steps in order to put an end to the illegal immigration, and announced the following day that the immigrants were to be deported to Mauritius, and that their fate would be decided when the war ended.

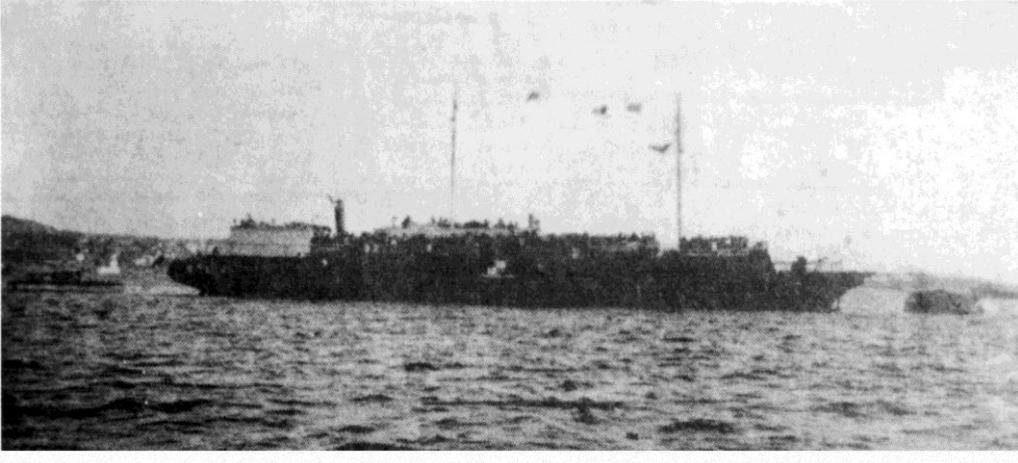
The Haganah leaders decided to sabotage the Patria in order to prevent it from leaving port. A mine was prepared at Haifa,

concealed in a cloth bag and smuggled aboard the ship, where it was handed over to one of the Haganah liaison officers. On November 25, 1940, at about 9 a.m. the mine was detonated. The intention was to blast a small hole in the vessel's side so that that it would slowly take in water allowing time to evacuate all those on board. However, the mine blasted a large hole and water flooded into the hold. Within 15 minutes the ship began to list with only a small portion remaining above water. Some 250 people went down with the ship. This was the largest number of victims of any single operation conducted by an organization since the beginning of British rule in Palestine.

The Patria survivors were eventually permitted to remain in Eretz Israel, but 1,584 of the Atlantic's passengers were deported to Mauritius, and returned to Eretz Israel only five years later, on August 20, 1945.

### THE "STRUMA"

On December 12, 1941, the Struma sailed from Constanza in Rumania with 769 immigrants aboard. The vessel, commissioned by the New Zionist Organization and the Irgun, was the last to leave Europe in wartime. The objective was to anchor in Turkey, and from there to await certificates for Palestine. When the ship reached its destination, the Turkish authorities prevented the disembarkation of the passengers for fear that the British would not give them certificates and Turkey would be forced to give them refuge. Despite the despairing appeals of the captain that the ship was unable to continue on its way, the Turkish authorities sent the ship back to the Black Sea on February 13, 1942. On the following day a mighty explosion was heard and the ship went down. Only one of its passengers survived and eventually reached Eretz Israel.



The "Struma"

## THE IRGUN GETS A NEW RECRUIT

The Second World War broke out on September 1, 1939. Germany conquered Poland, Holland, Belgium and Denmark by the 'Blitzkrieg' method. The British and French armies were surrounded and were pushed into the Dunkirk enclave in France, whence they were evacuated to England in small vessels and shipping boats. All their heavy weapons were abandoned and seized by the Germans.

In June 1940, with German victory imminent, Italy declared war on Britain and France. Shortly afterwards, France surrendered, and Britain remained alone in the struggle against Germany and Italy.

The proximity of the Italians to Palestine enabled them to dispatch aircraft to bomb strategic targets. A month after Italy entered the war, Haifa was bombed, with the aim of putting the refineries and port out of action. Dozens of people were killed in the raid and many others were injured. Strict blackout was imposed on all towns and settlements, and civil defense measures were adopted against the air raids.

These measures proved useless, however, when Tel Aviv was bombed in full daylight. I was playing with friends near home when we suddenly heard loud explosions. Before we could grasp what was happening, the Italian planes were on their way back to base. The entire bombardment had lasted only a few seconds, catching us unaware and leaving us no time to get to the shelter in the center of the neighborhood. From conversations around us, we understood that many people had been injured. I immediately ran home to report that I was safe and then went to see what had happened. The Nordiya quarter (where the Dizengoff Center now stands) had been heavily hit; the huts were in ruins, and among the debris lay the dead and injured. Here and there a fire had broken out. Damaged cars and wagons blocked the road itself. In the middle of the road lay

a dead horse, hit while still harnessed to a wagon. I gazed at the horror around me. Of what strategic importance could this residential area have been?

A mass funeral was held for the 107 men and women who had died in the bombardment. The funeral procession left from the Balfour school and I still recall the coffins lying in rows on the trucks en route to the Nahlat Yitzhak cemetery. The lesson learned from this terrible raid was that our early-warning systems had to be improved to enable us to take shelter in good time. However, many Tel Avivians decided on a different solution and left the city for a safer place. Among them were my parents who, after much family consultation, decided to move to Ramat Gan, a quiet suburb of Tel Aviv, which was of no interest to enemy aircraft. My father bought a medium-sized plot of land on Salameh Street (now Ben-Gurion Street), between Ramat Gan and Ramat-Yitzhak, and reverted for a brief period to his previous occupation of building contractor. He built a small four-roomed house with a large cellar, which would serve as a shelter if necessary.

I was thirteen when we moved to Ramat Gan, and spent my last year of grade school (eighth grade) in the Ohel-Shem High School in Ramat Gan. It was a school with twelve grades, where boys and girls studied together – a great innovation for me. The standard of teaching in the humanities was much higher than in the Bilu school in Tel Aviv and the transition was not easy. Ohel-Shem was a private school (owned by the Koller family) and the atmosphere was liberal, but orderly and disciplined.

On arriving in Ramat Gan, I made friends with a classmate, Yosef Kinderlerer-Yaldor. Yosef had been born in Poland and in 1936 his family immigrated to Palestine. They lived in a hut near the Rama cinema. His father worked in the Elite chocolate factory and his mother ran the household and raised chickens and pigeons in the courtyard to supplement the family income. It was a warm and welcoming home. When we graduated from

the eighth grade, Yosef moved to the Montefiore Reali School in Tel Aviv and I continued my studies at Ohel-Shem, but we remained firm friends.

The year 1943 was a turning point in the course of the Second World War. The Italians and Germans were driven out of North Africa, and the British army, together with the Americans who had joined the war effort in December 1941, invaded Italy. On the Russian front the Germans were defeated at Stalingrad, and the Russian forces launched a wide-ranging offensive. The front moved further away from Palestine, and the threat of bombing was averted. On the other hand, catastrophic news was reaching us from Nazi Europe. Hitler's extermination machine was becoming increasingly streamlined, and those Jews who had succeeded in escaping the death-camps had nowhere to go, since the British had stopped all immigration to Palestine. The Yishuv faced a cruel choice: on the one hand, the desire to help the Allies in their war effort against the Germans; on the other hand Britain's treachery and indifference to the systematic extermination of the Jews made collaboration a distinctly unattractive prospect. Ben-Gurion summed up the situation: "We must help the British in their war effort as if there were no White Paper, and fight the White Paper as if there were no war," but this was clearly impossible since the two were irreconcilable.

In summer 1943, now aged fifteen, I felt that I could no longer remain indifferent to everything happening around me. My closest friends felt the same and together we pondered the contribution we could make. The idea of volunteering for service in the British army was immediately dismissed because of our youth, but there remained the possibility of joining one of the underground movements; the big question was which one.

As will be recalled, the Haganah had set itself the aim of defending the lives and property of the Yishuv, and in the 1930s, at a time when the Arabs were rioting against the Jews, it had adopted a policy of self-restraint (Havlagah). The Irgun

was opposed to this policy and launched a series of deterrent attacks on Arab targets.

After publication of the White Paper, the Irgun had launched a second front against the British. The command had decided that illegal immigration activities should continue concomitantly with attacks on British Mandate targets, in order to express the strong objection of the Jews to the ban on immigration and on the limitations imposed on their purchase of land in Palestine. When war broke out, however, the Irgun declared a cease-fire. Its leaders concluded that the Nazis were the main enemy of the Jewish people and that it was essential to collaborate with the British in the war against Germany.

In late 1943, word of the liquidation of European Jewry had already reached the Yishuv, which was powerless to rescue the survivors. The British not only failed to help the survivors, but actually prevented the rescue of those who had succeeded in fleeing the Holocaust. The reaction of the Irgun was a renewal of the struggle against the British rulers of Palestine.

In this period, as noted above, my friends and I were trying to arrive at a decision as to which underground organisation to join. I was approached by Gavriel Trivas, a well-known figure in Ramat Gan, who proposed that I join the Haganah. The Haganah was then concentrating on training the younger generation to defend the Yishuv in the event of an Arab attack. Trivas invited me to a Saturday meeting in an orange-grove, where adolescents and adults were practicing hand-to-hand combat with sticks. The passivity of Haganah policy did not, however, appeal to me and training with sticks seemed absurd. I felt it was dangerous to reconcile ourselves to the British presence and was convinced that the only way to implement Zionism was to drive the British out.

I reported my impressions to my close friends, including Yosef Kinderlerer-Yaldor and David Cohen, and we agreed that the Haganah was not the place for us. Our decision was reported to

Akiva Cohen (David's older brother), who was a member of the Irgun, and several days later he contacted me to explain the Irgun's ideology. Akiva said that the way to solve the Jewish question was to establish a Jewish state in Palestine, and in order to achieve that it was essential to get rid of the Mandate rule. Since the British were not ready to leave of their own free will, we had to fight them and force them to leave. Akiva swore me to secrecy and I had no idea whether he had also contacted my friends. After several more conversations, Akiva invited me to appear before the Irgun's selection committee. The meeting was held in the cigarette factory shelter at the end of Salameh Street, which was set apart from the residential buildings of Ramat Gan and Bnei Brak. Entering the shelter, I was dazzled by the beam of a flashlight and was asked by the person holding the flashlight if I knew why I was there. I replied in the affirmative and explained what I knew about the Irgun and its methods. We talked about the means to be used to fight the Mandate authorities, and the rejection of the individual terror policy advocated by the Lehi. I was told of the dangers entailed in underground activity, including the possibility of arrest, injury and even death. Finally, I was asked if I would be ready to carry out any order I received, unquestioningly. I replied that I understood the importance of discipline, but that I did not think it should be blind. I was, of course, ready to follow orders, but not without question. This sparked off a debate, and it was explained to me that failure to carry out an order would undermine the structure of the underground movement. I replied that I felt I had to understand the order and accept it otherwise I could not carry it out. We parted, agreeing to disagree, and I was asked to think about all the things I had heard so as to be ready for the next meeting. Since I was cautioned not to tell anyone about what I had seen and heard, I could not discuss the issues which had been raised with my friend Yosef. The question of blind obedience troubled me deeply, since I could

not envisage carrying out an order, which seemed wrong. Interestingly, I was not troubled by the thought of the many hazards entailed in underground activity – perhaps because they did not seem real to me or perhaps because I deluded myself that nothing could happen to me on account of my youth.

Shortly afterwards, Akiva contacted me again, and after a long conversation lasting well into the night, I was summoned to the committee. This time the conversation was more relaxed and the issue was whether there could be circumstances in which it was not essential to follow orders. After a long discussion we arrived at an understanding, and after I had declared myself ready to join the Irgun, I was told that I should wait to be contacted. Later I discovered that I had been given especially considerate treatment, since all the other candidates were brought before the committee blindfolded so that they would be unable to identify the place.

I kept my secret and told nobody what had happened. The eagerly anticipated contact was made and I was summoned at a pre-determined date to the same hut at the cigarette factory at the end of Salameh Street. It was a dark night, but still I glanced behind me to make sure nobody was following me. The shelter itself was pitch black, and when the commander lit candles I was amazed to discover old friends there. Among them were Yosef Kinderlerer, David Cohen, Shmuel Averbuch, Baruch Toprover, and Amos Goldblat. Tension was high, and the commander, who was introduced to us by his underground name alone, explained the rules of conspiracy. Each of us was given a code name, and as the new names were distributed, the tension was dispelled by a burst of laughter. I took great pride in the name given to me: 'Avshalom', and identified with it completely.

At that time, I had just read about the Nili group organised in Palestine during the First World War under the leadership of Aaron Aaronson to transmit important information to British

Intelligence on Turkish army movements. I had been particularly impressed by Avshalom Feinberg, a man with great leadership powers and the moving spirit behind the organisation. Contact with the British was maintained through a ship anchored off the Atlit coast which, after receiving a pre-agreed signal would send a small boat to shore to rendezvous with the Nili members. When contact with the British ship was severed, Avshalom decided to make his way to Egypt through the Sinai Desert to renew the contact. He and his friend Yosef Lishansky set off, but after a short time Lishansky returned wounded, explaining that when they had reached the British frontline, they had been attacked by Bedouin and that Avshalom had been killed. Lishansky was handed over to the Turks by members of HaShomer (who were opposed to Nili's activities) and was hanged in Damascus for espionage. For many years Avshalom's death remained an enigma. People did not believe Lishansky's story and suspected that he had been involved in the death. In 1967, with the help of a local Bedouin, Avshalom's bones were uncovered near Rafiah and reinterred in the Mount Herzl military cemetery in Jerusalem. It transpired that Avshalom had indeed been murdered by Arabs and that, at the time, he had a handful of dates in his pocket. After his death, a date palm grew from one of the stones in his pocket and the Bedouin knew that this tree marked the place where he had been murdered.

## FIRST ACTIONS AGAINST THE BRITISH

During our basic training we used to meet on two evenings a week and on Saturday morning. At the evening meetings we held discussions in which our commander instilled in us something of the ethos of the underground. He told us about the development of the Irgun, and about the heroes of the organisation. We were deeply impressed by Yaakov Raz, who had been caught by Arabs while carrying a disguised bomb in the market near the Nablus Gate in Jerusalem. Arabs had stabbed him and whilst still bleeding, he had been seized by the police and taken under heavy guard to the government hospital. There he was interrogated by the British police. When he felt that his strength was running out, and feared that he might lose control and inadvertently give away underground secrets, he tore off his bandages and died of loss of blood.

The main subject discussed at our first meetings was clandestine conduct, the rules of conspiracy and confidentiality. One of the most important rules was to know only what was essential, so that even if severely tortured, we could confess only the little that we knew. We were taught not to arrive at a meeting place in groups and to use only code names. The most important thing was to observe normal behaviour and to assume that all our conversations were being overheard. We learned the difference between a provocateur infiltrated into the ranks, and an informer who listened "innocently" to extract secrets.

After several meetings, our commander tested our ability to cope with fear. We met on Mount Napoleon near Ramat Gan, in one of the hollows dug by archaeologists. Each of us was required to make his way alone to the Seven Mills on the Yarkon River, ten minutes away, to buy a portion of felafel in the neighboring Arab village of Jamusin. It was a quiet village and the people were friendly, but to walk alone at night through the

orange groves, far from any Jewish settlement, scared even the bravest among us. Our commander taught us Avraham Stern's poem 'Nameless Soldiers,' the anthem of the Irgun before it was replaced by Jabotinsky's Betar song. The falafel feast and singing created a spirit of camaraderie and bonding between us.

At our Saturday meetings we drilled and learned topography. To add a practical element to our studies, we explored the neighborhood and did field exercises. The tours of exploration were led by Aharon Shohat, commanding officer of the 'gunda' (platoon consisting of several units), who accompanied our exercises with Betar marching songs. Although we very much enjoyed the field exercises, we were disappointed not to be learning about weapons. I discovered later that the reason for this was simply that there were not sufficient pistols in Ramat Gan to train the new recruits. Instead we did target-practice with air guns in the Betar youth movement hut near the main road (now Jabotinsky Street), close to the Betar football field. In order not to arouse suspicion, we posed as enthusiastic Betarites, making as much noise as we could during firing practice to conceal what we were doing.

When we had completed our six months of basic training, we were tested at an impressive ceremony. One by one we were brought into a room where three commanders sat around a table covered with the national flag, a pistol and the Bible. The examination proceeded with questions related to the material I had studied, and continued with issues of Irgun ideology and my readiness to take part in Irgun operations. The tense atmosphere at the outset gradually receded, as the interrogation became more of a conversation. By the end of the meeting, we were rank-and-file Irgun members.

The first task assigned to us was to paste placards on buildings. The logistics were by no means simple. First, we had to find a place where we could mix the glue, then find the spare time and a suitable method of avoiding discovery and

identification. Yosef Kinderlerer solved the glue problem: adjacent to his home an isolated building housed a bookbinder's workshop whose owner, Zalman Tzivlin, we knew and sometimes helped out. He was known to sympathise with the underground and agreed without question to our request to boil up starch and water on his premises. We generally went out in threes on pasting-missions: one in charge of the glue and the brush, the second with a parcel of placards and the third as lookout. Sometimes, when the workload was particularly heavy, we went out in pairs instead of threes. We had to be on our guard all the time. On one occasion, towards the end of a long operation, our attention momentarily lapsed. Suddenly two policemen, an Englishman and a Jew, emerged from a courtyard and walked towards us. We fled, just managing to leap onto a passing bus with the police in hot pursuit.

We soon became highly skilful placard gluers and strategists, careful to modify our route each time to prevent ambush. One placard, issued on February 1, 1944, the day on which the Irgun declared a revolt against British rule in Palestine, particularly impressed us. The placard was large and printed in blue, and read, in part:

## To the Jewish people dwelling in Zion!

[...] Sons of Israel, Jewish youth!

We are now in the last stage of the war. We face an historic decision on our future destiny.

The armistice proclaimed at the beginning of the war has been breached by the British. The rulers of the country have chosen to disregard loyalty, concessions and sacrifice; they continue to implement their aim: the eradication of sovereign Zionism...

We will draw our conclusions unwaveringly. An armistice no longer prevails between the Jewish people and Jewish youth and the British administration in Palestine, which is handing

over our brethren to Hitler. We are at war with this administration, war to the bitter end...

And this is our demand!

Power will immediately be handed over to a provisional Jewish government...

The establishment of a Jewish government and the implementation of its plans – this is the sole way of rescuing our people, ensuring our survival and our honor...

Jews!

Our fighting youth will not shrink from sacrifice and from suffering, from blood and affliction. They will neither succumb nor rest until we renew our past glory, and promise our people a homeland, liberty, honor, bread and justice...

## Irgun Zvai Leumi

The first Irgun actions were limited in scope, it having been decided that as long as the war against Hitler continued, attacks would be directed only against the civil administration in Palestine and not against the British military. The first assault was launched at the Immigration Office, and thereafter at the Income Tax offices. These operations, directed solely against property, were carried out in the three large cities simultaneously (Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa). The Irgun's next targets were the Intelligence Service, the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) centers in the three cities. The objective of these attacks was two-fold: to undermine the prestige of the Mandate government and to destroy the files of Jewish suspects.

After the wave of arrests, which followed these actions, it was decided to expand the ranks of the fighting units. My unit was consequently transferred from the HATAM (Revolutionary Propaganda Unit) to the HOK (Fighting Force). We were very proud of this redeployment, since we were finally to take part in

the fighting operations of the Irgun and could leave placard pasting to others. We were assigned a new commander, "Yehoyada" (Yeshayahu Aviam-Kleiman) from Bnei Brak, who had considerable battle experience. My first task in the HOK was to stand guard for a unit, which was cleaning weapons after the attack on the Beit Dagan police station. It was the first time that I had been entrusted with a loaded pistol, and I was ordered to use it in the event that the police arrived. This was a heavy responsibility and one that carried the risk of arrest and imprisonment. I stood in the orange grove, alert to every rustle among the trees and after about half an hour, Yehoyada called me inside to see the boys in action. It was a small packing house at the end of one of the Bnei Brak orange groves, known by the code name 'Sheinkin'. The windows were covered with sacking (to prevent the light from escaping) and on the floor were weapons, mainly revolvers and several submachine-guns. There were also grenades and explosives. The atmosphere was cheerful as people related stories about the attack on Bet Dagan. As I listened, gazing at the heap of weapons, I suddenly realised that I felt I had become an organic part of the Fighting Force.

I took a more active role in the next operation, held several days later. Because of the war, foodstuffs and various other commodities were under government control and rationed. The Irgun command decided to confiscate some cloth which the government was storing in Tel Aviv and to sell it on the free market to finance the struggle which was daily becoming more costly. The operation was planned for a Friday afternoon, when the Nahlat Benjamin Street area, where the stores were located, was empty of people. On October 6, 1944, during the intermediate days of the Feast of Tabernacles (Succot), a unit of the Fighting Force took over the stores. The fighters took all the cloth and loaded it onto seven trucks, which had been confiscated that day. Each of the truck drivers had been hired

that morning, ostensibly for a routine job. Once outside town, an Irgun member ordered the driver to abandon the vehicle and wait in a nearby orange grove. The drivers were told to report the theft to the police in the evening, and were promised that the vehicles would be returned after the operation. Everything went according to plan. Most of the drivers co-operated and were compensated for loss of income. My task was to direct some of the trucks to a large building, which had been prepared in advance in Ramat Gan. It was a packing house in one of the orange groves near Mount Napoleon. The Arab guard received a generous sum from us to place the storehouse at our disposal. Since the citrus season had not yet begun, there was no danger that the owners of the grove or other unexpected visitors would arrive. The Arab guard was cautioned that if he told the police about our activities, he would be severely punished. When the trucks arrived at the rendezvous, I directed them to a dirt track leading to the store. We immediately began unloading the goods, but soon discovered that portering is not the easiest of occupations. After completing the job, we locked the store and I kept hold of the key.

Several days later I went off to school one morning as usual. En route I happened to meet one of the teachers, Yisrael Artzi, and we continued the journey together. Arriving at school, my friend Yosef informed me that I was to go immediately to the storehouse, where a customer was interested in buying the cloth. The customer, a shrewd businessman, examined the cloth and classified it by quality and size. He had recently arrived from Poland and, as he worked, he set certain lengths of cloth aside, mumbling to himself in Yiddish:

"This will make a good suit for my wife, and this one for my mother-in-law."

When I saw that he was procrastinating, I whispered that he should hurry before the police arrived. My urging bore fruit, and two hours later I was back at school, behaving as if nothing had happened. During one of the lessons, Artzi came into the classroom, and began to read out names from the register. When he reached my name, he peered at me and asked why I was recorded as having been absent from the first two lessons. I gazed at him with an innocent expression and reminded him that we had walked to school together. The 'mistake' was rectified.

This was the first action in which I took an active part; nobody in the organization would have dreamt that it would be the last in a series of operation, which had begun in February 1944. The organization was facing a six-month's lull as a result of the "Hnting Season".

## THE "HUNTING SEASON"

The 'Hunting Season', or 'Season' for short, was the code name for the Haganah's persecution of the Irgun, aimed at putting an end to its activities.

As a result of the Irgun's proclamation of a revolt against British rule, military operations were launched against various government targets. The official leadership of the Yishuv, the heads of the Vaad Le'umi and the Jewish Agency, were opposed to this activity and demanded that it cease. They argued that the national institutions had been democratically elected, and that consequently the Irgun and Lehi should accept their authority.

In September 1944, Menahem Begin, Irgun commander, held two meetings with Moshe Sneh, head of the Haganah General Headquarters, and Eliyahu Golomb, one of the Haganah leaders. At these meetings, which lasted into the night, relations between the Irgun and the Yishuv leadership were discussed at length.<sup>2</sup>

On the question of national authority, Moshe Sneh said, inter alia:

To expand your activities requires control of the souls and the property of the public. And it is we who control the public. We do not intend to renounce that control, because it is we who have received a mandate from the Jewish people... If you continue your activities, a clash will result.

Eliyahu Golomb was even blunter:

We demand that you cease immediately [your activity against the British]... We do not want a civil war... but we will be ready

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<sup>2</sup> Shlomo Lev-Ami, The protocols of the Irgun HQ, Hazionut, Volume 4.

for that as well. We will be forced to adopt our own measures to prevent your activities. The police, in our opinion, will not be able to liquidate you, but if the Yishuv rebels, it could come to that. It is clear that we are not speaking of your physical liquidation, but the developments could lead to that as well, they could lead to your destruction. And then it will not matter who started - it is a question of propaganda and information.

Begin vehemently rejected the charge that the Irgun wanted to take over control of the Yishuv and said:

We have no intention of seizing power in the Yishuv. We have said this on many occasions. We have no such ambitions... we think that Ben-Gurion is the man who can lead our youth into battle today. But in order to do so, Ben-Gurion must leave his residence in Rehavia. For as long as he is there, he cannot conduct that war. We have no party or administrative interests. We pray for the day when we can proclaim the end of the Irgun's task and disperse it. And the moment that you go out to war - we will all rally under a united leadership, in which you will constitute the decisive majority. But as long as you have not done this, we will conduct our battle.

The turning point in the struggle against the Jewish underground was the assassination of Lord Moyne in Cairo. Lord Moyne, who was known to be an anti-Zionist, had been appointed Minister of State for the Middle East, and from his place of residence in Cairo was responsible for implementing the White Paper policy. Lehi considered Lord Moyne to be responsible for the deportation of the immigrant ships, plotted to assassinate him. Two of its members, Eliyahu Hakim and Eliyahu Bet Zuri, were despatched to Cairo, and on November 6, 1944, they carried out the assassination, but were caught shortly after carrying out their mission. On January 10, 1945

they were charged with murder. Hakim and Beit-Zuri, manacled, stood calmly beside their Egyptian guards with red fezzes. Both were, and had been since their capture, completely self-possessed. They did not take part in the proceedings, and when the testimony was completed, Eliyahu Hakim rose to his feet and said:

We accuse Lord Moyne and the government he represents, with murdering hundreds and thousands of our brethren; we accuse him of seizing our country and looting our possessions... We were forced to do justice and to fight.

After being sentenced to death, they rose to their feet and sang the national anthem. On March 23, 1945, they were dressed in the traditional, ill-fitting red burlap suit of condemned men, marched barefoot to the gallows, were blindfolded at the scaffold, and hanged.



Eliyahu Hakim



Eliyahu Beit-Zuri

The assassination of Lord Moyne created shock waves in Palestine and throughout the world. Even before the identity of

the assassins became known, the Jewish Agency Executive convened and issued a fierce condemnation of the act. At the same meeting, it decided on a series of measures against "terrorist organizations" in Palestine.

## TO THE YISHUV

Together with all the civilized world, the Jewish community has been shocked to hear of the despicable crime of murder of the British Minister in the Middle East – a crime rendered more despicable by the fact that the British people have been engaged for the past six years with great heroism and supreme effort, together with their allies, in a life-and-death struggle with the Nazi foe.

This terrible crime, carried out outside the borders of our country, and whose circumstances have not yet been clarified, demonstrates once again the increasing threat of the terrorist gangs, which still exist in this country.

Terror in this country can stifle the prospects of our political struggle and destroy our inner peace. The Yishuv is exhorted to cast out of its midst all members of this destructive and ruinous gang, not to succumb to their threats and to extend the necessary aid to the authorities to prevent acts of terror and to eradicate its organisation, since this is a matter of life and death for us.

(Signed) The Jewish Agency Executive

It is interesting to note that this statement was published before the identity of the two young men arrested in Cairo became known. Moreover, it contains, for the first time, an appeal for co-operation with the British authorities in the fight against underground organizations.

A week later, my teacher Yitzhak Staretz came into the classroom, his expression even graver than usual. A colorful figure, forceful and strict, he was also warm-hearted and always willing to help. He was a superb teacher and taught mathematics with an enthusiasm we pupils grew to share. He announced that day that the Zionist Executive had decided to hold a special convention with representatives of Jewish youth, to discuss the new situation arising from the actions of the 'porshim' (dissidents, i.e. the Irgun and Lehi). Zionist youth movements had been invited to attend, as well as representatives from high schools. Each school was to send four delegates; Staretz proposed that we elect our delegates and hold a discussion after the convention. To my surprise and pleasure, I was chosen to represent my class, and the following day four of us from the Ohel-Shem high school set out for the Jewish Agency in Rehavia, Jerusalem (my sister Rivka was also a delegate).

At the entrance to the building stood a guard armed with a long-barrelled Mauser revolver. He directed us to a small room, where we underwent a careful body search before being permitted to enter the auditorium. On the platform, at a long table, sat the Zionist leaders, among them the President of the Zionist Organisation, Dr. Chaim Weizmann (who had arrived in Palestine several days before the assassination in Cairo, after an absence of five years), the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem, David Ben-Gurion, and the Chairman of the Political Department, Moshe Sharett (Shertok).

The meeting was opened by Chaim Weizmann, who explained in halting Hebrew the political damage inflicted on Zionism by the activities of the Irgun and Lehi. Ben-Gurion then delivered a long speech, which concluded with his scheme for waging war on the dissident organisations. The scheme included four main elements: expelling them from places of employment and from schools; depriving them of refuge by forcing them out of their

homes; refusing to succumb to their threats and handing them over to the British Police.

After Ben-Gurion's speech, there was a general debate, in which most of the speakers objected to collaboration with the British authorities. The main argument was that even if the struggle against the dissidents were justified, the British were the real enemies of Zionism because of their implementation of the White Paper. The debate grew heated and Ben-Gurion adjourned the meeting to the following day.

We made our way to the Himmelfarb Hotel in Hasolel Street, where we were lodged four to a room and continued to argue until after midnight. We decided unanimously not to sign any manifesto, which advocated collaboration with the police. The following morning we again underwent the security checks and the discussion was taken up from the preceding day. Ben-Gurion attacked all those whom he thought sympathized with the underground, and at a certain juncture said:

"And I know that even in this auditorium there are representatives of the dissidents, who are trying to influence the debate."

A tremor ran through me. I feared that they had checked the list of participants with the Haganah's Intelligence Service and that he was referring to me. When the general debate ended, the youth organisation delegations were summoned, one by one, to a side room. Surprisingly enough most were easily persuaded to sign the manifesto. However, this did not work with the school delegations, the great majority of which refrained from signing.

The following day a press release was issued on behalf of this extraordinary gathering of representatives of Zionist youth, held on November 19, 1944, on the initiative of the Zionist Executive. It read:

## A war of Jewish youth against terror and its perpetrators!

The savage terror of the "porshim" and those who have cast off the yoke...which is ostensibly directed against the British authorities and their institutions, in practice causes harm primarily to our own suffering people and to the future of our Zionist hopes...

Those who aid the enemy - are themselves enemies!

The perpetrators of terror, who denote themselves the National Military Organization (Irgun Zvai Leumi) and Freedom Fighters of Israel (Lehi) are traitors...

Jewish youth!

You are exhorted now to rise up and root out the terror from the Yishuv.

Do not lend a hand to those who have broken down the walls!

Banish them from the classroom, and from the workshop.

Do not permit their propaganda, whether written or spoken – neither in the street nor the assembly hall, neither in the synagogue, the school or anywhere else.

Do not give refuge to these trouble-makers in the homes of your parents, relatives and acquaintances; do not succumb to threats and blackmail.

Let the young people be on their guard. Let them act on their own initiative and extend all possible aid to public institutions and to the authorities to prevent terror and to disband its organizations. Let the gang members know that they will encounter the relentless opposition of united Jewish youth. The road to repentance is still open to them. But the incorrigible destroyers must be isolated and boycotted, until they are spewed out of the ranks of the Yishuv, until terror ceases and its organizations are eradicated.

Our school and some others were missing from the list of participants in the convention, which appeared at the end of the press release.

We returned to Ramat Gan full of impressions and the following day regaled our classmates with our adventures in Jerusalem. In the ensuing class debate I tried to remain passive; I contented myself with an informative report without expressing my opinion. The other speakers, including those who were members of the Haganah, objected to any form of collaboration with the Police. Staretz refrained from expressing an opinion, but during the recess he came over to me and whispered: "I am proud of you for not signing the manifesto". Staretz did not belong to any of the underground organisations, nor did he know about my connection with the Irgun, but as a nationally aware Jew, he objected to collaboration with the British authorities.

Once the Season had been approved by the Jewish Agency Executive, the matter was submitted to the Histadrut Council, the body which, more than any other framework, determined the conduct of the "organized Yishuv". It published an official announcement on the matter:

Their propaganda, whether written or spoken, must not be permitted...

No refuge must be given to these malefactors in the homes of your parents, relatives and acquaintances!

The incorrigible despoilers must be isolated and abandoned, until they are spewed out of the ranks of the Yishuv, until terror ceases and its organization is eradicated.

As regards collaboration with the British police, the Announcement went on to declare:

The Jewish Agency proposes herewith that all persons who are acquainted with any of the terrorists should immediately inform the police by word of mouth, in writing or by telephone and observe the injunction: 'And thou shalt root out the evil from thy midst'. Fathers who have sons in these organizations should, in the same fashion, inform the police and observe thereby the injunction: "If a man have a stubborn and rebellious son, he must take him out to the elders and say to them: This our son is stubborn and rebellious, he will not obey our voice. And all the men of the city shall stone him with stones." Particularly since the English do not intend to do the terrorists any harm. They will hold them for a year or two apart from other people until their surplus energy, which apparently results from overeating and from inactivity and sloth, has cooled down [...]

It is time to act for the sake of the Jewish people and the homeland.

Two members of the Jewish Agency Executive, Rabbi Yehuda Fishman-Maimon and Yitzhak Greenboim, continued to oppose any form of collaboration with the British police, and when the decision was taken, Greenboim announced his resignation.

The following is a 1944 pamphlet published by the Irgun proclaiming the policy of non-retaliation.

## THERE WILL BE NO FRATERNAL WAR

[...] It is with gloomy face that the loyal Jew asks himself and his neighbor: Are we to suffer this as well? Will a civil war break out in Eretz Israel? Will our home be destroyed before it has been built? Will our enemies see their base aspiration fulfilled?

The air is filled with gunpowder. Orators and leaders do not cease to speak of the internal strife. One of them has said that it

has already begun; the second – even more loudmouthed – has profaned his lips with the hysterical cry: blood for blood, an eye for an eye! A third has labored and labored until he has finally devised a plan to save the Jewish people. And this is the plan: to expel from their homes, to expel from schools, to starve and to hand over our fighting youths to the British Police. 'It is them or us,' it declared, 'and all means are acceptable in order to liquidate them.' [From Ben-Gurion's speech at the Histadrut Conference].

Yes, the dread of the loyal Jew is understandable. Are we to witness our children raising their hands or aiming their weapons against one another? What will they do, those persecuted people against whom the terrible edicts are directed? How will they defend themselves? ...These are grave questions, and we feel it our duty – on our own behalf and on behalf of the Irgun Zvai Le'umi in Palestine – to provide an answer. And this is our answer: you may stay calm, loyal Jews; there will be no fraternal strife in this country...

It was not easy for Begin to persuade his subordinates to exercise restraint. There were two underlying reasons for his decision: firstly, he said, to react could result in the Yishuv being plunged into a civil war, which would spell the end of the struggle against British rule in Eretz Israel. Secondly, he felt it undesirable to exacerbate relations with the Haganah, because they might later decide to join the struggle against foreign rule. Members of the Irgun who had been trained in the spirit of 'breaking the havlaga', found it hard to accept the decision of the General Headquarters. They did not, however, violate the order, possibly in the hope that their leader's evaluation would prove correct, and that the Haganah would join the struggle against the British. (This did indeed occur a year later, when the

Jewish Resistance Movement – Tenuat Hameri Ha'ivri - was established).

The entire Haganah command was preoccupied with the Season, and information on the Irgun and the Lehi was amassed by the Haganah's intelligence service, 'Shai'. The intelligence service had some 250 Palmach fighters (the elite Haganah unit) at its disposal, who were brought to town and assigned to the Season operation. They shadowed suspects and kidnapped Irgun fighters on the basis of lists they received from the Shai. In addition, the Palmach guarded the Jewish Agency leaders for fear that the Irgun or Lehi might react by perpetrating counter-kidnappings. The Jewish Agency in Jerusalem set up a Department for Special Assignments, which maintained close contact with the C.I.D. It was this department which handed over to the British a list of names of persons suspected of being members of the Irgun.

Close to one thousand people were handed over to the British. Most of them were taken to the Latrun detention camp and several hundred were deported to detention camps in Africa. In addition, dozens of suspects were kidnapped and detained in prison cells built especially for this purpose on various kibbutzim. They were interrogated by members of the Haganah Intelligence Service and occasionally suffered torture.

A letter from the High Commissioner in Jerusalem to the Colonial Secretary in London dated March 1, 1945 reveals that the Jewish Agency exploited its collaboration with the C.I.D in order to hand over active members of the Revisionist party, who were not even members of the Irgun, and thereby to rid itself of political rivals. The letter states, among other things: <sup>3</sup>

1. [...] In all, the Jewish Agency has supplied so far details of 830 suspects, of whom 337 have been located and detained so

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<sup>3</sup> Public Records, CO 733/457

far. Of these, 241 are being held under the Emergency Regulations; the remainders have been released either under surveillance or unconditionally... Several useful arrests have also been made in the Irgun center in Tel-Aviv.

2. Unfortunately, the Jewish Agency's lists of so-called terrorists, continues to include numerous people who have no terror connections, but politically speaking are undesirable to the Jewish Agency. This adds to the difficulties the police has in separating the sheep from the goats [...]

The most serious kidnapping i was the case of Yaakov Tavin, who was in charge of the Irgun's intelligence service and on the Haganah's most wanted list. For three months, Tavin succeeded in evading the Haganah men who were shadowing him, but at the end of February 1945, he finally fell into their hands. The kidnapping was described in Ha'aretz of March 2, 1945 as follows:

Passersby in Dizengoff and Yirmiyahu streets were greatly struck on Tuesday, February 27, 1945, by the kidnapping of a young man in the street. The kidnapping occurred at 11 a.m, and was witnessed by a large number of people. A large taxi halted at the corner of Dizengoff and Yirmiyahu streets, and several men emerged, one of them dressed in police uniform. They approached the young man, who was standing on the pavement holding a package. Shouting 'Thief!' they attacked him and began to hit him.

The crowd thought that he was in fact a thief, and several of them joined the attackers and helped them to push the young man into the taxi. He struggled with them and shouted in Yiddish and in Hebrew: 'Jews, help me! Why do you let them hit a Jew?' He was thrown into the car, which swiftly drove away.

Tavin's kidnappers blindfolded him, tied his hands and forced him to lie on the floor of the car. He was driven to Kibbutz Givat Hashlosha and from there was taken to Kibbutz Ein Harod, where he was imprisoned in a barn which had been converted into a detention room. Tavin was held there for six months and underwent numerous interrogations, accompanied by severe torture. He was released when the Second World War ended and the Haganah entered into negotiations with the Irgun for the establishment of 'The United Resistance' .<sup>4</sup>

The kidnappings were fiercely condemned in the Yishuv. The Chief Rabbinate published a strongly-worded notice which declared:

This cruel deed is utterly prohibited by the Torah, and is alien and abominable to the Jewish people and to every Jew. It desecrates the name of Israel and our settlement in Eretz Israel.

Cease these cruel and despicable acts.

The distinguished philosopher, Hugo Bergmann, who was a member of 'Brit Shalom' and a sworn opponent of the Jewish underground, wrote:<sup>5</sup>

The kidnappings are the tomb of democratic public life... a death sentence against all we hold dear in the Yishuv... These Ku Klux Klan acts are being committed lawlessly, and those accused have no opportunity to defend themselves.

The protesters were joined by civil organizations and by the Tel-Aviv Municipality, together with municipalities and local councils all over the country. Public pressure proved effective and the Season gradually lapsed.

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<sup>4</sup> IDF Archives, 801/10 and an interview with Tavin.

<sup>5</sup> "be'ayot", 1945, p.155.

I was one of the students whom the Special Committee determined should be expelled from school. The decision was conveyed to the school principal, who then informed my father. Walking with my father to the bus stop one morning, he suddenly turned to me and asked whether I was a member of the Irgun. I naturally denied I was. Later I learned that he had demanded that the principal convene a meeting of the school board to discuss my expulsion. At the meeting the principal explained that I had been seen pasting Irgun posters. My father had requested that the witnesses be brought before the board so that they could be questioned. The principal, who was a member of the Haganah, explained that there was no way he could do this since they could then be identified and avenged by the Irgun. My father summed up by saying:

“My son is being charged by two anonymous people, who refuse to appear here. My son utterly denies the charges. What are we to believe – anonymous information or my son, who is known to be a decent and honest person?”

After a brief discussion, the board dismissed the principal's request, and I stayed on at school. The next day, however, the principal turned to me and said:

“You can tell stories to your father, but I want you to know that I know the truth...We will catch you some day.”

A different response came from Staretz. He came over to me in recess and told me that he had fought against my expulsion, regardless whether I was a member of the Irgun or not.

Although the Season caused the Irgun considerable harm, it did not liquidate it. Many of the fighters were arrested, but new recruits took the place of the veterans.

## IN THE "HAYSTACK"

Ramat Gan and Bnei Brak, which were strongholds of the Irgun, were also targets of the 'Season'. In the general curfew in Bnei Brak, policemen armed with lists of names arrested dozens of members of the organisation. Among them were members of the Fighting Force who had taken part in military operations, including the armorers who had helped to conceal weapons. The wave of arrests created the urgent need to fill the ranks again and to appoint new commanders. After one of the meetings of my unit, my friend Yosef and I were asked to remain behind and our commander, Yehoyada, informed us that it had been decided to appoint us armorers. "It's a very responsible and difficult job," he said. "But it is also extremely interesting." We were thrilled to have been chosen from all the candidates, and were well aware of the heavy responsibility that rested on our shoulders. The armories were the heart of the organisation and we would be required to exercise great discretion. For safety's sake my code name was changed, and I now became 'Zefania'.

During the 'Season', the Haganah had succeeded in seizing large amounts of weapons from the Irgun armories. Petah Tikva's main arm cache, containing three tons of explosives, revolvers and ammunition, had been found in an orange grove and in Haifa the Haganah had emptied all the Irgun's arsenals. After these setbacks the caches were re-located to Ramat Gan, where we were assigned the task of digging the new sites. The arms' caches, code-named 'Haystacks', were contained in milk churns, which could be hermetically sealed. We placed each churn in a large can, which we then buried. (The garbage cans were 'borrowed' from a local park, the churns 'appropriated' from a local dairy). Since it was impossible to do the 'borrowing' and digging on the same night, we used to hide the cans and churns in disused and empty water tanks on Mount Napoleon.

The following evening we would climb into the tank in order to move our loot to the orange grove. After choosing a suitable spot under a tree we would start digging. The hole had to be quite deep, with at least half a meter of soil over the cache. When the work was completed, we filled sacks with the freshly excavated soil and scattered it at a safe distance. We then carefully placed the can in the hole, first making several holes in its base for moisture to trickle out, and finally we placed the churn in the can. The most difficult part was the camouflaging of the area. The digging left a conspicuous patch devoid of vegetation. To prevent this, we covered the patch with grass, which we brought with us.

In the milk churn we concealed revolvers, submachine-guns (dismantled), explosives and ammunition. Bullets which were to be stored for lengthy periods were placed in bottles, and the aperture was plugged with wax. The storage of rifles was trickier. The base of one of the churns was removed in our workshop, and it was then welded to another churn, creating a receptacle long enough to hold rifles.

Our task was complicated by the ban on making lists of any kind. We were obliged to remember by heart not only the site of the cache, but also its contents. The simplest way of marking the site was by counting the number of trees on either side. As an additional aide-memoire, we would carve a seemingly innocent mark on a tree trunk. We usually had no problems finding the hidden weapons, but once a cache simply 'vanished'. We counted the number of trees once and then again, but found nothing when we dug up the area. We were perplexed: if the Haganah had visited the spot, they would at least have left the can there. When we re-counted for the third time, we finally understood where we were going wrong. One of the trees had been uprooted and had thrown our counting scheme into confusion.

The rapid disappearance of garbage cans from the local parks prompted municipal inspectors to chain them to pillars. This still did not deter us – we simply brought along pliers to break the chains.

As the quantity of arms in Ramat Gan increased, we began to construct larger caches. Instead of milk churns and garbage cans, we used large hermetically sealed barrels, which were stored in wooden boxes made of planks which could be fitted into one another. The planks and the barrels were obtained from a workshop in Tel Aviv and all that was left for us to do was to bury them deep in the ground. The excavation work was now too arduous for two laborers and we were assigned several reinforcements. It was not difficult to dig up the soft soil, but disposing of it was problematic and time-consuming.

One winter night we set out to replace arms in a cache in a Bnei Brak orange grove, near the abandoned “Sheinkin” packing-house. After the job was finished it started raining, and Josef and I debated how best to return home. Yosef wanted to walk to nearby Bnei Brak and from there to take a bus to Ramat Gan, while I wanted to go across the fields, where I would be less likely to encounter anyone. We went our separate ways, the rain pelting down. The dark of the fields was impenetrable and I could barely see ahead of me. After hitting a tree, I stumbled onto a building site and promptly fell into a lime-pit. Initially stunned by the fall, I soon began to think how on earth I would get out. At first I tried to wade through the lime, but got nowhere. The thought of the workers arriving the next morning and finding my corpse, spurred me into renewed action and I began to move my arms and legs in swimming movements. I finally reached the edge of the pit, crawled out and started on my journey home, thankful that the rain was washing the lime off my clothes. When I arrived back home, soaked to the skin, my sister Rivka was startled, but without asking superfluous questions helped me remove my clothes and dispatched me to

the bathroom. I took a cold shower while she rinsed the lime out of my clothes. My brother Aryeh, awakened by the noise, brought me a glass of cognac and I soon crawled under the warm eiderdown of my deliciously inviting bed.

The 'Haystack' personnel had two major tasks in the Irgun: the first to prepare weapons for action, to clean them and return them to the cache afterwards. The second, more mundane task was to supply weapons for training the Fighting Force. It was our job to remove the arms from the cache and hand them out to representatives of the various units. Later the same night we would return to the meeting place to replace them in the cache. It was boring and dangerous work, but very important.

We had a special problem with Saturday morning training. Since we could not venture near the cache in daylight, we had to work under cover of dark, store the arms elsewhere temporarily and hand them over in the early morning hours. On a small mound near Mount Arnavot, which was concealed from view, we buried a small can, which served as our 'Saturday armory'. Very early one Saturday morning we arrived and, confident that there was nobody in the vicinity took out the weapons we had buried the previous evening. Contrary to our usual custom, we left one revolver in the can for security purposes. That afternoon, I made my way there again to collect it, and was stunned to discover that the can was empty. I was shocked. Scanning the area, I spied an Arab shepherd with his flock. He roused my suspicions, but I was afraid to go over to him in case he was armed. I watched him with his flock until the evening drew in.

I discovered that the flock belonged to Abed, the watchman of the Muslim cemetery on Salameh Road (now an army camp). Armed with this information, I went to meet Yehoyada to report on the events. He received the news gravely, but agreed to give me time to find the revolver before taking action. The same night I collected several of my friends, and together we visited

Abed and his family, who were on peaceable terms with their Jewish neighbors. I woke him from his sleep and demanded that he return the revolver. He denied any connection with the theft. We asked all the family to come out of the tent and conducted a careful search of his home. When I asked him which of his sons had been out with the flock that day, he replied that the shepherd was a relative from a nearby village and promised to talk to him the next day. I explained that we would be back in two days' time and advised him to make sure the revolver was found. We shadowed him to make certain that he did not contact the police, and returned after a few days on another nocturnal visit. Abed told us that the shepherd totally denied the charges and this time we conducted a careful search of the family and their belongings. I told Abed that we would return every night until he gave back the revolver. He promised to talk to his relative again and we arranged another meeting. At the scheduled time, I hid behind the bushes and after checking that the area was clear of police, went over to Abed who was waiting patiently for me. This time he had news for me; he told me that the shepherd had confessed to taking the revolver, but claimed that he had sold it to someone else and spent the money. Abed asked me if I would be willing to pay to ransom the pistol. At first I refused, arguing that the gun was mine and I did not have to pay for it twice over, but then I changed my mind and enquired how much was involved. Abed replied that he did not know, but was willing to find out. In the end I suggested that he bring the revolver to our next meeting and I would pay. The next day we met again, but I still did not receive the gun. Abed explained that there were still some difficulties, but promised that two days later I would find it back in its place. I was bitterly disappointed; the prospect of its return seemed to be rapidly diminishing. Nevertheless, at the appointed time I went to the mound and carefully removed the soil, which covered the can. I opened the can cautiously and to my great surprise, found the

gun wrapped in a silk stocking. I was delighted. I took it out, removed the clip, and discovered that it was loaded exactly as it had been on the day it was taken. I put the clip back, stuck the revolver into my belt and descended the mound with a light heart. Suddenly I felt a tap on my shoulder: I pulled out the revolver and pointed it at the person standing behind me. It was Abed, who congratulated me on finding my property. He told me he had paid to get it back from his relative and had awaited my arrival. I put the revolver back and explained to Abed that his relative had done something very serious. Not only would I not pay him but he should be happy that I was not asking him to pay damages. We parted as friends and I ran to tell my friend Yosef what had happened. On the way, I saw Yehoyada sitting in a cafe and whispered to him to join me in a nearby building. After reprimanding me for coming over to him in public, he noticed the revolver in my belt and congratulated me.

Before I had time to recover from this adventure, I was witness to another incident connected with my task as armorer. It was a clear winter day, and the pupils of the municipal school on the corner of Yahalom Street (present-day Krinizi Street), were playing marbles during the break. During their game, one of the marbles rolled into the bushes in the school courtyard. One of the children ran to look for the lost marble and as he scabbled in the damp soil, he suddenly encountered metal. He scraped off some of the dirt, and after lifting the lid, found a tightly sealed milk churn. The boy called his friends and they pulled the churn out of the ground and brought it into the gymnasium. Together they managed to open it, and found inside two submachine-guns, cartridges and ammunition. The story spread through the school like wildfire and everyone rushed to see the find. Among those who came was Yehoshua Bornstein, the school janitor. Yehoshua, a member of the Irgun, was aware that there was a cache among the bushes, and knew that it had been exposed after the heavy rain of the previous

night. He kept calm and informed his colleague, Shlomo Appelbaum. Shlomo arrived swiftly, piled the weapons into a sack and made his escape, hotly pursued by an intrigued group of children. Shlomo was more agile than they and slipped into the nearby Moslem cemetery. From there he made his way through the Park and reached Zvi Koller's home safely. He threw the sack onto the balcony and made his way to Koller's office to warn him of the strange parcel on the balcony of his home. When night fell, the sack was handed over to us and we placed it in a safe hiding place.

### RECOVERING FROM THE SEASON

About six months into the 'Season', the Irgun began to recover from the setbacks. Young commanders were appointed to replace the veterans who had been arrested and the ranks were filled anew. The arms' suppliers managed to bring in new weapons to replace those seized by the Haganah, and plans were made for the renewal of activity. One of the first activities, which marked the recovery of the Irgun was the manufacture of primitive home-made mortars, which were used against British targets. The idea was conceived by Gidi (Amihai Paglin), one of the Irgun's best officers. Working in the Irgun's workshop, Gidi succeeded in constructing a mortar with shells made of metal containers filled with explosives. The mortar was not accurate and could be used only for short ranges, but it made a terrific noise and symbolized the continued struggle against the British Mandate. Several such mortars were made, and plans were made to place them near various British sites in the country. One of these was the police camp at Sarona – now the government compound in Tel Aviv. Explosives were brought from all over the country to fire the mortars. My task was to convey them to a spot in the Nahlat Yitzhak cemetery. The cemetery guard, a member of the Irgun, had dug a false grave to be used as an arms' cache. Since we did not know the exact

location of this grave, it was agreed that he would wait for us in the cemetery and receive the 'goods' from us. It was a Friday night, and four of us set out, each with a sack of explosives over his shoulder.

On the way there we joked about encountering ghosts wandering about the cemetery. But as soon as we arrived, we fell silent. The atmosphere was charged and the watchman was nowhere in sight, presumably having left because we were very late. We had no idea where the cache was located and did not want to take the 'parcels' back, since the explosives had to reach their destination. I had little choice but to leave the sacks there, consoling myself with the knowledge that Jews do not usually visit cemeteries on a Saturday. Each sack was placed beside a grave, and in order to be able to describe their location, each of us memorized the name engraved on the tombstone. Thus we tiptoed at midnight through the cemetery, each of us repeating the name of 'his' dead person. It was a grotesque scene. The following morning I hastened to meet Yehoyada to give him the names on the tombstones. When the Sabbath ended, the watchman removed the sacks and placed them in the hiding place.

The mortars did not prove very successful; those which were aimed at the King David Hotel in Jerusalem, which housed the Mandate government offices and British Army HQ, were discovered by the Haganah and reported to the police. The mortars installed opposite Sarona were fired, but caused no damage. Despite the failure, the very positioning of the mortars was an achievement, demonstrating that the Irgun was a force to be reckoned with.

Shortly after the mortar operation, I was informed that the police had arrested my good friend, Yosef. Police officers arrived at his home in the middle of the night and after conducting a meticulous but fruitless search, they asked him to accompany them. He was taken to the Jaffa goal and after

being interrogated, was transferred to the Latrun detention camp. The news of his arrest stunned me. I had been aware of the numerous arrests carried out all over the country during the 'Season', but they had never touched me so closely. I felt that the rope was tightening around my own neck and decided to leave Ramat Gan for a while. Since I had no desire to become a 'refugee' (i.e. to move to another town and be supported by the Irgun), I had to find another way of absenting myself from home. At that time it was customary for groups of senior high-school students to go off for a month or two to work in kibbutz fields. This profited the kibbutz and was educational for the students. I proposed to Yehoyada that I join such a work group and he approved. He, too, feared that after Yosef's arrest, my turn would come and that the kibbutz offered a safe haven. After receiving the Irgun's approval, I joined my classmates for Kibbutz Mishmar ha-Emek in the Jezreel Valley.

The kibbutz welcomed us warmly. We were housed in a tent camp on the hill, not far from the local Palmach camp. The tranquility of agricultural work was a welcome change after the tensions of the past few months. The hard work in the arms' caches and the need to exercise constant caution had left their mark on me. I was happy to go out to the plantations to pick plums and to learn about the different species. In the evenings we attended lectures on socialism and communism, on the beauty of communal labor, the slogan being 'from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.' The HaShomer HaZair (Socialist-Zionist movement) considered the Soviet Union to be the fulfilment of their dreams and dreamed of implementing socialist theories in Palestine.

On evenings when we were not attending lectures, we met up with the Palmachniks, who came to strike up acquaintance with our girls. I would listen attentively to their conversations, taking care not to enter into arguments, ideological or otherwise, so as not to arouse their suspicions. At one of these meetings the talk

turned to the struggle against the 'dissidents'; I sensed that there was unrest among these Palmachniks and growing resistance to the struggle against the Irgun. They objected in particular to handing over underground fighters to the British Police. Arguments also raged about statements made at a special Palmach gathering held at Kibbutz Yagur, where Sneh and Golomb had announced the suspension of activities against the Irgun. The reason given was that the 'dissidents' had suffered a severe blow and their activities had been paralyzed. The truth was, however, that note had been taken of the growing resistance of Haganah members to collaboration with the British. Moreover, some members of the Palmach claimed that operations against the 'dissidents' were deflecting them from their main purpose, namely the struggle against the British. I recalled Begin's insistence that we should exercise restraint in the face of persecution, because one day the Haganah would join us in the struggle against foreign rule. The time was approaching, I felt, when the entire young generation would rise up against the British Mandate in Palestine.

Before completing our work in the kibbutz, a Haganah member gave us intensive training in handling a rifle. I was delighted at the opportunity, since the Irgun did not offer this training, considering rifles unsuitable for guerrilla warfare in built-up areas. In fact, I was later given the opportunity to use a rifle in an Irgun action, when we were sent to blow up the railway bridges near the Arab village of Yibne (present-day Yavne).

## BLOWING UP YIBNE RAILWAY BRIDGE

In July 1945, shortly after returning from volunteer work on Kibbutz Mishmar ha-Emek, I received word that I was to report to Rehovot for duty. I was very excited despite knowing nothing about the forthcoming operation. Following instructions I went by bus to Rehovot, alighting at the last stop, and walked south till I reached a path leading into an orange grove. I was to look for a girl with a copy of the newspaper Ha'aretz, a letter missing from the title. I mumbled the password and we walked together to a nearby packing-house. There I met my commander Yehoyada and Yoel Kalfus from Ramat Gan (the other people present were not familiar to me). When we had all gathered, we were taken to a eucalyptus thicket on the summit of a hill, where we waited in the shadow of the trees until sundown. As we were sitting and waiting I saw the armories coming up the slope bringing weapons and ammunition. I sympathized with them from my months in the same role.

We were called to attention and lined up: "Benyamin" (Yehoshua Weinstein), who had been appointed commander of the operation, explained the details. The objective was to blow up two railway bridges over the Sorek River, near the Arab village of Yibne. When we came close to our destination, we were to split up into two groups. One would move northward to blow up the small bridge, while the second would attack the southern, larger bridge. After completing our mission, we were to make our way on foot along the sand dunes towards Tel Aviv and there disperse.

I drank in Benyamin's instructions and silently rehearsed my role, which was to guard the sappers assigned to blow up the small bridge. As the briefing ended, "Eitan" (Yeruham Livni), Irgun Operations Officer, appeared and told us that this was the first operation in which Lehi fighters were also taking part. He

hoped that this 'fraternity of warriors' would eventually lead to full amalgamation of our two organizations.

After the briefing, followed by questions and answers, it was time to distribute the weapons. The arsenal was sophisticated and included a large number of submachine-guns (the sappers were armed with revolvers), but the main innovation was the rifles. Only few of us knew how to handle them and Yehoyada was pleasantly surprised when he heard that I was amongst the few.

Twenty-six of us set out in single file, our commanding officer sometimes leading and sometimes bringing up the rear. We maintained complete silence, and orders were passed down in a whisper. We moved slowly with our heavy packages of explosives. When we came close to our destination, we split into two groups and my group advanced towards the small bridge. As we moved forward, we saw a police car moving towards the bridge, and several policemen descending in order to examine the bridge itself. Benyamin, who had joined our group, ordered us to halt, fling ourselves to the ground and to refrain from opening fire unless the order was given. We were scattered all over the terrain: I was on the edge of the wadi, while several of my comrades were already inside it. The advance group had already reached the bridge, and when they saw the British, they slipped into a nearby Bedouin tent, holding the surprised Bedouin at gunpoint lest they give the game away.

The British spied us, but did not open fire since they were outnumbered. I lay there, watching the policemen and impatiently awaiting developments. Thoughts raced through my head. I realized that the battle would begin as soon as one of the sides opened fire, but how would it end? Benyamin was well aware that the moment shooting began, we would have casualties and he wanted to prevent this if at all possible. Again and again he passed down the order to hold fire. He relied on the policemen also being reluctant and leaving. Things seemed

to drag on for ages. Finally the British retreated from the bridge, but it was not clear if they had actually left the area. Benyamin ordered us to withdraw, and we gathered in a nearby orange grove.

Meanwhile the members of the other group had also reached the grove, leaving a small unit to guard the explosives. We learned that the explosives had been attached to the pillars of the bridge and we awaited Benyamin's order to blow the bridge up. Early reconnaissance had shown that when the German army reached the gateway of Egypt and seemed likely to invade Palestine, the British had prepared the bridge for demolition and had drilled special holes for laying explosives. Who would have guessed that those holes would prove useful to the Irgun when they came to blow up the same bridge? We lay in the grove for a long time and waited while Benyamin conferred with the commanders. We hoped that they would order us to return to the little bridge to complete our mission, but in fact they decided that we should confine ourselves to blowing up the larger bridge, since Benyamin was unwilling to take unnecessary risks. A three-man unit set out for the bridge and, shortly after, a mighty explosion was heard throughout the area and the bridge collapsed. While we were readying ourselves to leave, an Arab suddenly appeared, mounted on a camel. Benyamin did not want him to see us lest he give us up to the police, and let him pass unscathed. However, to our great consternation, he dismounted and began his prayers. When the prayers continued interminably, Benyamin decided that the only thing to do was to tie him to a tree and withdraw. We had lost a great deal of precious time and he was afraid that we would not reach home-base before daylight. Three of the fighters came up quietly behind the Arab, caught him and brought him to the grove. We tried to bind him to a tree, but he burst into bitter tears and cried out "El jamal, el jamal" (my camel, my camel), clearly more worried about his camel than for his own safety. The tragi-comic

scene was a welcome relief from the hours of tension. Even sober Benjamin saw the funny side. After calm was restored, he gave orders for the camel to be tethered close to its master. Several of the boys tried to tackle the camel, but it refused to budge. It soon became evident that camels are more stubborn than mules. Benjamin watched the scene and finally decided to free the Arab with his camel, but not before cautioning him that if he dared to inform the police, he would suffer the consequences.

Because of the late hour we changed our route, and instead of making our way through the dunes to Tel Aviv, we decided to return to Rehovot. We were very tired, but Benjamin urged us to step up our pace so that we would be able to hide the weapons under cover of darkness. There was also the danger that the British had imposed a curfew on the city and that we would fall straight into their hands. A householder heard us approaching, peeped out of his window and started shouting: 'thieves, thieves.' Two of the boys went to reassure him, and when he heard that we were underground fighters, he gave us his blessing.

We arrived in the orange grove in good time, handed over the weapons to the armorers, and our commanders conferred again on the direction to take. It was decided to split us into three groups: the first would go on foot towards Rishon le-Zion and from there by bus to Tel Aviv; the second would make for the Arab town of Ramle and from there by Arab bus to Jaffa, and the third would walk to Tel Aviv. My group walked to Rishon, where we boarded a bus and I instantly fell asleep. Suddenly the bus came to a halt. I opened my eyes and saw that two policemen had boarded the bus to conduct a search. We all held out our identity cards, and after a short inspection, the bus was allowed to continue its journey.

According to the original plan, we were supposed to return home before dawn, and I had not told my parents that I would

be back only on the following day. When my father came into my room to wake me, he was shocked to find my bed empty. My brother Aryeh had no idea where I was nor did others home my father approached. One of them, however, who had joined the Irgun with me and had then left, told him about my activities. My parents stopped the search and waited patiently for my return home. The encounter was tense: I was pained to have caused my parents such concern, but I also thought that the time had come to tell them the truth about my activities in the Irgun and to explain why I had chosen this path. The dispute was fierce, but I felt that my father's objections to my activities stemmed primarily from his concern for my welfare and not from ideological motives. He argued that I was endangering not only myself but also my family, in particular my younger brother. I knew he was right and that I was placing all my loved ones at risk, but I was not willing to stop. My father ended by saying that I had to choose between my Irgun activities and living at home. I replied that I would find another place to live. As I was about to leave, my mother stopped me and asked me to stay, saying she would worry about me all the time. From the day I had joined the Irgun, it had been clear to me that sooner or later my parents would find out, but I had tried to postpone the moment for as long as possible. The clash with my parents had been inevitable, and I was glad that it was now behind me.

The blowing up of Yibne Bridge, which paralyzed rail transport between Palestine and Egypt, had few repercussions. Yet this action was a milestone in the war against the British rule. It was the first case of collaboration between the two underground movements since the split in 1940. For the Lehi it was the first anti-British action after an interval of close to nine months. As for the Irgun, the operation served as proof that the 'Season' had not achieved its objective and that the boast that the Irgun had been destroyed was premature.

If it was to continue the struggle against the British, the Irgun urgently needed explosives, but it lacked the funds to buy them. Various possibilities of appropriating them were discussed, and members of the Fighting Force were asked to keep their eyes and ears open to find suitable sources. One of these was the quarry at Rosh ha-Ayin, which received allocations of explosives from the British for its quarrying work. Our investigations revealed that the explosives were conveyed to the quarry on a truck from Haifa. It was only a matter of time before an ambush was planned. In the event, three hundred kilograms of explosives were taken from the truck to the Irgun supply depot.

An additional source of information on explosives was the police force itself. When a detainee was released, he was put under house arrest and required to report daily to the police station. One day, as one of our men was reporting in, the desk clerk's telephone rang. He grasped that explosives were being transferred to the Solel Boneh depots at Givat Rambam (present-day Givatayim). The news was passed on to the appropriate authorities, and plans were made to take over the depots and confiscate the explosives. This was a particularly satisfactory action, since we considered the 'confiscation' to be a kind of compensation for the large amount of arms taken from the Irgun arsenal by the Haganah during the 'Season'. The plan took shape and on the evening of August 14, 1945, we set out from Ramat Gan for nearby Givat Rambam. The two-armed guards at the depots were easily overcome and their rifles confiscated. Our main problem was to find the depot in which the explosives were being kept. It transpired that the guards were unaware of the content of the depots, which we had to search one by one until we found what we had come for. The explosives were taken to Ramat Gan, but we did not have time to hide them in the prepared cache. Some of the crates were hidden in a pile of sand at a building site near the orange groves between Ramat Gan and Bnei Brak.

The following day the British army conducted a search with tracker dogs. The soldiers established their headquarters on the pile of sand, and set out from there to search the nearby orange groves. None of them dreamed that the treasure they were seeking was literally underneath them. The search was finally called off and the same night we hastened to transfer the explosives to a safe place. But this was not the end of the affair: as a result of the savage attacks against the Irgun in the press, which accused us of taking arms from Jewish guards, it was decided to return the two rifles, which in any case were of no use to us. The task was assigned to me, and on Friday evening I brought the two rifles to the home of the local rabbi and asked him to hand them over, thus escaping the attention of the ubiquitous Intelligence Service.

## THE UNITED RESISTANCE

As the Second World War approached its end, hopes ran high among the leaders of the Zionist movement that the British government would amend its policy towards Jewish immigration to Palestine. Such hopes, however, were soon dashed. In the summer of 1945, a general election was held in Britain. Labor pledged that if they were returned to power, they would revoke the White Paper and permit Holocaust survivors to immigrate to Palestine without delay. They also promised to act for the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, which would gradually evolve into an independent state.

However, after sweeping victory at the polls, the new Labor government soon declared that there would be no changes in Britain's foreign policy, nor would any concessions be granted with regard to Jewish immigration. Labor's attachment to the White Paper greatly disappointed Jewish leaders in Palestine and the Diaspora. On September 23, 1945, Moshe Sneh, head of the Haganah General Headquarters, cabled David Ben-Gurion (then in London) as follows: <sup>6</sup>

[...] It has been proposed that we stage a grave incident. Then we will issue a statement declaring that this is only a warning, and hint at much more serious incidents to follow.

Ben-Gurion replied swiftly on October 1:

[...] We must not confine our reaction in Palestine to immigration and settlement. It is essential to adopt tactics of S [sabotage] and reprisal. Not individual terror, but retaliation for each and every Jew murdered by the White Paper. The S. action must

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<sup>6</sup> Haganah Archives, From the Slik no.1, 1991

carry weight and be impressive, and care should be taken, insofar as possible, to avoid casualties...

Sneh regarded Ben-Gurion's letter as a warrant for the launching of military action against the British. As a first step, the Season was suspended, and discussions initiated on collaboration between the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi. The negotiations were crowned with success, and at the end of October, 1945, an agreement was signed between the three organizations for the establishment of the "Jewish Resistance Movement". The following are the main points of the agreement:<sup>7</sup>

- a. The Haganah organization has entered upon a military struggle against British rule.
- b. The Irgun and Lehi will not implement combat plans without the approval of the command of the Resistance Movement.
- c. The Irgun and Lehi will carry out combat missions assigned to them by the command of the Resistance Movement.
- d. Discussions of proposed operations will not be formal. Representatives of the three fighting organizations will meet regularly, or whenever the need arises, and will discuss such plans from a political and practical viewpoint.
- e. Once operations have been approved in principle, experts from the three organizations will clarify the details.
- f. The need to obtain the consent of the Resistance Movement command does not apply to arms' acquisition (i.e. confiscating weapons from the British). Irgun and Lehi have the right to conduct such operations at their discretion.
- g. The agreement between the three fighting organizations is based on 'positive precepts'.

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<sup>7</sup> Begin, In the Underground, vol.2, p.7

h. If, at some time, the Haganah should be ordered to abandon the military struggle against the British authorities, the Irgun and Lehi will continue to fight

The leadership of the Resistance Movement consisted of two representatives of the Haganah (Yisrael Galili and Moshe Sneh), an Irgun representative (Menahem Begin) and a Lehi representative (Nathan Yellin-Mor). It held general discussions, and the Irgun and Lehi were required to submit all plans of action to this body.

Operations were authorized by the Haganah command, after discussions between the senior operations staff: Yitzhak Sadeh (Palmach commander), Eitan Livni (Irgun's chief operations officer) and Yaakov Eliav (Lehi's chief of operations). Later, Eliav withdrew from these meetings and asked Eitan Livni to represent him. The Haganah command had the right to veto plans on operational, political or other grounds.

On October 9, 1945, a Palmach unit set out to free by force the 208 illegal immigrants detained at the Atlit camp. The attackers easily overcame the guards, and the immigrants, together with their liberators, escaped to Kibbutz Beit Oren in the Carmel Mountain.

The attack on the Atlit detention camp was the first anti-British action of the Palmach, and symbolized the first action of many in the coming weeks.

The first operation of the united front was an attack on the national railway network, which came to be known as the 'Night of the Trains'. Haganah units sabotaged some 200 points along the railway tracks, while a joint unit of the Irgun and the Lehi attacked the main railway station at Lydda.

There was strong reaction in Britain to the 'Night of the Trains'. The papers published detailed articles on the acts of sabotage and government representatives hastened to denounce the operation. The Jewish Agency and the Zionist

Executive in London, in a special announcement, expressed deep regret at the acts of sabotage, which had occurred in Palestine, and stated that:

It is a tragedy that matters in Palestine have come to such a pass. The Jewish Agency rejects the use of violence as a means of political struggle, but has come to the conclusion that its ability to impose restraint has been set a severe test because of the continuation of a policy, which the Jews consider to be vital to their future.

The Jewish Agency statement does not explicitly approve the act, but for the first time implies sympathy for its underlying motives.

There were no more cases of informing against the Irgun and Lehi once the 'Season' ended, but arrests continued. One of the victims was Yehoyada, my commanding officer, who was replaced in Ramat Gan by Ilan (Shmuel-Shmulik Krushinevsky).

The united front increased the scope of its military activities, and large quantities of weapons and explosives were urgently needed. Several 'purchasing' operations were planned, and we were assigned the task of preparing new caches to take in the booty. No more milk churns; we now had real depots where weapons and ammunition of different kinds could be kept. The first cache was excavated inside the municipal school, which was then under construction near the Ramat Gan police station. Since the watchman was a member of the Irgun, we had free access to the site and could do as we chose there at night. The cache was about two meters in length and breadth, and one and a half meters high. It was built of wooden planks (which had been specially treated for damp-resistance), and the weapons were stored in metal barrels with hermetic seals. There were three armorers – Shmulik, Amos Goldblat (replacing Yosef Kinderlerer, who had been arrested) and I, too few for the job.

Three more Irgun members were attached to the group and together we dug through the night. The excavated soil was carried away on a horse-drawn wagon driven by Menahem Lurie, who worked during the day and borrowed the wagon at night without the knowledge of its owner. Shmulik and Lurie were accustomed to physical labor, and did ten times as much work as we did. They scorned the weak 'high-school kids' and thanks to them the work was completed before dawn. I crawled into bed at 5:00 a.m. and two hours later was obliged to get up and go to school. As might be expected, my powers of concentration were limited in the extreme, and by the second lesson I was unable to keep my bloodshot eyes open. Luckily for me, my teacher decided that I was sick, and I went home and slept till the evening.

We dug a second cache of the same size in one of the Ramat Gan orange groves, but it was too risky both because of the large amount of soil we had to dispose of and because of the time it took to open and re-seal. We searched for a safer place, and the solution was provided by one of our sympathizers, Yaakov Nordman. Nordman, a teacher in the Ramat Gan municipal school, lived in an isolated house on the way to Ramat Yitzhak. I went with Shmulik to talk to him, and we found that his courtyard was ideally suited to our needs. Nordman greeted us cordially, but was not enthusiastic at the idea of digging a cache in his courtyard. At first he flatly refused, but when we told him that we intended to keep only books and propaganda material there, he softened somewhat. We met with him several more times and finally Shmulik proposed that we use the cache for material which was not required immediately, so that we would not need to open it too often. After receiving his consent, we decided to do the digging in daylight, to allay suspicions. Shmulik and I came one morning in the guise of innocent laborers, and dug a large hole in the courtyard. At night, we brought the dismantled box and put it in the hole. After

the lid had been camouflaged with earth, the cache became an indistinguishable part of the garden.

## ARMS SEIZURE FROM THE BRITISH

The first and most successful arms' raid was directed at the military depot at Rosh ha-Ayin. There was an RAF (British Royal Air Force) base with a depot of arms and ammunition for the aircraft. A young Jewish girl of American origin worked in the camp, and she made friends with one of the British sergeants. The girl, who lived in Petah Tikva, contacted the Irgun and told them that she had learned from her British friend that there were large numbers of pistols and submachine-guns in the depot. She also reported that the British sergeant was willing to cooperate with us. After investigation, we learned that she was telling the truth, and began planning a raid on the camp. On the scheduled day, two trucks were commandeered in the usual way (the drivers were hired for a haulage job, and on the way were 'requested' to abandon the vehicles), the drivers were detained in an orange grove and after the operation had been completed, were released and reimbursed. The trucks, found abandoned by the police, were returned to their owners after they came to report the theft. The trucks were camouflaged to look like British army vehicles, and their civilian plates number were replaced by military ones.

On Friday afternoon, November 22, 1945, (when the soldiers were having a food break), two army vehicles, a van and a lorry approached the Rosh ha-Ayin camp. Beside the van-driver sat Jackson (Eliezer Zemler), who was blond and wearing British officer's uniform. He informed the guards in his perfect English that he had come to collect some crates from the depot. He handed over the necessary papers, together with a permit for the 'Arab porters' who were sitting on the truck (these documents had been forged with the kind help of the young woman who worked in the camp and her sergeant friend). The two vehicles passed the check without difficulty, and made directly for the depots. After tying up the guard, they burst inside

and began to load the sealed crates onto the vehicles. There was no time to open them and classify their contents before loading them. After completing the loading, the two vehicles left the camp and made for an orange grove in Petah Tikva.

Shmulik, Amos and I had come to Petah Tikva at noon. After eating at a local restaurant, we went to the park where we met a young woman liaison. After exchanging passwords, we were taken to an orange grove where we waited with dozens of other fighters, to act as carriers for the precious cargo.

While we were chatting we heard the sound of vehicle engines and there was a sudden onslaught on the 'goods' in the truck. The crates were unloaded and piled up among the trees. It was strange to see fighters cavorting like children having been given a much sought-after toy. After completing the unloading, our main task of moving the weapons to Ramat Gan and Tel Aviv began (only a small part was buried at Petah Tikva). When the commanding officer began to organize the convoy, one of the fighters loaded a crate onto his shoulder and said: "It's not heavy. I can easily carry it by myself." Fortunately, the commander was not convinced, and divided us up so that three were carrying two crates each.

We set out on foot in high spirits, but it soon became clear that the load was heavy and we could not continue at a rapid pace. I was assigned the task of leading the group, which was making for Ramat Gan to store the arms in the specially prepared caches. The pace became slower, and the convoy lost its cohesion. The following day I discovered that the second group, which had set out for Tel Aviv, had been luckier than us: they had met up with a truck en route, had loaded the crates onto it and had marched on unencumbered. We finally reached 'Sheinkin' (an abandoned packing-house among the orange groves of Bnei Brak), exhausted from the march. There Lurie awaited us with his wagon, which we loaded while Dvora Kalfus-Nehushtan handed out sandwiches and beverages. I set out,

hungry and thirsty, with Lurie for the cache in the municipal school. We passed by the police station, but nobody suspected the innocent-looking wagon which was transporting a load covered with sacking.

As soon as the trucks had made their escape from the army camp at Rosh ha-Ayin, the chase began. The army immediately imposed a curfew on all roads, but nobody dreamed that we would convey our booty all the way from Petah Tikva to Ramat Gan on foot. We left the crates in the depot, and only after the excitement had died down did we examine their contents. They included more than seventy Sten guns and a large amount of ammunition, three 3" mortars and five Browning heavy machine-guns. The Sten guns were very convenient for use in underground conditions and greatly increased the Irgun's firing power. The machineguns on the other hand, were more cumbersome. They were stored in Nordman's courtyard and taken out only when the War of Independence broke out in 1948.

Between actions, the routine life of the underground continued. Many young people joined the Irgun and the ranks of the Fighting Force were swelled. The pace was increased, and every evening we were called on to supply weapons for training. One Saturday, one of the units was training with revolvers that I had collected from the cache. There were several young couples strolling about the grove where the cache was located and we had to wait for nightfall in order to retrieve the revolvers. I went home and hid the revolvers in the cellar, planning to collect them on my return home in the evening. As soon as I opened the door, I sensed that something was wrong. Nobody spoke to me and the atmosphere was electric. Tentatively I went down slowly to the cellar, only to discover that the revolvers had vanished. I searched everywhere but found nothing. I came upstairs and asked my brother Aryeh if he knew what had happened. He replied that our father had found the

parcel as soon as I left, but had no idea where he had hidden it. After the Saturday evening prayer, I approached my father and asked him about the revolvers.

"I threw them into the sewage," he replied.

I was furious and shouted:

"How dare you throw away Jewish arms? Don't you know how difficult it is to find weapons and how important it is to us to continue the struggle?"

In reply, my father said:

"How dare you raise your voice? How dare you act so irresponsibly and endanger your whole family? If the police had found those guns, they would have arrested your father and your brother, and you would have destroyed your whole family."

I had no answer to those justified charges. I was deeply ashamed. I sat in silence, not knowing what to do or how to explain what had happened to my comrades and commanding officer. Nobody spoke. Gradually we calmed down, and my father came over to me and said:

"Did you really believe that I would throw away revolvers? I hid them in the courtyard and now please get rid of them and never bring weapons home again."

I was greatly relieved, apologized and explained that I had to wait till it was completely dark outside. An hour later, I took the parcel and stood up to leave the house. To my surprise, my father came with me, and said:

"I'll go with you because it's dangerous these days to walk about with weapons."

My father's reaction touched me, but I explained to him that I was not permitted to take him with me to the cache. I hastened to leave and took the revolvers back to their proper hiding place.

## RAID ON THE ARMY CAMP IN THE EXHIBITION GROUNDS

About a month after the successful raid on Rosh ha-Ayin and after many delays, the high command of the United Resistance finally approved a plan to launch a second raid on the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) headquarters in Jerusalem and Jaffa. These raids were exploited in order to plan confiscation of weapons from the army camp in the Exhibition grounds in Tel Aviv. From internal information, we learned that there was a stock of weapons in one of the depots, including American Thompson machine-guns (the so-called Tommy-gun which was widely used in the British armed forces), which we preferred to the Stens we were then using. After we had checked security arrangements, we decided to break through the fence from the Yarkon River side and to take over the base from within.

At the appointed time, the fence was opened with special cutters, and the raiding party set out for the central building. Gidi the commander of the operation, called on the soldiers through a megaphone to lay down their arms. Several dozen British soldiers obeyed the order and surrendered. They were led into the central building and held there under guard until the raid was completed. Another unit made for the depots, but encountered automatic fire from one of the buildings. "Avner" (Dov Sternglaz) tried to fling a hand grenade towards the source of the shots, but was hit in the jaw in the process. His hand grenade exploded and he was seriously injured. Another five members of the unit also suffered injuries, but the attackers eventually succeeded in silencing the source of gunfire and breaking into the depot. To their disappointment, it proved empty of weapons, and they were forced to retreat, carrying with them their wounded and the few weapons they had taken. Two

motorboats were waiting for them, and took them along the Yarkon River to the Seven Mills, as far as a small waterfall not traversable by boat.

At the beginning of the evening, all the necessary arrangements had been made to receive the fighters and weapons at the meeting point. Shmulik assigned me the task of preparing several boats which would be used to cross the river if necessary. I set out for the site and found a storage shed with boats for hire. We broke into the wooden hut and removed the boats and oars. Suddenly we heard shouts from across the road: "Thieves, thieves." The watchman in the Yerushalmi rope factory had spotted us and intended to inform the police. We went into the watchman's hut with cocked revolvers, explained who we were and 'recommended' that he avoid interfering. To be on the safe side we pulled out the telephone wires. Everything was ready for the returning unit. Even Menahem Lurie was waiting nearby with his wagon.

When we heard the motorboats approaching, we raced excitedly towards the water, but the sight of so many wounded men shocked us. This was the highest number of casualties so far in one operation. The wounded men had been treated in the boats by Topsy (Malka Yefet), a qualified nurse, and were now assisted by Dvora Kalfus-Nehushtan. Avner, who had been seriously wounded, was taken first to the apartment of Aliza (Litzi) and Moshe Greenberg, who were members of the Irgun, and then to Hadassah hospital in Tel Aviv, where he later died. The other wounded men were taken to the Peulan hospital in Ramat Gan, housed in a building owned by Shalom Shuk-Halevi, whose daughter Ruth was a member of the Irgun.

Among the injured was Noah Grizek, wounded in the thigh and hospitalised for a lengthy period. I was to meet him three months later, when he was my roommate in the Pohovsky hospital in Tel Aviv after I too was injured.

After the wounded had been evacuated, each of the fighters told his story with great emotion, and the noise and excitement were great. Suddenly we heard the order 'Attention' and Gidi, who towered above us all, lined us up. There was total silence as Gidi (Amihai Paglin) explained the withdrawal routes. Shmulik and I walked among the rows and loaded the weapons into sacks we had prepared in advance. The sacks were then loaded onto the wagon to be taken to the cache in the municipal school. After handing over the weapons, the fighters dispersed, some going to Tel Aviv and others to Petah Tikva.

As anticipated, a general curfew was imposed the following day in Ramat Gan and house-to-house searches were conducted. Fortunately, our house was outside the curfew area, and the British soldiers reached only as far as Salameh Road, which was the municipal limit of Ramat Gan. When I saw the soldiers approaching, I immediately made my escape through the back door and headed for the nearby orange groves.

Several days later, when quiet had been restored, we decided to take the weapons out of the cache to clean them, oil them and prepare them for the next operation. Amos Goldblat, Menahem Lurie and I prepared to do this together. After removing the topsoil and exposing the cache, I climbed down and handed the sacks up to Amos, who had remained outside. I warned him not to take any of the weapons out of the sacks since they could be loaded. As I stood in the cache, I suddenly heard the unmistakable sound of a shot. I climbed out; fearing that the police had arrived to arrest us, and discovered that one of the revolvers had indeed fired. Unfortunately, the bullet had hit Amos in the finger and he was in need of proper medical treatment. I was afraid that the shot might have been heard in the adjacent police station and that someone would be sent to investigate, but when several minutes passed without incident, I asked Lurie to stand guard whilst I took Amos to the nearest first aid station. There we found Naftali Frankel, the duty medic

that night who bandaged the finger and suggested Amos be treated by a physician. He noted in his register that the wound had been caused by a work accident and assured me that he could manage without me. I ran back to the cache to help Lurie load the sacks onto the wagon and to take the weapons to the rented hut. Some time later I learned that Naftali Frankel was in fact a member of the Irgun.

## INTENSIFYING THE STRUGGLE

The underground struggle against the British gained momentum and activity became more daring and wider in scope. Initially the Irgun had concentrated on attacking centers of civilian government and had refrained from hits on army camps, but this distinction no longer existed. With all restrictions removed, the British armed forces were no longer immune from attack by our Fighting Force.

After the Second World War, the many RAF bases stationed throughout the country became targets for underground attack. On February 25, 1946, three military airfields were attacked and dozens of planes destroyed.

I spent that night, together with Shmulik and several other fighters, in one of the groves between Ramat Gan and Petah Tikva. Our role was to await the group, which had set out to attack the Lydda airfield, to collect their weapons and treat the wounded. At 8:30pm, the appointed time, we heard loud explosions, but still did not expect the fighters before midnight. An hour later, we heard a rustle and saw a group of people approaching. Our first thought was that this was a British reconnaissance unit and we immediately hid among the trees, weapons ready. When the group was close enough, we heard Hebrew being spoken. I went out to meet them and discovered that they were Lehi fighters, returning from the raid on the Kfar Syrkin airfield. Commanded by Yaakov Granek (known as blond Dov), the fighters had reached the airfield in a truck and immediately taken up positions. Under cover of fire, the sapper unit had broken into the field and rapidly approached the aircraft. They laid mines between the wings and bodies of the aircraft and beat a rapid retreat. Eight aircraft went up in flames and the action was completed without casualties.

We congratulated the Lehi fighters and stayed behind to greet our own comrades on their return from Lydda. Midnight came

but nobody arrived. We continued to wait tensely in the rain, our concern growing. At around 4:00am they finally arrived. It transpired that the heavy rain and thick mud had slowed their progress and they had only reached the Lydda airfield at 10:00pm. On their way, they had heard the explosions from the direction of Kfar Syrkin (seven kilometers away) and anticipated that the troops in the camp would be on the alert. The commander of the operation "Shimshon" (Dov Cohen, who had served in a British army commando unit and was due to be demobilized), held a hasty conference, and it was finally decided to proceed as planned. The sappers cut the barbed wire with their special cutters and broke in. They made their way directly to the aircraft, and laid their explosives between the wing and the body of the aircraft. When a whistle was blown, they detonated the explosives and withdrew. Eleven aircraft were destroyed.

The withdrawal was difficult and took longer than planned. The rain had ceased but the soil was saturated and the mud hampered progress. The operation ended without casualties, apart from Dvora Kalfus' shoe, which disappeared in the mud. At Petah Tikva they handed over their weapons to the armorers and then continued on foot towards Ramat Gan, meeting us en route. As we were about to cross the road linking Petah Tikva road with Tel Litvinsky (present-day Tel-Hashomer), we encountered a convoy of military vehicles leaving the large camp at Tel Litvinsky on its way to impose a curfew on the main roads, and on Ramat Gan and Petah Tikva. We lingered in the orange grove until the convoy had passed and as soon as the road was clear we crossed it at a run and left the scene as fast as possible.

Dawn had broken and we were left with the task of cleaning our mud-splattered clothes and shoes before entering town. The group made for Dvora's house, on an isolated hill near Ramat Yitzhak. The Kalfus family was very active in the Irgun; the older

brother, Nathan, had been involved in illegal immigration activities and had brought many immigrants to the country; Dvora and her younger brother, Yoel, were active in the Ramat Gan branch of the Fighting Force. While their mother made us tea, the fighters tried to scrape the mud off their shoes. It was a cheerful group, the most prominent of which was Michael Ashbel, who had a good singing voice and wrote poems in his spare time. The poem he wrote about that night's operation soon became one of the most popular marching songs of the Irgun fighters.

While Shimshon and his men were marching to the Lydda airfield, another unit, commanded by "Gidi" (Amihai Paglin), was making its way to the Kastina airfield (presently Hatzor) to destroy 20 military aircraft.

## WOUNDED IN BATTLE

Once the Anglo-American Commission of Inquiry, appointed in November 1945 by the British and Americans to recommend a solution to the Palestine problem, had completed its work, the Irgun High Command gave the go-ahead for wide-scale action.

Several months previously, my commanding officers had decided that I should attend a Commanders' Course. First, I was asked to report to Shuni (near Benyamina), where the central courses were held. Fortunately, as it turned out, I was unable to leave home, since the British discovered the course I was scheduled to attend and all the trainees were sent to goal. After that, the central courses were discontinued, and training was carried out at the regional level. The course I attended was held in Ramat Gan, with trainees from Petah Tikva also taking part. We met in the evenings in a large packing-shed in an orange grove in Ramat Yitzhak, known by the code name "Arlozorov". Saturday meetings were held outdoors in the orange groves. We learned weapon handling and drill, did field training and studied leadership theory. The training was intensive and the course lasted for several months. At the end we sat examinations, and, in line with Irgun tradition, took part in a military operation against the British. At our graduation party, held at the home of "Amnon" (Yoel Friedler), I was proclaimed the top cadet in my class. Several days later, we set out for the south.

On April 2, 1946, I reported for duty at Rehovot to take part in an operation about which I knew nothing as yet. Following orders, I met with a young couple at a designated bus stop. We exchanged passwords, and they took me to a large packing-shed in a nearby orange grove. I was happy to see some old friends: Baruch Toprover, Yoel Kalfus and Yoel Friedler from Ramat Gan, Ozer Simcha and Hayim Golovsky from Petah Tikva, and of course my commanding officer and friend "Ilan"

(Shmulik Kroshnevsky). More and more people arrived, and by midday 60 of us were assembled. It was clear that a large-scale operation was being planned. After being given sandwiches and drinks, we were summoned into the packing-shed for a briefing. "Eitan" (the Irgun's Operations Officer) was the first to address us, and we soon grasped that the objective was to bring railway lines in the north and south to a standstill. However, to avoid disrupting the export of Shamouti oranges by Jewish growers, it had been decided to sabotage the railway track south of Rehovot and north of Haifa. Three independent Irgun groups would operate in the south; in the north, a Lehi unit would blow up the railway bridge over the Naaman river estuary. One of the Irgun groups, led by "Zeev" (Menahem Schiff), was to blow up the two railway bridges near the Arab village of Yibne, a repetition of an operation carried out a year previously. Menahem Schiff's group, numbering 30 fighters, was assembled at another packing-shed, also in Rehovot. The second group, commanded by "Gad" (Eliezer Podhazour), was assigned the mission of sabotaging bridges and tracks south of Yibne. The third group, under "Shimshon" (Dov Cohen) was to attack the Ashdod railway station and blow up the nearby bridge. The two latter groups received a joint briefing and they covered part of the route together.

After Eitan's general remarks, each officer assembled his men for a detailed briefing. Maps were spread out on improvised tables. The force was divided into sections, each memorizing its orders. This was the largest field operation the Irgun had conducted so far, and the weapons had been selected accordingly. The main weapons were rifles, machine-guns and submachine-guns, with only a few pistols. This was a great change to previous operations, which had largely taken place in urban settings. Our withdrawal was also planned differently; since the British were expected to impose a curfew on all southern settlements, it was decided to withdraw on foot to Bat

Yam and to slip into Tel Aviv from there. This meant that we were obliged to trek through sand dunes for some 25 kilometers (or 35 kilometers for the southernmost force).

After the briefing I understood the reason for the bustling activity in the orange groves between Petah Tikva and Ramat Gan in the weeks before the operation. Dozens of Irgun members had undergone intensive training and target practice. Shimson had introduced the rifle for operational use, and was in charge of all the training. He added field training to rifle handling. The fighters practiced marching and crawling in order to get into shape, but the two to three weeks' training period was insufficient for the task ahead. And the boots we wore were not suitable for long treks in the sand.

Once the questions and answers were behind us, we were free until the trucks arrived. Spirits were high and the veterans amongst us related anecdotes about previous battle experiences. Suddenly Baruch Toprover turned to me with a smile and said: "I have a strange feeling. Who knows when we'll meet again?" He must have had a premonition. Baruch was arrested after the operation, and when he was released, at the height of the War of Independence, I was in the besieged city of Jerusalem. Thus, we were not to meet again for several years. We sat there in silence, deep in thought.

The roar of engines approaching the packing-shed broke the quiet. The two trucks had been 'confiscated' during the day in order to transport us to our starting point. We clambered onto the truck unarmed, since we were supposed to be laborers returning from work. The second truck was loaded with oranges: the weapons were concealed beneath them, and the "Arab workers" sat on top. We traveled in convoy southward towards Kibbutz Yavne. The settlers barred the gates to prevent us from crossing their land. One of our commanders, who were sitting beside the driver, explained that we were on a mission on behalf of the Irgun. This persuaded the settler and he allowed the first

truck to enter. Whilst driving through the settlement, we heard shouts from behind us. It transpired that he had refused to allow the second truck in, claiming that he could not allow Arabs to move around the settlement during curfew hours. At that time, the British had imposed a travel curfew from 6:00pm, and as we approached the settlement we had seen several truckloads of British soldiers setting out to enforce the curfew. Again we negotiated with the settler, and after we had convinced him that the passengers in the second truck were also Jewish fighters, disguised as Arabs, they were allowed to join us.

We left the settlement safely and the convoy halted at a pre-agreed spot. We climbed down, swiftly unloaded the oranges and extricated the weapons. We were a mixed group and the darkness added to the general confusion. Surprisingly enough, some sort of order established itself and, after distribution of the weapons, we took our leave of the unit, which was to operate in Ashdod and set out.

While we were moving through the fields, we spied a slowly moving dot of light. Our first thought was that it was a British armored vehicle coming to find us. Gad ordered the group to lie down, and I was ordered to advance with another fighter to clarify the source of the light. We crept forward cautiously, thinking as we moved: 'What if it really is a tank? Would we have time to inform the rest of the group before being trapped by its projector beam?' I glanced at my comrade, and without a word we continued towards the unknown object. When we were very close, we breathed a sigh of relief – It was the kibbutz tractor ploughing the fields by night. We reported this to Gad who, after advising the tractor driver to return home, gave the order to advance.

Gad urged us on since we were behind schedule. The plan was for the three groups to go into action simultaneously, and since we had no walky-talkies, our watches were the only means of coordinating action. The operation was set for

8:00pm. At precisely that time, as we approached our destination, we heard explosions as the railway bridge beside the Arab village of Yibne was blown up. We had forfeited the surprise element and it was clear that the force guarding our target would be ready for us.

This was indeed the case: as we continued on foot, a rocket suddenly illuminated the entire area. We immediately flung ourselves to the ground, continuing only after the light had died away. Thus we played cat and mouse with the guards until we finally reached our destination and the units dispersed. My unit had been assigned two tasks: first, to sabotage the railway tracks and telephone poles. Then we were to join up with the lookout unit, whose task was to delay any British force, which might arrive from the adjacent army base. For these tasks, we were equipped with a Bren machine-gun, submachine-guns and grenades.

We went out to the railway track, while Shmulik and his men remained on guard. We dispersed over a wide area of track and laid the charges by the telephone poles and beside the track. When everything was ready, I blew a blast on my whistle, and the charges were detonated. I sped away to take shelter, and on the way heard the whistle of bullets being fired nearby. I threw myself to the ground and heard Shmulik says: 'Come here, we're over here.' I stood up to join the group, when there was a sudden explosion. I felt a sharp blow to my right arm, saw blood pouring out and called to Shmulik. He staunched the blood flow with a tourniquet, bandaged my arm and helped me to the meeting spot.

We had to wait until all the units had completed their assignments before withdrawing together. The units returned one by one, Gad among them. He asked me how I felt and said that when all the fighters had arrived, they would decide what to do about me. He had two alternatives. The first one – to take me all the way to Bat Yam, the second one – to evacuate me to

the nearest settlement, Rehovot or Rishon le-Zion, where I would receive medical treatment. Meanwhile another unit had arrived with a severely wounded fighter on a stretcher. It was Ezra Rabia, who had been hit in the chest when throwing a grenade at the firing guards. All attention was, of course, focused on Ezra. I finally asked Shmulik to give me a pain-killing injection. He searched the first-aid kit and found an ampoule of morphine and a needle, but did not know how to use them. In fact, nobody knew how to use the needle and no one was willing to take responsibility for trying. Shmulik finally found some 'pills' and gave them to me, claiming they were analgesics. When I put them in my mouth, I discovered that they were mint candies...

While we were waiting for the last unit to arrive, we heard rounds of shots at increasingly short intervals. The boys lay down in a circle, ready for any possible threat. I was the only one without a weapon and asked Shmulik to give me a pistol so that I could defend myself if necessary. To my great disappointment, he firmly refused. There was a quick consultation, and Gad decided to set out at once, without waiting for the final unit. The convoy moved slowly, Ezra lying on the stretcher and I leaning on Amnon (Yoel Friedler). Ezra lost consciousness and died shortly afterwards. We buried him in the sand, on the assumption that the British would find him the following day and bury him in a Jewish settlement. We assembled around the fresh grave in total silence. Shmulik recited Kaddish (the prayer for the dead) and we stood motionless. It was the most moving Kaddish I have ever heard.

Ezra Rabia had come to Palestine from Iraq without his family and had joined the Irgun shortly after his arrival. Fluent in Arabic and well acquainted with Arab life and customs, he was given assignments in Arab districts. He took part in the confiscation of weapons from the Rosh ha-Ayin camp as a 'bearer' disguised in Arab dress. In the operation in which he lost his life, he had

been one of the 'Arabs' in the second truck, sitting atop the heap of oranges. The following day the British did indeed find Ezra's body and he was buried at Kfar Warburg.

Gad, who announced that we were far behind schedule and had to move faster, broke the silence at Ezra's grave. He offered me the chance of being carried on the stretcher, but after he had explained that this would hold up our progress, I felt obliged to walk. I could no longer move the fingers of my injured hand and asked Shmulik to loosen the tourniquet. He did as I asked and, to my relief, the blood flowed back into my fingers. But the wound began to bleed freely, and Shmulik, fearing that I might collapse from loss of blood, tightened the tourniquet again and refused to open it until we reached base. We moved off and my arm soon became numb. Walking was hard; our feet sank into the sand and my pain was agonizing. I lost consciousness several times, but did not want to be carried for fear that we would all be caught by the British. Suddenly I became very thirsty, and asked for water. The water flask was empty and all that remained was a little cognac.

Thus we marched all night, my friends taking turn to support me. After several hours we reached Nahal Rubin. How good it felt to bathe my feet. We were warned not to drink the stagnant water, but I was so thirsty that I drank my fill despite the hovering mosquitoes. Our pace became slower and the convoy became a straggle. As dawn broke, Yoel Friedler waxed lyrical on the beauty of the scene. Gad halted the convoy and we thought that he would announce a break. But he merely urged us to increase the pace in order to reach Bat Yam before the British army arrived. Some of the boys were so tired that they became apathetic. As we moved on, a plane circled around us several times. Our Brennist took aim, but Gad decided that it was preferable not to fire and to conceal the weapons in the sand dunes. This was futile, since the plane had clearly spotted

us and reported our progress to headquarters. The aircraft continued southward and we in a northerly direction.

At 8:00am we finally reached the sand dunes of Bat Yam. There we met up with several people who were awaiting us, including Dvora Kalfus, who worriedly asked me what had happened. I replied simply: "This is Jewish blood", before sinking to the ground in total exhaustion. One of the boys went off to summon a car whilst Yoel Friedler helped me up. Dvora stopped us, saying that I could not risk going into town in blood stained clothes. She lined up the other boys, and when she found one of about the same build as me, asked him to exchange clothes with me. I got into the back seat of the car driven by Eliyahu Spektor, with one of the women fighters beside me. En route from Bat Yam to Tel Aviv we encountered a police roadblock in Arab Jaffa. The car came to a halt, and before the policeman could poke his head through the window, the young woman threw her arms around me to hide my wounded arm. The pain was acute and I begged her to stop, but she persisted and we passed through the roadblock safely.

We finally reached Lilienblum Street and went into the Pochovsky Maternity Home where I had been born. I dragged myself up to the second floor, where I was given into the safekeeping of Sister Mina Oshinker, who immediately treated my wound. First, she gave me a morphine injection to ease the pain and then cut away my clothing, washed me and with great care cleaned the wound. She loosened the tourniquet. The flow of blood had ceased but I could not move my fingers at all. The arm was totally paralyzed. The injection soon took effect; I became drowsy and could do nothing but give myself up to the care of the medical team.

The Irgun's physician, Dr. Eliezer Matan, approached Professor Marcus, the most distinguished surgeon in Tel Aviv at the time, and asked him to operate on my arm. Professor Marcus examined the case carefully and decided that there was serious

risk of gangrene and that the arm had to be amputated. Dr. Matan was unwilling to go ahead with so drastic an operation and consulted Dr. Friedlander, also a surgeon, who was associated with the Irgun and worked for right-wing health insurance fund (Kupat Holim Leumit). Friedlander believed that they could risk operating to fuse the bone without amputating. He claimed that because of my youth, there was a reasonable chance that my body would overcome the complications. The debate between the doctors was lengthy, and Dr. Friedlander, to whom I owe my right arm, finally performed the operation.

Dr. Friedlander operated me on that same afternoon. It transpired that the bone had broken in two, leaving my arm dangling. The two sections of the bone were fused with the aid of a platinum bar, the wound was cleansed and the arm placed in plaster. Because of the infection, I had a high fever and urgently needed antibiotics. During the Second World War, penicillin was available only to the military, and after the war it was allocated for civilian use only under strict official supervision. A request to the health authorities for penicillin might have given me away to the British. The Irgun preferred to use another method of obtaining the drug. At night, Irgun fighters broke into the warehouse of the Hirshberg Brothers and confiscated a shipment of penicillin. Thus Avraham and Yaakov Hirshberg, my maternal uncles, had unwittingly helped in my recovery.

The day after my operation I found myself in a room with a neighbor in the last stages of convalescence. I was pleased to see Noah Grizak, who had been wounded in the thigh in the attack on the army camp in the Exhibition Grounds. We had first met three months previously, at an assembly point in Ramat Gan returning from a field operation. Noah had then been evacuated to the Paulen hospital in Ramat Gan and only later was he transferred to the Pohovsky Hospital.

From Noah I learned of the fate of the group, led by Shimshon, which had set out to attack Ashdod railway station. The force had encountered resistance on the part of Arab guards, but had overcome them and blown up the station and the nearby bridge. After the operation, the force had withdrawn in the direction of Bat Yam. It was a long and difficult journey, and it soon became evident that some of the boys were not sufficiently trained in long-distance treks. When dawn broke, they were discovered by the same plane, which had spotted us. The army had encircled all the Jewish settlements in the south and after the report was received, a battalion of soldiers set out for Bat Yam. When Shimshon and his men reached the Bat Yam sand dunes, the British army was waiting for them. (We had succeeded in reaching Bat Yam shortly before the army arrived). The paratroopers fanned out all over the area and our people had no chance of escape. Eitan ordered the fighters to bury their weapons in the sand and try to slip away one by one. Most chose to make for the sea, and Eitan himself waded into the water, but to no avail; wherever they turned, they encountered armed troops. Avner Ben-Shem, who had followed Eitan into the water, was shot dead, and the firing ceased only after all our fighters had surrendered. Only two got away - Shimshon and Chaim Golovsky. Chaim later told me that when the boys began running towards the sea, Shimshon had said to him: "Let's run in the opposite direction, and if we make it safely over the hill, we'll be able to reach Rishon le-Zion." They ran in zigzags and succeeded in evading the bullets fired at them. Afterwards, the British forces were concentrated by the seashore and the two Irgun fighters reached Rishon le-Zion unscathed.

The British arrested in Bat Yam dunes thirty-one fighters, including some of the Irgun best commanders. In addition to the 27 who had taken part in the operation, another four, who had been waiting for them, were detained. In addition to Avner Ben-

Shem, who was killed by gunfire, four men were wounded and evacuated to the Government Hospital in Jaffa. The papers reported that the British had found blood-stained garments and thought that they belonged to one of the injured men they had arrested. Fortunately they did not guess that they were my clothes and did not bother to look for another wounded man in hospital. The arrest of the 31 fighters was a bitter blow for the Irgun but it did at least ensure coverage for the cause in the national and international press.

Noah Grizak did his best to make my hospital stay a pleasant one. He told me about his first few days in hospital and how his injured leg was attached to a weight for a long time. "You're lucky," he said. "You'll soon be able to walk about, and only your arm will be in a cast. I was immobilized in bed for three months. But even that passed, and in a few days time I will be out of here and back on active duty." I was very sorry when Noah left hospital, since we had become good friends. We decided to meet after I recovered from my injury, but our paths diverged; a year later, I moved to Jerusalem and after the War of Independence I learned that Noah had been killed in the battle for Jaffa.

The transition from intense activity to lying idle in bed was shockingly extreme. I suddenly found myself in an entirely different world and had to confront my helplessness and dependency. At first I was not sufficiently aware of the gravity of my condition – severe infection throughout my body, total paralysis of my arm, the threat of gangrene and subsequent need for amputation. I imagined that I would be able to leave hospital in a few days time. In fact, I lay there for two weeks, and only when the fever dropped did the doctors agree to send me home.

The hospital Director agreed to treat Irgun members on condition that visits by comrades were strictly prohibited, since he feared that they might alert the British police. Only two

people were allowed to visit me: Dr. Matan and "Amatzia" (David Grossbard), CO Tel Aviv District, who was in charge of medical services. They came daily, sometimes twice a day, and did their best to make my stay easier. On one occasion they asked me: "What would you like us to bring you? We'll bring anything you want". "Strawberries and cream," I replied cheekily, knowing that they were unobtainable. Several hours later, Sister Mina walked in and told me that a present had arrived from my friends and placed a large bowl of strawberries and cream beside my bed.

The day after I was injured, Shmulik visited my father in his chemicals' store in Tel Aviv and informed him that I had been lightly wounded and could be visited in hospital in several days' time. My father did not say anything, but thought to himself: 'If he's so lightly wounded, what is he doing in hospital, and why can we only visit him in a few day's time?' Years later he told me that after Shmulik had left; his friend Cohen from Kfar Saba came into the store. Alone together, Cohen told my father his troubles. The police had arrested one of his sons, Yehoshua, and the other son, Menahem, had escaped and nobody knew his whereabouts. Before his arrest, the British had offered a reward for information leading to the apprehension of Yehoshua and his picture had appeared in the press and on billboards. The two brothers were active in the Lehi and Yehoshua was renowned for his courage (Yehoshua later became David Ben-Gurion's bodyguard at Sede Boker). My father listened and thought: 'What can I say to him? I've just been told that my son is lying wounded in hospital and I can't discuss it with anybody'.

My mother's visit to hospital was not easy for her. When the nurse asked her to feed me, she said with tears in her eyes: "When I nursed you as a newborn baby, I never imagined that eighteen years later I would come to the same place and feed you again." The visit was brief and towards its end she plucked up courage and said: "They told me that the bullet only

scratched you. So why is your arm in a cast? And why do you have to spend so long in hospital?" I tried to reassure her, but without success. Before leaving, she asked me to promise that when I was released from hospital, I would come home, so that she could look after me.

Life in hospital took on a routine, determined by the prosaic needs of the bedridden patient: measuring fever, bowel monitoring movements, etc. I slept a great deal, and the main thing that disturbed me were the penicillin injections I received every four hours for two weeks. I received so many of these shots that there was no room on my behind for further jabs. I spent most of my waking hours reading and received few visitors. I had no radio, but was fortunate enough to be able to hear the rehearsals and performances of pianist Pnina Salzman, who played in the Tel Aviv Museum, located just behind the hospital.

On my last day in hospital I was again taken to the operating theater, this time for an 'aeroplane' to be built to support my arm. Dr. Friedlander encased the upper half of my body in plaster, and inserted a metal rod to support my arm in its cast at shoulder height. I was forced to resort to acrobatics to manipulate the structure. Getting into a car, for example, was almost impossible. My appearance was apparently so frightening that when I arrived home, my two-year-old brother Zvi fled in panic.

I imposed voluntary 'house arrest' on myself, and did not go out in daylight. My alibi was that I had been injured in a road accident, but I knew the alibi would not stand up to thorough investigation. I developed a new routine of reading and listening to the radio. In the evening my friends came to visit and told me what was happening in the Irgun, and I strolled with them in the orange-groves near our house. My most devoted friend Yosef, visited daily and brought a parcel of home-made chocolate-nut candies each time.

After leaving hospital, I was informed that I had been commended for my exemplary conduct after being wounded.

A week after my return home, on April 23rd, at noon, a loud explosion was heard, followed by shots. It was the Irgun attack on the Ramat Gan police station, one of the great Taggart fortresses built during the 1930s riots. In this attack, three fighters were killed and five injured, including Dov Gruner, who was captured. The dead were buried anonymously in the Nahlat Yitzhak cemetery, in the presence of the Hevra Kadisha burial society and police guards, but without relatives.

The retreat route from the attack was not far from my home, and British policemen conducted searches throughout the neighborhood. When my mother saw what was going on, she panicked and told me to hide in the cellar. I refused flatly, since it was clear to me that the British would find me there and that my attempt to hide would incriminate me. The army soon imposed a curfew on Ramat Gan. As in previous cases, the soldiers came as far as Salameh Road, which was the municipal border of Ramat Gan. But, in contrast to previous occasions, I could not escape through the back door, and stayed at home till the curfew was lifted. Fortunately our house was not searched and the British returned to base.

## THE BLACK SABBATH

At dawn on Saturday, June 29, 1946, a curfew was imposed throughout the country and seventeen thousand troops were dispatched to institutions and settlements to seize arms and documents and to arrest the leaders of the Yishuv and of the Haganah. The Mandate government announced that it was resolved to eradicate terror and violence, and that the army operations had been sanctioned by the Cabinet in London. Operation Agatha, as it was termed by the British, came as a surprise and achieved most of its aims. A great deal of intelligence groundwork was done and special detention camps were prepared at Rafiah. In Jerusalem, the British entered the Jewish Agency offices and, after conducting a thorough search of rooms and archives, confiscated documents, which they loaded onto three large trucks. Among them were telegrams, which provided clear evidence of the role of the Jewish Agency in leading the United Resistance. They included the cable sent by the Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive (David Ben-Gurion) to the Head of the Haganah Command (Moshe Sneh) telling him to launch an offensive against the Mandate Government immediately; the agreement between the Haganah, Irgun and Lehi, and cables giving the go-ahead for Irgun and Lehi actions against the British within the framework of the United Resistance. Also found were the texts of broadcasts by Kol Israel (the Resistance's secret broadcasting station) stating, among other things, that everything possible would be done 'to impede the transfer of British bases to Palestine'.

In addition to the numerous documents confiscated from offices, the soldiers broke into the homes of members of the Jewish Agency Executive and arrested them.

At 4.15 a.m on the Sabbath, a police officer, followed by an army officer with two army vehicles, arrived at the home of sixty-year-old Rabbi Fishman-Maimon. The soldiers surrounded the house. Rabbi Fishman informed them that he was unable to travel on the Sabbath and proposed that he walk, or that the house be placed under guard until the Sabbath ended, when he would be able to travel. He asked the officers to consult their superiors on this proposal, but they had received orders to take him at once. Rabbi Fishman sat down and replied that he would not budge. The soldiers tried to carry him together with the chair, but the rabbi slipped off the chair, and they then took him by force and pushed him into the vehicle.

Among those arrested were Moshe Shertok (Sharett) and Bernard Joseph (Dov Yosef) of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, and David Remez, chairman of the Vaad Le'umi. Other public figures were detained all over the country and brought to the special VIP camp built for them at Latrun. In Tel-Aviv, a thorough search was conducted at the Histadrut Executive and at the offices of the Davar newspaper and Bank Hapoalim.

Searches were conducted and arrests made in many kibbutzim, but the British scored their greatest success at Kibbutz Yagur in the Zevulun Valley. They searched for a week, apparently on the basis of a reliable tip-off. The kibbutz members offered passive resistance, but were dispersed with tear gas and incarcerated in detention areas set up by the soldiers. At first the search proceeded in routine fashion, but after the first arms' cache was found, the attitude changed and the British started digging under the floors, literally leaving no stone unturned in their search for arms. After a week, they had uncovered a great deal of booty, including more than 300 rifles, some 100 mortars (2"), more than 400,000 bullets, about 5,000 grenades and 78 revolvers. The spoils were displayed at a

press conference at the kibbutz, and the British left only after arresting all the men on the Yagur.



**Search for arms by British Soldiers**

During Black Sabbath, more than 2,700 people were arrested throughout the country and taken to the Rafiah detention camp. The last of them were released only two months later.

The Haganah at first reacted with outrage. The Kol Yisrael announcer declared dramatically:

**Our backs are to the wall! We will fight back.**

The Haganah command decided to carry out three operations against the British authorities. The first was a Palmach raid on the Bat Galim army camp, in order to requisition weapons (according to Haganah Intelligence Service information, the weapons confiscated at Yagur were being stored there). The second mission, entrusted to the Irgun, was the blowing up of the King David Hotel, where the offices of the Mandatory government and the British military command were located. In a letter to Begin, Sneh wrote: <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Jabotinsky Institute, k-4 1/11/5

a) At the earliest possible opportunity, you are to carry out the operation at the 'chick' [code name for King David Hotel] and at the house of "your servant and messiah" [code name for David Brothers building]. Inform me of the date. Preferably at the same time. Do not reveal the identity of the implementing body - either by announcing it explicitly or by hinting.

b) We too are preparing something - will inform you of details in good time.

c) Exclude TA [Tel Aviv] from any plan of action. We are all interested in preserving TA - as the center of Yishuv life and the center of our own activities. If, as the result of any action, TA is immobilized (curfew, arrests), this will paralyse us and our plans as well. And the important objects of the other side are not focused here. Hence, TA is 'out of bounds' for the forces of Israel.

1.7.46. M. [Moshe Sneh]."

While preparations for the operations were at their height, Meir Weisgal arrived at Sneh's hideout. Weisgal was on a personal mission from Chaim Weizmann, President of the Zionist Organization (Weizmann himself was then ailing at his home in Rehovot). Weisgal told Sneh that Weizmann urged that the armed struggle against the British be halted. Among other things, Weisgal quoted Weizmann as saying:

"In other countries it is accepted that the president is the commander in chief of the armed forces. I have never sought this authority nor has it ever occurred to me to interfere in your affairs. For the first and only time, I am exercising this right and demanding of you that you cease all this activity."

Weizmann demanded an immediate answer, and announced that if his request was rejected, he would resign and publicly

announce the reasons for his resignation. Sneh, who was opposed to stopping the armed struggle against the British, informed Weisgal that he could not decide this matter alone,<sup>9</sup> and would submit Weizmann's request to the X Committee. The committee debated the question of the powers of the president of the Zionist Organization, but eventually decided, by majority vote, to accede to Weizmann's request. Sneh, who opposed the resolution, resigned from his post as head of the Haganah's national command, but remained liaison officer with the Irgun and Lehi. Sneh met with Begin, did not inform him of the X Committee's resolution, and merely requested that the assault on the King David Hotel be postponed. Sneh then decided to leave for Paris to attend a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive, which was to discuss the continued struggle against the Mandatory government. Before leaving the country, on July 19, he sent Begin another note:

"Shalom!

I have heard from my comrades about the recent conversation. If my personal appeal still holds weight with you, I beg you to delay the scheduled actions for another few days".

As a result of Sneh's appeal, the attack on the King David Hotel was scheduled for July 22, 1946.

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<sup>9</sup> The X Committee was the supreme political committee to which were submitted the operational plans of the Jewish Resistance Movement (without specification of the target and exact date). The plans were implemented only after approval by the Committee.

## THE ATTACK ON THE KING DAVID HOTEL

The Moseri family, members of the wealthy and influential Jewish establishment in Cairo and Alexandria, built the King David Hotel in Jerusalem. They set up a shareholding company to finance construction, consisting mainly of Egyptian businessmen and wealthy Jews from all over the world. The seven-story building, with 200 luxurious rooms, was opened to the public in 1931. In 1938, the Mandatory government requisitioned the entire southern wing of the hotel, and housed the military command and the Mandatory government secretariat there. The British chose the King David because of its central location, and because it was easy to guard. In the hotel basement, they built a military communications center and, for security reasons, added a side entrance, linking the building to an army camp south of the hotel. Less than a third of the rooms were reserved for civilian use.

After preparatory work and several postponements, Irgun fighters gathered at 7 am on Monday, July 22, 1946 at the Bet Aharon Talmud Torah in Jerusalem. They arrived there one by one, gave the password and assembled in one of the classrooms. They realized that they were being sent on a mission, but none of them knew what the target was. Shortly afterwards, the senior command arrived and it was only when the briefing began that the assembled fighters discovered that they were going to strike at the King David Hotel.

The strike force left next in a van, loaded with seven innocent milk churns, each containing 50 kilograms of explosives and special detonators. The commander of the operation, Yisrael Levi ("Gidon") rode in the van, dressed as a Sudanese waiter, while the other members of the unit were dressed as Arabs. The van drove through the streets of Jerusalem, its tarpaulin cover

concealing the milk churns and the passengers, and halted at the side entrance of the hotel, through which foodstuffs were brought into the La Regence restaurant in the basement. The fighters easily overcame the guards by the gate and hastened to the basement, where they searched all the rooms, and assembled all the workers in the restaurant kitchen. Then they returned to the van, and brought the milk churns into the restaurant, placing them beside the supporting pillars. Yisrael Levi set the time fuses for 30 minutes, and ordered his men to leave. The staff gathered in the kitchen was told to leave the building 10 minutes later to avoid injury.

During the withdrawal from the basement, heavy gunfire was leveled at the group and two fighters were injured. One of them, Aharon Abramovitch, later died of his wounds.

After exiting the hotel, Gidon summoned two Irgun girls who were waiting nearby, and ordered them to carry out their mission. They ran over to a nearby telephone booth, and delivered the following message to the hotel telephone operator and to the editorial office of the Palestine Post:

"I am speaking on behalf of the Hebrew underground. We have placed an explosive device in the hotel. Evacuate it at once - you have been warned."

They also delivered a telephone warning to the French Consulate, adjacent to the hotel, to open their windows to prevent blast damage. The telephone messages were intended to prevent casualties.

Some 25 minutes after the telephone calls, a shattering explosion shook Jerusalem, and reverberated at a great distance. The entire southern wing of the King David Hotel – all seven stores – was totally destroyed. For reasons unclear, the staff of the government secretariat and the military command remained in their rooms. Some of them were unaware of

events, and others were not permitted to leave the building. This accounts for the large number of victims trapped in the debris of the building.

For ten days, the British Engineering Corps cleared the wreckage, and on July 31 it was officially announced that 91 people had been killed in the explosion: 28 Britons, 41 Arabs, 17 Jews and 5 others.

The success of the Hebrew underground in striking at the heart of British government in Palestine, and the high toll of victims sent shock waves through England and the rest of the world. At first, the Mandatory government denied having received a telephone warning, but testimony submitted to the interrogating judge made it clear beyond a doubt that such a warning had in fact been given. Moreover, the Palestine Post telephone operator attested on oath to the police that, immediately after receiving the telephone message, she had telephoned the duty officer at the police station. The French Consulate staff opened their windows as they had been told to do by the anonymous woman who telephoned them, and this was further evidence that they had been warned in advance.

It is almost impossible to recapitulate what occurred in the government secretariat offices in the half hour preceding the explosion, but all the evidence suggests that there were numerous flaws in the security arrangements in the King David and that a series of omissions occurred. The telephone warning was disregarded, and although the warning signal was given, an all-clear was sounded shortly before the explosion. These facts indicate that there were serious errors in the decision-making process and that internal communication did not function properly. The high toll stemmed from the fact that nobody ordered the employees to leave the building, and those who wanted to leave were prevented from doing so.

The heads of the Jewish Agency and the Vaad Le'umi were stunned. They feared that the British would adopt even more

severe retaliatory measures than on the Black Saturday, and hastened to denounce the operation in the strongest terms. The statement they issued on the following day expressed "their feelings of horror at the base and unparalleled act perpetrated today by a gang of criminals." Even David Ben-Gurion, who was then in Paris, joined the chorus of condemnation, and in an interview to the French newspaper France Soir, declared that the Irgun was "the enemy of the Jewish people."

The denunciation by the Jewish Agency totally ignored the fact that the bombing of the King David was carried out as part of the activities of the resistance movement, and on the explicit instructions of Moshe Sneh. At the request of the Haganah, the Irgun issued a leaflet accepting responsibility for the operation.

A year later the Irgun issued the following statement:

## THE TRUTH ABOUT THE KING DAVID HOTEL

[...] On July 1 – two days after the British raid on the National Institutions and on our towns and villages – we received a letter from the headquarters of the resistance movement, demanding that we carry out an attack on the center of government at the King David Hotel...

Execution of this plan was postponed several times – both for technical reasons and at the request of the resistance movement. It was finally approved on July 22...

Notwithstanding, several days later, Kol Yisrael broadcast an statement – In the name of the resistance movement – abhorring the high death toll at the King David, caused by the actions of the 'dissidents'...

We have kept silent for a whole year. We have faced savage incitement, such as this country has never before known. We have withstood the worst possible provocations – and remained silent. We have witnessed evasion, hypocrisy and cowardice – and remained silent.

But today, when the resistance movement has expired and there is no hope that it will ever be revived... there are no longer valid reasons why we should maintain our silence concerning the assault against the center of Nazo-British rule – one of the mightiest attacks ever carried out by a militant underground. Now it is permissible to reveal the truth; now we must reveal the truth.

Let the people see – and judge.

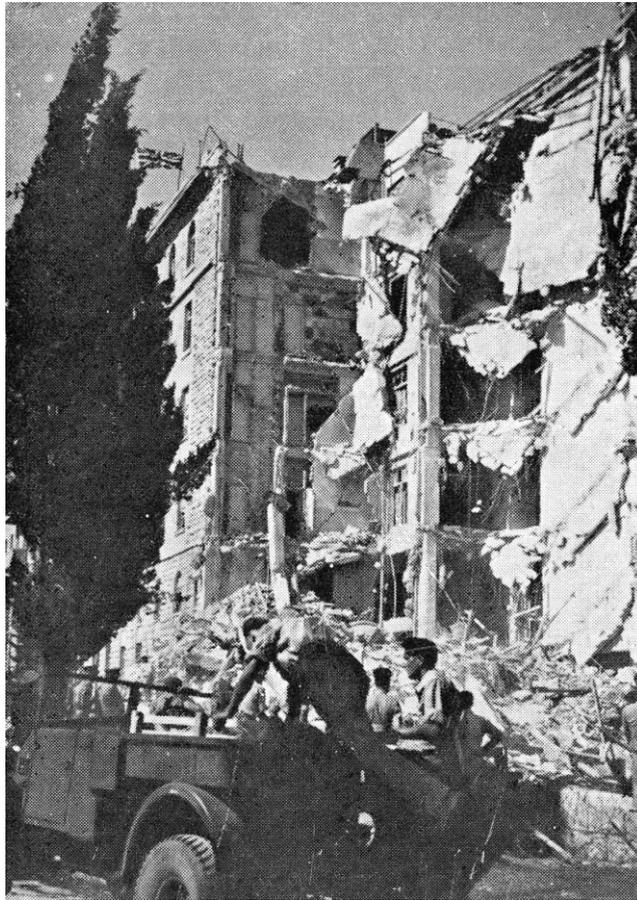
July 22, 1947."

As a result of the Black Saturday, the moderates now held the upper hand, and at a meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive in Paris on August 5, 1946, it was decided to terminate the armed struggle against the British in Palestine.

This marked the end of the glorious ten-month period, when all the Jewish forces in Palestine (Haganah, Irgun and Lehi) fought together against foreign rule.

The terminating of the armed struggle provoked considerable resentment among many members of the Haganah, and Yitzhak Sadeh (the commander of the Palmah) gave vent to this emotion in his article "Proposal and Response" in *Ahdut Ha'avoda*, October 15, 1946 (signed 'Noded' – 'Wanderer').

"There will be no capitulation, because there is nobody to order capitulation, and should such a person be found, he would find nobody to carry out the order".



The King David Hotel after the attack

When the Jewish Resistance Movement ceased to exist, the Irgun and Lehi continued the armed struggle alone. The Irgun was now both morally and materially stronger than ever before. Support for its cause grown, since the Jewish resistance movement had legitimized its activities. The number of recruits increased, and its stock of weapons and ammunition was expanded as a result of its acquisitions from British army depots. Free of the restrictions imposed by the Haganah command, the Irgun now intensified its anti-British activities.

## CONVALESCENCE

About two weeks before the attack on the King David Hotel, "Topsy" (Malka Yefet) came to my home to take me to the X-ray Institute in Balfour Street for a routine X-ray. The physician received me immediately. Again I was forced to engage in acrobatics, since the 'aeroplane' made it difficult to X-ray the arm area. After two unsuccessful attempts, the X-ray was taken and I waited patiently in the other room for the film to be developed. The doctor came in smiling and told us that the fracture had healed. We took the X-rays with us and went to neighboring Hadassah hospital, where Dr. Friedlander informed me ceremoniously that the time had come to take off the cast, which I had been wearing for the past three months. After sawing away for what seemed like an eternity, Dr. Friedlander removed the cast to reveal a thin, spindly, immobile arm. The wound was bandaged, and the arm bound up in a large kerchief. It was now time for the neurologists and physiotherapists to take over. As great as my joy was that the bone had healed and the cast had been removed, so was my disappointment that I could not move my arm a fraction.

Several days later Topsy came back and took me to Tel Aviv to see various doctors. Together with Dr. Matan we went to a neurologist, whose name I have made every effort to forget. After examining my arm thoroughly, he asked me suddenly: "Tell me, are you religious?" I was surprised at the question, and asked him why he asked. He replied that he recommended prayer, since only God could help. I left in disgust and we went to another neurologist. We started to tell him the circumstances of the injury, and he interrupted nervously: "Don't tell me your name or where you live. I will examine you and recommend treatment, but don't tell anyone that you've been to see me." I allowed him to examine my arm, for which he recommended electric shock treatment, but felt I could not rely on the advice of someone as blatantly crazy as him.

We finally found Dr. Weizer, who greeted me warmly and explained that he was opposed to the Irgun's ideology, but would do everything in his power to help me and fulfill his obligations as a physician. Dr. Weizer was born and trained in Germany. He came to Palestine in 1933 to join his sister, who was a member of Kibbutz Naan. Since he could not find employment in his chosen profession, he had worked as a laborer. After eighteen months, he left the kibbutz and moved to Tel Aviv, where he opened a private clinic in his apartment in Yonah Street. After the War of Independence, he set up the Physical Medicine department at Hadassah Hospital in Tel Aviv and later at Ichilov Hospital.

Dr. Weizer started with 'shock treatment', though of a kind different to that the previous doctor had in mind. He showed me photographs of deformed arms and explained that my arm would look like that if I did not follow the exercise regime he was going giving me. If I worked hard and persevered, I had a good prospect of total recovery. This marked the beginning of a difficult four-month period. The first exercise was to straighten my arm. Dr. Weizer, a stocky man, gripped my arm in his strong hands and began to straighten it by force. I suffered agonies, but uttered not a sound. Next thing I knew I was lying on the doctor's sofa – apparently I had fainted.

From that day on my life changed: I was no longer idle and at leisure, but busy with painful physiotherapy. Once an hour I used my healthy arm to exercise my fingers and elbow for ten minutes. The idea was to bend the finger or elbow until I could endure the pain no longer and only then to relax it. The pain was overshadowed by the hope that I would be able to use my injured arm again. Every afternoon Shulamit Ben Yaakov would come to my home and give me electrical treatment for half an hour to stimulate the nerves. She also gave me calcium injections to strengthen the bones. One day she arrived wearing a dress, which buttoned down the front and mischievously set

me a task: "I will allow you to unbutton the dress," she said, "on condition that you do it with your right hand." I immediately set to it, but it was quite beyond my powers, and after the third button I gave up. From then on, I practiced unbuttoning daily, but Shulamit never appeared in the same dress again.

I started the exercises early in the morning and continued until bedtime. Twice a week, I went to Dr. Weizer for a check-up and for 30 minutes of intensive treatment. During one of the visits, I met Yehoshua Saban (known as 'Pop' – short for “popitas”, or sunflower seeds, of which he was very fond), a cheerful and good-looking young man who was always in high spirits. Yehoshua had been wounded in the left hand during the attack on the Ramat Gan police station and also needed physiotherapy. Since my injury was in the right arm, we complemented one another in various exercises and in handling the medicine ball. As our conditions improved, swimming was added to the regimen. It was a pleasant contrast to the tortures we had suffered at the hands of Dr. Weizer and we set out daily for the Galei Gil swimming pool in Ramat Gan (now the site of the Diamond Exchange). Yehoshua was fond of mischief and, after tiring of swimming, would start pushing any nearby girls into the water. On one occasion he caused such a scandal that we felt we couldn't to return to the pool and started to swim at Tel Aviv beach instead.

My condition improved steadily, and I was eager to return to action. The injured arm was still too weak to handle a rifle, but a pistol can be fired with one hand. It was finally decided that as long as I was receiving medical treatment, I would be seconded to the Revolutionary Propaganda Unit, and after making a full recovery, I would return to the Fighting Force. I was not particularly pleased, but preferred this option to continued inactivity. I was appointed commander of a unit and worked enthusiastically to educate a new generation, which would some day join the ranks of the Fighting Force.

## THE GALLOWS

Despite the disbanding of the United Resistance, the struggle against the British was gaining momentum. Military operations, which became increasingly daring, not only undermined British prestige, but also disrupted government and order in the country. The military authorities decided to react vigorously and numerous death sentences were meted out to underground fighters they apprehended. Heavy public pressure was brought to bear, in Palestine and throughout the world, on the British government to pardon the condemned men, but to no avail. The Government was determined to carry out executions, hoping thereby to deter the Irgun and Lehi from continuing their attacks.

### DOV GRUNER

On Tuesday, April 23, 1946, a military vehicle approached the Ramat Gan police station, and let off about a dozen 'Arab prisoners', escorted by 'British soldiers'. The 'prisoners' were taken into the station, and the 'British sergeant' in charge of the convoy informed the desk sergeant that the Arabs had been caught stealing at the Tel Litvinsky army camp (present-day Tel Hashomer) and were to be detained. While the desk sergeant was deciding what to do with them, the 'prisoners' and their escorts took out revolvers and ordered the policemen to put up their hands and file into the detention cell. Within moments, the unit had taken over the police station, and then moved towards the armory, blasting open the door. Meanwhile the 'porters', led by Dov Gruner, had entered the building. They removed the weapons from the armory and loaded them onto a waiting truck. A policeman on the upper storey noticed the activity, and directed machine-gun fire at the attackers. He shot the Irgun Bren gunner, who had taken up position on the balcony of the building opposite the police station, and then fired at the

'porters', who continued to load weapons while bullets whistled around them. When they had completed their task, the truck drove off to an orange grove near Ramat-Gan. The commander of the operation, Eliezer Pedatzur ("Gad"), counted his men and discovered that three were missing: the Bren gunner Yisrael Feinerman, who had been shot and killed while covering the 'porters' from the balcony of the building opposite the police station; Yaakov Zlotnik, who was fatally wounded while running to the truck (his body was discovered hanging on the barbed wire) and Dov Gruner, who had sustained jaw injury, had fallen into the trench beside the fence and was taken captive. The British took Gruner to Hadassah hospital in Tel-Aviv, where he was operated by Professor Marcus. Gruner spent twelve days at Hadassah, with an armed guard posted outside his room around the clock. From there, he was transferred to the government hospital in Jaffa, and then to the medical division of the central jail in Jerusalem.

On January 1, 1947, seven months after his arrest, Gruner's trial opened at the military court in Jerusalem. He was charged with firing on policemen, and setting explosive charges with the intent of killing personnel 'on His Majesty's service'. When asked if he admitted his guilt, Gruner replied that he did not recognize the authority of the court to try him, had no intention of taking part in the proceedings, did not want translated into Hebrew for his benefit. Instead, he read a statement to the judges:

I do not recognize your authority to try me. This court has no legal foundation, since it was appointed by a regime without legal foundation.

You came to Palestine because of the commitment you undertook at the behest of all the nations of the world to rectify the greatest wrong caused to any nation in the history of mankind, namely the expulsion of Israel from their land, which

transformed them into victims of persecution and incessant slaughter throughout the world. It was this commitment - and this commitment alone, which constituted the legal and moral basis for your presence in this country. But you betrayed it wilfully, brutally and with satanic cunning. You turned your commitment into a mere scrap of paper...

When the prevailing government in any country is not legal, when it becomes a regime of oppression and tyranny, it is the right of its citizens – more than that, it is their duty – to fight this regime and to topple it. This is what Jewish youth are doing and will continue to do until you quit this land, and hand it over to its rightful owners: the Jewish people. For you should know this: there is no power in the world which can sever the tie between the Jewish people and their one and only land. Whosoever tries to sever it – his hand will be cut off and the curse of God will rest on him for ever.

There was a silence in the courtroom after Gruner's statement. The prosecutor delivered his address and summoned witnesses. In an unusual move, the prosecutor pointed out several factors in favor of the accused: his five year's service in the British army, his good conduct during his service, his participation in fighting on the Italian front and the severe injury he suffered, which left him disabled. This statement had no effect on the judges, and after a brief consultation, the president of the court announced that Gruner had been found guilty on two charges. On the first charge, he was sentenced to be hung by the neck. The court reserved the right to determine the punishment for the second charge. Immediately after the reading of the sentence, Gruner rose to his feet and declared:

"In blood and fire Judea fell, in blood and fire Judea will rise again"

A quotation from a poem written by the poet Yaakov Cohen after the 1903 Kishinev pogroms. The quotation became the slogan of the Hashomer organization.

Dov Gruner was taken to the death cell under heavy guard, and dressed in scarlet garments. He spent 105 days in the cell, alternating between hope and despair, while leaders and public figures in Palestine and abroad interceded with the British government to commute the death sentence to life imprisonment. Heavy pressure was also exerted on Gruner to plead for clemency, but he insisted on being treated as a prisoner of war and refused to sign the request.



Dov Gruner

Dov Gruner was born on December 6, 1912, in Hungary. In 1938 he joined Beitar, and two years later immigrated to Eretz Israel aboard the Skaria, an illegal immigrant vessel organized by Beitar. After spending six months in the Atlit internment camp, he joined the Beitar company at Rosh Pina, and then found his way to the ranks of the Irgun. In 1941, he joined the British army in order to fight the Nazi enemy, and together with

his comrades in the Jewish Brigade came to the aid of Holocaust survivors in Europe. After his demobilization, in March 1946, he resumed his activity in the Irgun and joined its Fighting Force. While still on demobilization leave, he took part in the requisition of weapons from a British army depot near Netanya, and ten days later set out on his second and last operation – the attack on the Ramat Gan police station. He was 35 when he went to the gallows, together with his comrades - Alkahi, Drezner and Kashani.

## MORDECHAI ALKAHI, YEHIEL DREZNER AND ELIEZER KASHANI

Benyamin Kimchi, who was arrested after the Irgun attack on the Ottoman Bank in Jaffa, was sentenced in December 1946 to 18 years imprisonment and 18 lashes. It was the first time that an underground fighter had been given this humiliating sentence. The Irgun command took a very severe view of the sentence, and cautioned the British against carrying it out. "If it is implemented," they wrote in a leaflet which was widely distributed.

The British ignored the Irgun warnings, and on Friday, December 27, 1946, Kimchi received 18 lashes in the Jerusalem jail. Immediately afterwards, a unit of the Irgun fighters was sent into action. A captain from the Sixth Airborne Division was whipped in Netanya, two British sergeants in Tel-Aviv, and another sergeant in Rishon Lezion.

Another unit (composed of Yehiel Drezner, Mordechai Alkahi, Eliezer Kashani, Haim Golovsky and Avraham Mizrahi) set out by car from Petah Tikva on a similar mission. Not far from Wilhelma, they encountered a road-block and came under heavy fire. Mizrahi, the driver, was hit and died later. The other four were dragged out of the vehicle and taken to a nearby army camp, where they were stripped, beaten and humiliated. After

five days of torture they were taken to the central prison in Jerusalem. On February 10, 1947, 43 days after their capture and arrest, their trial opened at a military court in Jerusalem. The defendants did not take part in the proceedings, refused to answer questions and did not cross-examine prosecution witnesses. When the testimony was completed, Drezner and Golovsky rose to their feet and declared that they did not recognize the authority of the court; they considered themselves to be prisoners of war and hence the authorities were empowered to detain them, but not to try them.



כך רק

# אזהרה!

חייל עברי, שופל בשבי האויב, נידון ע"י בית-דין של צבא הכבוש הבריטי למלקות.

אנו מזהירים את ממשלת הדכוי מפני הוצאה לפועל של עונש משפיל זה.

אם הוא יוצא אל הפועל, יופל אותו עונש על קציני הצבא הבריטי. כל אחד מהם יהיה עלול ללקות 18 מלקות.

הארגון הצבאי הלאומי  
בארץ-ישראל

בסלו תשי"ז

## WARNING!

A Hebrew soldier, taken prisoner by the enemy, was sentenced by an illegal British Military "Court" to the humiliating punishment of flogging.

We warn the occupation Government not to carry out this punishment, which is contrary to the laws of soldiers honour. If it is put into effect — every officer of the British occupation army in Eretz-Israel will be liable to be punished in the same way: to get 18 whips.

HAIRGUN HAZVAI HALEUMI (N. M. O.)  
b'Eretz-Israel

The trial was brief and the sentence was handed down on the same day: death by hanging for Alkahi, Drezner and Kashani, and life imprisonment for Golovsky on account of his youth (he was 17 years old). After hearing the sentence, the four rose to their feet and sang Hatikva anthem. They were taken to the central jail, where Dov Gruner was in the death cell. Forty-eight hours later, General Barker, who left the country the same day, confirmed the sentences.

Public figures and institutions tried hard to have the sentence commuted. A petition was submitted, signed by 800 residents of Petah Tikva (three of the defendants lived there), and an appeal was submitted to the Supreme Court, claiming errors in legal procedure, but to no avail. It should be stressed that all these steps were taken on the initiative of public figures and relatives of the defendants. They themselves authorized nobody to act on their behalf and, like Dov Gruner, refused to sign an appeal for clemency. They even issued a public statement in which they said:

Do you not understand that your requests for clemency are an affront to your honor and the honor of the entire people? It represents servility towards the authorities reminiscent of the Diaspora. We are prisoners and we demand that they treat us as prisoners...At present we are in their hands...We cannot resist them, and they can treat us as they choose...they cannot break our spirit. We know how to die with honor as befits Hebrews.

On April 15, the British transferred the four condemned men: Gruner, Alkahi, Drezner and Kashani from Jerusalem jail to Acre prison. The move was carried out clandestinely, and the authorities hinted that they had no intention of carrying out the sentence in the near future. When their lawyer, Max Critchman,

approached the Acre prison authorities, and asked why they were being moved, he was told that "...the governor has received no instructions regarding preparations for executions, and the procedure is that the jail administration receives such instructions several days before the executions."

The next day, at 2.45 am, three British policemen and one Arab policeman came to the apartment of Nehemiah Katriel Magril, the only Jew living in Acre. Magril was a scholar, who acted as emissary to the Jewish inmates of the jail and led the prayers there on the Sabbath and festivals. He had never been ordained as a rabbi, and was known among the Arabs as 'Hakham Abu Mussa'. Ha'aretz, April 17, 1947, describes the visit:

The policemen roused Magril and asked him to accompany them to the jail. They refused to tell him the reason, and urged him to hurry; telling him that time was short. When he asked how long they would need him, they replied: 'About two hours.' He suddenly understood what was happening and refused to go, telling them to contact the Chief Rabbinate of Haifa instead. The policemen left without him.

Magril learned of the execution of Dov Gruner and his comrades a few hours later from a Jerusalem Radio broadcast.

At 4:00 a.m. Dov Gruner was awakened and taken to the execution cell. Present there were the Director of prison services in Palestine, the Governor of Acre Jail, a physician and six British officers. As was the custom in Britain and in the colonies, the prison governor acted as hangman but in violation of custom, no rabbi was present. Dov Gruner went to the gallows without religious solace, as did Yehiel Drezner, Eliezer Kashani and Mordechai Elkahi. All four were hanged, each singing the anthem Hatikva as the noose was tightened around his neck. When the muffled voices of the condemned men were

heard throughout the prison, all the Jewish prisoners rose to their feet and sang the national anthem.

**Mordechai Alkahi** was born in Petah Tikva on March 10, 1925 into a poor family of Turkish origin. At the age of 14, he went out to work to help support his family, and in late 1943 he joined the Irgun. After the training period, he was transferred to the Fighting Force, and his first experience of combat was at the Kalkiliya police station, during the Irgun operation on four police stations on Yom Kipur, 1945. He later took part in numerous operations, including the attack on the Ramat-Gan police station, where Dov Gruner was captured. All these operations took place at night; by day he continued to work in a factory. He was 22 when he went to the gallows.

**Yehiel Drezner** was born in Poland on October 13, 1922, to a religious Zionist family, which immigrated to Palestine in 1933. He joined the Beitar movement in Jerusalem at 13 and in 1940 he joined the Irgun. There he held many positions: first, in the intelligence service and then in the Fighting Force. Yehiel saw action many times, as a rank-and-file fighter and as commanding officer: including the attack on Lydda airbase; the assault on Yibne railway station and the attack on Ramat-Gan police station. At the time of his arrest, he was commander of the Fighting Force at Petah-Tivka, and was equipped with an identity card in the name of Dov Rosenbaum. It was under this name that he went to the gallows, and the British and the general public remained unaware of his real identity. He was 25 when he was executed.

**Eliezer Kashani** was born in Petah Tikva on March 13, 1923, into a large, working class family, which had been in Palestine for three generations. At the age of 13 he went out to work. On August 23, 1944, during the widespread search conducted by

the British in Petah Tikva, he was arrested as a 'terror suspect', brought to the Latrun internment camp and then sent to Eritrea with the first group of 251 detainees. In the camp he joined the Irgun, and in February 1945 he was released. In Palestine he commenced his underground activity despite his obligation to report daily to the police. He was arrested again after the explosion at the King David Hotel, but was released shortly afterwards and returned to underground activity. He was 24 when he went to the gallows.



Mordechai Alkahi



Yehiel Drezner



Eliezer Kashani

I learned of the executions from the news broadcast at 7:00 am. together with the announcement that a curfew had been imposed throughout the country. I got up from the breakfast table and went out of the house by the back door in the direction of the orange groves. My initial shock was replaced by anger and frustration. To the last moment, I had hoped that the Irgun would find a way of rescuing its members from the rope, by taking hostages or breaking into the goal. I had believed that the British would find some reason to pardon them and commute their death sentence to life imprisonment. Now the hangings were a brutal fact. My feeling was that the Irgun had to react – and immediately, not only to avenge the blood of the executed men, but to prevent the authorities from using the death sentence as a matter of routine.

Without realizing what I was doing, I found myself walking along the same path among the orange groves that I used to take with Yehiel Drezner when he was in charge of the arms depots in Ramat Gan (he had replaced Shmulik). When the British arrested his brother Zvi, Yehiel left home and became a 'refugee'. His father was summoned to the police and cautioned that if Yehiel did not give himself up, his other brothers would be arrested. Yehiel did not respond to the police demand and devoted himself to underground work. In Ramat Gan I knew him under his codename 'Aharon' and he often visited me during the difficult period when I was immobilized in a cast. Under cover of dark, we used to stroll through the groves and often talked about our personal problems. Yehiel told me how hard it was for him to be a 'refugee'. He was very lonely. He could not take a job for fear that his identity would be discovered, but did not want to stay in his room all day in case the neighbors became suspicious. And so he rose early every day and wandered for hours through the streets of Ramat Gan, waiting impatiently for

the evening and his underground activities. He was also worried about his father and brothers and feared that they would be arrested because of him. One night, he said suddenly: "Who knows when the Jewish state will be established, but if I do live to see it – I don't want medals or prizes for what I've sacrificed. I did everything out of true conviction and nobody owes me thanks. All I want is to have a family and live quietly as a free Jew in my own country."

Yehiel did not live to enjoy the Jewish state, which was set up thanks to him and his comrades in arms. From Ramat Gan he was transferred to Petah Tikva, where he changed his codename to 'Gaul', but did not change his forged identity card (where he appeared as Dov Rosenboim). A year after that conversation, Yehiel was hanged and buried under the name of Dov Rosenboim to avoid endangering his family, who were not even present at his funeral. He fought anonymously, and gave his life anonymously for his people.

## MOSHE BARAZANI

In March 17, 1947, the day on which martial law was lifted the military court in Jerusalem sentenced Moshe Barazani to death by hanging. Barazani, a member of Lehi, had been arrested eight days previously in the Makor Baruch quarter of Jerusalem, not far from Schneller camp. In a body search, a grenade was found, and he was tried on a charge of bearing arms and intent to assassinate Brigadier A.P. Davis, who was in charge of implementing martial law in the city. Barazani declared that he did not recognise the authority of the court to try him, and would not take part in the proceedings. He made a political statement, in which he said that the Jewish people regarded the British as alien rulers of their country:

In this war, I have fallen captive to you, and you have no right to try me. You will not intimidate us by hangings nor will you succeed in destroying us. My people and all the people you have enslaved will fight your empire to the death.

The trial was brief; ninety minutes after it began, the judge read out the death sentence. Barazani rose to his feet and sang Hatikva, but the police guard interrupted him and dragged him away. He was chained hand and foot and taken to the condemned man's cell, where he joined Dov Gruner and his three comrades - Eliezer Kashani, Yehiel Drezner and Mordechai Alkahi, whose death sentences had already been confirmed by the British Commander in Chief in Palestine.

## MEIR FEINSTEIN

A week after Barazani's trial, on March 25, 1947, the military court convened again, this time to try the four Irgun fighters who had been caught after the explosion at the Jerusalem railway

station. Two of the defendants, Mas'ud Biton and Moshe Horovitz, were apprehended at some distance from the station, and the Irgun command decided that they should deny any involvement in the deed. Horovitz was arrested with a bullet wound, but one of the traders at the commercial center agreed to testify that Horovitz had been in his store, had heard shots fired and had gone out to see what was happening and been wounded. The other two, Meir Feinstein and Daniel Azulay, announced that they did not recognize the authority of the court to try them, and would not take part in the proceedings. Before sentence was passed, the two made political statements. Feinstein said:

A gallows regime that is what you are trying to impose on this country, which was intended to serve as a beacon of light for all mankind. And in your foolishness and malice, you assume that by means of this regime you will succeed in breaking the spirit of our people, the people for whom the whole country has become a gallows. You are wrong. You will discover that you have met up with steel, steel forged in the flame of love and hatred, love of the homeland and of freedom and hatred of slavery and of the invader. It is burning steel, and you cannot shatter it. You will burn your own hands.

The court accepted the alibi of Horovitz and Biton and released them. Meir Feinstein and Daniel Azulay were sentenced to death by hanging. They were removed from court and taken to the death cell in the central prison in Jerusalem, where they joined Gruner, Alkahi, Drezner, Kashani and Barazani.

On April 17, 1947, the day after the hanging of Gruner, Alkahi, Drezner and Kashani, the British Commander in Chief in Palestine confirmed the sentences of Feinstein and Barazani. Daniel Azulay's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment.

## A GRENADE BETWEEN HEARTS

In the death cell in the central prison in Jerusalem, Feinstein and Barazani resolved to blow themselves and their executioners up. They wrote to their comrades in adjacent cells:

Brethren greetings. You have not done well in failing to send it to us. Who knows if by morning it will not be too late. Do not allow time to lapse. Send it to us as soon as possible. All you have been told was merely an emotional storm which passed swiftly. We are fully resolved. Our greetings to all. Be strong and so will we. M.F., M. B.

"It" referred to the two grenades which Feinstein and Barazani planned to hurl at the executioners when they came to escort them to the gallows. The idea was not new; it had been broached when Dov Gruner was in the death cell awaiting execution. The explosives were smuggled into the prison in parcels of food earmarked for prisoners who received "special treatment". When Dov Gruner was moved with his comrades to Acre prison, the explosives were left behind in the Jerusalem jail.

It was not easy for the Irgun and Lehi prisoners to carry out the wishes of their condemned comrades, but each of them knew that if he had been in their place, he would have asked the same. On the day on which they received confirmation of their request from the Irgun and Lehi headquarters, the prisoners started to prepare the grenades. They sliced off the top of an orange, scooped out the fruit and filled the space with gelignite and small metal strips. Into this they inserted detonators connected to a fuse. Finally, the top of the orange was replaced with thin toothpicks, so that it appeared intact.

Three times a day, the condemned men were handed food prepared by inmates who worked in the kitchen. The prison guards, who examined the food carefully, were accustomed to the sight of oranges, and passed them through without particular scrutiny. A basket of fruit was prepared, which included two 'special' oranges. The food was taken into the cell by one of the non-political prisoners, and a note on a tiny scrap of paper hidden in the leftovers was removed from the cell:

Greetings, dear friends. We have received the "press". Everything is clear to us, and we rejoice at this last opportunity to take part in avenging our four comrades. As for us, we are convinced that our organizations will avenge us to the proper degree and in the proper fashion. But they may take us by surprise and move us to Acre, and therefore please ask outside that they prepare the same thing for us in Acre, so that we can be sure of doing it. We are strong. Shalom. M. Feinstein and M. Barazani.

On Monday, April 21, 1947, about a week after the hangings at Acre, curfew was imposed on Jerusalem and it was rumored that Feinstein and Barazani were about to be executed. At 9:15 in the evening, British officers arrived at the home of Rabbi Yaakov Goldman, chief rabbi of the prison, and asked him to accompany them to the central prison. They did not give reasons, but it was clear to all that Feinstein and Barazani were about to be hanged. Rabbi Goldman was taken into the death cell, and tried to hearten the two fighters. At the request of Feinstein, they sang the Adon Olam (the most hail and praise to God prayer). Then the two condemned men together with the Rabbi sang Hatikva, and the rabbi left with the prison governor, promising to return to be with them in their final hour.

Feinstein and Barazani did not reveal their secret to the rabbi, but urged him not to return for the execution. The rabbi was

adamant, and in order not to hurt him, the two decided to change their original plan and to blow themselves up before the hangman arrived. About half an hour after the rabbi's departure, two explosions were heard from the cell: Moshe and Meir stood embraced. The grenades were held between them, at the height of their hearts. Meir lit a cigarette, with which he ignited the fuses that Moshe held, and they died together as heroes.

On the instructions of the chief rabbi, Rabbi Yitzhak Halevi Herzog, the two men were buried on the Mount of Olives in the section of the martyrs of the 1929 and 1936-38 riots. Rabbi Aryeh Levin and Benyamin Feinstein, Meir's brother, eulogized them at the graveside.

The courageous stand of the underground fighters in their final hour won them great esteem in Eretz Israel and throughout the world. A new generation had emerged in Palestine, ready to sacrifice itself for the noble objective of liberating its people and country. The poet, Nathan Alterman, who was an opponent of the Irgun and Lehi, published a poem in praise of Feinstein and Barazani in 'Davar', the Histadrut newspaper.

**Moshe Barazani** was born on June 20, 1928 in Iraq. When he was six years old his family immigrated to Eretz Israel and settled in the Old City of Jerusalem. Moshe started work at an early age, first as an apprentice carpenter, and then in a soft drinks factory. He joined Lehi when still young, first putting up posters as a member of the youth division, and then taking an active part in the fighting unit. He was 19 when he died.

**Meir Feinstein** was born on October 5, 1927, in the Old City of Jerusalem to religious parents. He studied at the Etz Hayyim yeshiva but at an early age lost his father, and was obliged to support himself and help feed his family. At first he worked in

Jerusalem, then in farming at Kibbutz Givat Hashlosha, where he joined the Haganah. In 1944, when he was 16, he joined the British army after obtaining a forged document from the mukhtar of Petah Tikva, stating that he was 20. After his demobilization he joined the Irgun, starting out in the propaganda unit. He was then sent on an officers course, and it was while attending this that he was chosen for the mission on which he was apprehended. He was nineteen and a half when he was executed.



Moshe Barazani



Meir Feinstein

## AVSHALOM HAVIV, YAAKOV WEISS AND MEIR NAKAR

On May 28, some three weeks after the Acre prison break, the British tried Avshalom Haviv, Yaakov Weiss and Meir Nakar, who had been caught just outside the prison wall carrying weapons. Haviv and his comrades did not acknowledge the right of the court to try them, and chose to exploit the forum in order to make political statements. They did not take part in the trial, which lasted nearly three weeks, with more than 35 prosecution witnesses being called. After the prosecutor's summing up, the defendants made their statements.

The first speaker was Avshalom Haviv, who compared the struggle of the Jewish underground to that of the Irish, and said, among other things:

When the fighters of the Irish underground took up arms against you, you tried to drown the uprising against tyranny in rivers of blood. You built gallows; you murdered people in the streets; you banished some into distant lands. You thought, in your great folly, that by force of persecution, you could break the spirit of resistance of the free Irish, but you were wrong. The Irish rebellion grew until a free Ireland came into being... You wonder how it came to pass that those Jews whom you thought to be cowards, who were the victims of massacre for generations, have risen up against your rule, are fighting your armies, and when they stand in the shadow of death, they scorn it... Their courage and spiritual force are drawn from two sources: the renewed contact of Hebrew youth with the land of their fathers, which has restored to them the tradition of courage of the heroes of the past, and the lesson of the Holocaust, which taught us that we are conducting a struggle not only for our liberty but also for our very survival.

Meir Nakar, in his statement, also spoke of the 'bankruptcy' of British policy in Palestine and the collapse of a regime "whose officials are forced to live in ghettos" (an allusion to the security zones in which the British enclosed themselves).

Yaakov Weiss attacked the anti-Zionist policy of the British government and denied the legitimacy of British presence in Palestine:

Your very presence here, against which everyone protests, is illegal. This land is ours from time immemorial and for ever more. What do you, British officers, have to do with our homeland? Who appointed you rulers of an ancient and freedom-loving nation?

On June 16, the sentence was passed: death by hanging for all three.

The Irgun command ordered its Fighting Force to take hostages so as to save the lives of the condemned men, but the British ignored the warnings of the Irgun, and the pleas of leaders of the Yishuv and of many prominent people throughout the world. On July 8, the commander of the British military forces in Palestine confirmed the death sentence handed down three weeks previously. Several days later, an Irgun unit seized two British sergeants in Netanya as they were leaving a cafe. The sergeants were pushed into a waiting car and taken to a pre-arranged hiding place.

The kidnapping of the sergeants stunned not only the British, but also the leaders of the Yishuv. They knew only too well that the Irgun would carry out its threat, and feared the reaction of the British army.

As soon as the kidnapping became known, curfew was imposed on Netanya and the surrounding area, and a house to house search began. Haganah forces joined in the search, but without success. The two sergeants were held in a bunker

which had been dug in a diamond factory on the outskirts of the town, with enough food and oxygen for a lengthy period. The taking of hostages by the Irgun did not deter the British government, and in the early morning hours of July 29, the three Irgun fighters – Avshalom Haviv, Yaakov Weiss and Meir Nakar – were hanged at Acre prison. It should be noted that the decision to carry out the sentence was taken at a special session of the Cabinet in London, despite the knowledge that the decision would seal the fate of the two sergeants. Rabbi Nissim Ohana of Haifa, who was asked to accompany the three condemned men in their final hour, wrote of their conduct:

They showed no sign of fear or shock. They were very brave... I stayed with them about an hour, and when I left, they asked me to send their greetings to the Yishuv, and expressed the wish for redemption for the Jewish people. I said to them: be blessed, heroes of the nation.

The British left the Irgun no alternative, and the following day, July 30, the two sergeants were found hanged in a wood near Netanya. The Irgun hoped that this action would bring to a halt the spate of executions meted out by the British. Indeed, after the hanging of the two sergeants, no more death sentences were carried out in Eretz Israel.

The hanging of the sergeants shocked the British government and people. The press denounced the act which caused the government to re-think its attitude towards the future of Palestine. Begin writes in his book "The Revolt" that the "cruel act" was one of the events which tipped the balance in the British withdrawal from Palestine. Colonel Archer Cassett, one of the senior British Mandatory officials, said in a lecture in 1949 that "the hanging of the sergeants did more than anything else to get us out of Palestine".

**Avshalom Haviv** was born on June 18, 1926 in Haifa, and moved with his family to Jerusalem when still a small child. He joined the Irgun while in high school. When he finished school, he served for a year in the Palmach as a condition for continuing his studies at the Hebrew University (a Jewish Agency ruling obliged every high-school graduate to spend a year working on a kibbutz or serving in the Palmach). When he returned to Jerusalem, he enrolled at the faculty of humanities, and resumed his activity in the Irgun, this time in the Fighting Force. He took part in numerous military operations, the last of which was blowing up of Goldschmidt House Officers Club, where he covered for the combat unit. In the raid on Acre prison, he commanded the covering force, which continued to fight until captured by the British. He was 21 when he went to the gallows.

**Yaakov Weiss**, a Betar member from his youth, was born in Czechoslovakia on July 15, 1924. During the Second World War he posed as a Hungarian officer, and thus saved his life. In 1943, he arrived in Palestine aboard an immigrant ship which was intercepted by the British, and was interned at Atlit with the other passengers. He remained there until the prisoners were freed by the Palmach (October 9, 1945), moved to Netanya, and shortly afterwards joined the Irgun. He was assigned to the Fighting Force and took part in several operations: the assault on the army recreation camp at Netanya and the sabotaging of bridges and railroad lines. In the Acre prison-break, he was assigned to the covering unit and fought until he was captured by the British. He was 23 when he went to the gallows.

**Meir Nakar** was born in Jerusalem on July 26, 1926, to a poor family of Iraqi origin. At the age of 12, he left his studies to help support his family, and a year later he joined Betar. At the age of 17 he enlisted in the British army, after forging his birth certificate. On demobilization, in 1946, he became a member of

the Irgun. At first he was active in recruitment and propaganda work, and then moved to the Fighting Force, where he took part in several operations, sometimes with Avshalom Haviv, his commander in their final operation. He was 21 when he went to the gallows.



Avshalom Haviv



Yaakov Weiss



Meir Nakar

## MINES ON THE ROADS

One of the measures adopted by the British against the Jewish population of Palestine was to immobilize the inter-urban routes at night. A curfew was imposed on all roads from sunset to dawn, and all traffic between towns was banned. In reaction to the curfew, the Irgun decided to mine the roads so that the British would also be unable to travel freely. The mines were made in the form of milestones and were detonated by an electrical mechanism. The operators hid nearby, and when a military or police vehicle passed, the mine was detonated by pressing an electric button.

At a meeting with my superior officers, I was informed that it had been decided to involve my unit in laying road mines (at that time, propaganda units were also deployed in operations against the British). I was assigned the task of reconnaissance the Arab village of Salameh (present-day Kfar Shalem) and examining the possibility of laying mines alongside the main road near the village. I took Shabtai and Ben-Zion, two outstanding graduates of a recent course, and we set out, each armed with a revolver. At about 11:00 pm we arrived at the village, whose alleys were deserted. Suddenly two young men asked us what we were doing there. We explained that we had no intention of lingering and continued on our way to carry out our assignment. Half an hour later, when we retraced our steps, we found a group of Arabs waiting for us, summoned presumably by the two young men. Keen to avoid a clash, I told Shabtai and Ben-Zion to run towards the orange grove beyond the alley. At the corner of the alley, Shabtai slipped and fell, while we continued to run. I halted when I heard him shout, and when I saw that the Arabs were approaching him, I took out my revolver and fired two shots – the first in the air and the second towards the group. The Arabs stopped in their tracks and Shabtai rose to his feet and joined us.

We crossed the orange grove and took the path to Ramat Yitzhak in a mood of elation. However, we were soon fired on from the end of the grove. We flung ourselves down and awaited developments. The bursts of machine-gun fire ceased momentarily and I glimpsed an armed group of six men. One of them shouted to us: "Min Hada?" (Who's there?) I replied in Arabic that we were Jews. He asked what we were doing there and I replied that we were on our way to attack the British and had no intention of harming Arabs. The spokesman, apparently the gang leader, asked me to come closer so that he could check if I was telling the truth. In reply, I suggested that he and I meet halfway, leaving our friends behind us. After brief negotiations, he agreed and began to walk towards us. Ben-Zion and Shabtai urged me not to move forward, since they feared that as soon as I was exposed he would open fire at me. I explained that I saw no alternative and that this encounter could be our only chance of getting away safely. Reluctantly, I got up and walked towards the gang leader. Demonstratively, I shoved my revolver into my belt, and asked him to remove the clip from his Sten-gun. As we were talking, the other members of his gang came closer, and I motioned to my friends to join us. The tension lifted; they seemed to believe my story that we were the reconnaissance unit for a large group of Irgun fighters. The gang leader expressed his admiration for the Irgun's operations, and said that they too hated the British. The atmosphere warmed up and I began to show interest in purchasing weapons. The Arab said that they had a large stock and would gladly supply any quantity we wanted. I agreed that we should meet again to discuss details of the types and quantity of weapons and the price. When I realized that the meeting was dragging on, I explained to my companion that we had to return at once, or the entire group would come to see what had happened to us. We parted with a handshake and arranged to meet in a Jaffa cafe to continue negotiations on arms' purchase.

We moved on towards Ramat Yitzhak, and at the first bend in the road began to sprint. We were overjoyed finally to reach Ramat Gan, hide our weapons in an improvised cache and to go our separate ways.

The following day I reported our adventures to my commanding officers and asked permission to meet with the gang leader. Several days later I was summoned to a briefing on the scheduled meeting. I was given a list of weapons, which the Irgun wanted and was told under no circumstances to pay anything for the purchase. I was instructed to say that payment would be made when the goods were handed over. I set out for Jaffa feeling rather nervous. Firstly, I feared that the Arab had informed the police, who would be waiting for me in the cafe. Secondly, there was the possibility that the Arab would kidnap me on the assumption that I had brought money to settle the deal. I approached the cafe cautiously and immediately spied the gang leader sitting on a stool and smoking a nargila. He rose to greet me and welcomed me like an old friend. We sipped Turkish coffee and chatted at length. Towards the end of the meeting, we began to discuss the arms' deal. The Arab perused the list I gave him and noted down the respective price of each weapon. He said that we could have the weapons after we had paid the money. I replied that there was a danger that he would vanish with the money and not supply the goods. I proposed that payment be made on receipt of the weapons and suggested we meet in the field near Salame Road, where we had first met. He replied that if he did not receive the money in advance, we might arrive at the meeting place with a large force and seize the weapons. This sparring went on for some time until we finally arranged a further meeting, a meeting which in fact never took place.

## THE SECOND "HUNTING SEASON"

The leaders of the Jewish Agency never reconciled themselves to the existence of movements which did not accept their authority and, after the United Resistance was disbanded, they began to plan the next onslaught on the Irgun and the Lehi. However, the period of collaboration between the three movements had enhanced sympathy for the Irgun and Lehi. The public at large, including some members of the Haganah, and even some of the leaders of the Yishuv, found it difficult to stomach the sudden change of face from collaboration with the underground to condemnation of their activities and persecution of their members. No political breakthrough had yet occurred; the gates of the country were still barred, and the British navy was being deployed in the battle against illegal immigration. Ben-Gurion was in favour of reverting to the measures employed during the 'Season', including close collaboration with the British and the handing over of underground fighters to the authorities. Members of the Jewish Agency Executive, and many members of the Haganah, objected strongly to this policy. There was particularly strong opposition to the idea of delivering underground fighters to the police. A meeting of the Jewish Agency Executive therefore decided to tackle the Irgun and Lehi without the partnership of the British. In accordance with this resolution, members of the underground movements would be expelled from places of employment, from schools and even from their homes; arms depots would be raided and Irgun and Lehi fighters would be prevented from taking military action against the British. To these measures was added a widespread propaganda campaign against the underground's mode of operation.

In order to carry out a second hunting season (known as the 'Little Season'), a kind of 'secret police' was set up, composed of members of the Haganah Intelligence Service and special

units of the Haganah Field Corps. Orders were issued from headquarters to establish in each of the branches units of 10-16 people for "the fight against the dissidents". It soon became plain that the ban on co-operation with the British authorities imposed by the Jewish Agency Executive was not being honored. Informing against members of the Irgun and Lehi had ceased and they were no longer handed over to the British, but another method of collaboration was found. Every time the Intelligence Service learned of a planned underground operation, it hastened to inform the British and thus aborted it. In some cases, Haganah fighters tried to take action themselves, causing needless casualties. One such case was the affair of the tunnel to Beit Hadar (Hadar House).

Bet Hadar was located in the center of the security zone set up by the British in Tel Aviv. The British housed their headquarters in the building, and access to it was very difficult. The security zone was surrounded by barbed wire, and anyone entering was scrupulously checked. A tunnel was therefore to be dug under the building along with a quantity of explosives large enough to destroy the entire building would be transported. Before blowing up the building, the Irgun intended to warn the British to evacuate all security zones in the country. After the blowing up of the King David Hotel, and the many casualties resulting from the failure to evacuate the building, it was reasonable to assume that the British would take no unnecessary risks and would evacuate all the security zones. This in itself would be a blow to British prestige; in addition to the Irgun's proven ability to strike a blow at the nerve center of British rule in Tel Aviv. When the tunnel was only half completed, it was discovered by the Haganah and a Haganah unit broke into the storage hut where the tunnel opening had been excavated. At the entrance to the tunnel they discovered a land mine, and a note saying "danger, do not touch." One of the unit members, Zeev Werber, was a sapper and tried to

dismantle the mine. There was a sudden explosion and he lost his life.

As a result of the explosion in the tunnel, the British conducted thorough searches throughout the neighborhood. Ironically enough, they discovered a large factory producing military materials for the Haganah. This was the way the British repaid the Haganah for preventing the destruction of Bet Hadar.

With isolated exceptions, the Haganah did not succeed in foiling Irgun and Lehi operations against the British, which became increasingly bold and frequent. They did, however, prevent the Irgun from bringing their case before the Yishuv. Haganah units, equipped with truncheons and sometimes firearms, patrolled the streets of towns and villages after dark, with the aim of harassing members of the Irgun who were sticking posters.

Once the 'harassment' decision was taken, there were numerous incidents of beating-up of Irgun activists. Persons suspected of contact with the Irgun were sometimes expelled from the neighborhood or the colony where they lived.

This time, in contrast to the policy during the first 'Season', the Irgun did not exercise self-restraint, and returned blow for blow. The kidnappings and clashes continued for several months and grew worse in August and September 1947. Gravest of all was the order received by Haganah members to hand over the names and addresses of people suspected of membership in the underground to their commanding officers. These lists were open and accessible in private homes and offices, and there was the serious danger that they would fall into the hands of the British police. Even if no explicit instructions were given to deliver lists of suspects to the British, the lists could be discovered during British searches of the homes of Haganah fighters.

One hot August evening in 1947, I was summoned to a meeting of company commanders in Ramat Gan. "Amitzur"

(Bezalel Amitzur), who was then a member of the high Command, surveyed the situation. There were two main subjects on the agenda: the 'Little Season', which had gained momentum, and the discussions of the UN Special Commission (UNSCOP) appointed to examine the Palestine problem and submit recommendations to the Assembly.

Discussion of the 'Little Season' was stormy and continued into the night, since assaults on Irgun members were on the increase and it was time to decide on defensive and retaliatory measures. When the meeting ended, I was asked to stay behind, and after all the others had gone, Amitzur informed me that 'Delek' (the Irgun's intelligence service) had received a list of Irgun suspects prepared by the Haganah, which included my name. Amitzur told me that it was decided to transfer me to Jerusalem, where I could hide from both the police and the Haganah Intelligence Service. The next day, I left my home in Ramat Gan and moved to Jerusalem.

## PART TWO

# JERUSALEM

## REFUGEE IN JERUSALEM

My parents had moved from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv when I was five. We used to visit Jerusalem three times a year: during the Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot festivals, thereby observing the ancient pilgrimage tradition. I remembered Jerusalem as a festive city, with people in their best clothes praying at the Western Wall.

I was happy to return to Jerusalem, despite the circumstances. This time I had not come to celebrate, but as a 'refugee' fleeing the British. I had to conduct myself with great caution to avoid being conspicuous. I invented two cover stories to explain my stay in Jerusalem: one for my family and friends and the other for the police. I would tell my family that I had come to study at the Hebrew University, and the British that I had come to stay with my grandparents.

My first step on arrival was to find a suitable place to live and to continue my activity in the Irgun without arousing suspicion. The room would have to be in a quiet neighborhood, where the British presence was not felt. The room should be easily accessible and, more importantly, provide an escape route in times of danger. I refused to take a room offered to me by my commanding officer, since I did not want even my fellow-fighters to know where I lived. Finally, after an intensive search, I found a room, which suited me. It was in the Ahvah quarter, (near Mea Shearim) in the home of Chaya and Yaakov Hoffman – an elderly couple, childless, quiet and warm. The husband was a book-keeper in a religious institution, who in his leisure time studied Torah, while Mrs. Hoffman was a housewife. They had a modest income, and had decided to rent out one of the three rooms in their apartment to bring in a little extra money. I explained to them that my studies at university required a great deal of extra study, which I would do at friends' homes, so I would often return home late. I assured them that I would not

invite friends back to my room so as not to disturb them. I moved into their apartment with my few belongings. The room was quite large and furnished with a bed, a small table, two chairs and an old closet. Its great advantage was the door leading to the courtyard, which could serve as an escape route. Ironically enough, the room was very close to my childhood home in the Geula quarter.

The conditions of underground life in Jerusalem were very difficult. It should be recalled that Jerusalem was the capital of British rule, location of the Mandate government offices, the British army headquarters, the CID headquarters and the residence of the High Commissioner. Naturally enough, the city was the arena for underground attacks on British targets. Some of the most daring operations were carried out in Jerusalem. The central CID offices in the city were blown up twice; a whole wing of the King David Hotel, where government and army offices were housed, was destroyed; the Schneller camp was attacked at the height of the martial law imposed on the city etc. As a result of these attacks, the British adopted special security measures, which greatly hampered underground activity. They set up security zones, known popularly as Bevingrads (named after Bevin, the British Minister for foreign Affairs), and surrounded them with high barbed wire fences. There were permanent guards at the gates, and all those going in and out were thoroughly checked and searched. In addition, army and police units patrolled the city, on foot or by vehicle. From time to time, the army closed a section of a street and conducted spot searches of passersby. And as if that were not enough, the British frequently imposed curfews on the entire city from 6:00 pm to 6:00 am.



### Queen Shlom-Zion Street

In addition to these difficulties, Jerusalem had another major drawback. Surrounded by bare hills and hostile Arab villages, it had no suitable hinterland for underground activity, like the abundant orange groves in the center of the country. It was hard to hold meetings in open terrain, since every movement immediately aroused suspicion and the British were liable to arrive swiftly. Meetings were generally held in rooms specially rented for that purpose. To avoid drawing attention to ourselves, we were careful to meet only in small groups and then infrequently. Weapons' training was also held in rented rooms, and restricted to small light arms – revolvers and submachine-

guns. For rifle or Bren gun practice, it was necessary to send the fighters to one of the Irgun units on the coastal plain. In military actions in Jerusalem, we used mainly revolvers and submachine-guns; when greater firing power was required, Bren guns were used.

It was very hard for me to adapt to the conditions in Jerusalem, particularly after the relative freedom I had previously enjoyed. Ramat Gan was surrounded by orange groves into which the British rarely ventured. They served as our meeting point, the place from which we set out on military operations, and to which we later returned. There we dug our arms' caches, and the packinghouses served as training centers. We were totally at home in the groves, and at night we moved around without fear of surprise visits from the police or the army. Jerusalem, with its narrow streets and crowded neighborhoods, necessitated far greater caution and stealth, and took a great deal of getting used to.

Since I was not known in Jerusalem, I was given the task of renting new rooms for our meetings, and I found the first of these in the Nachlaot quarter. The room could be reached after walking through the maze of alleyways that characterize the quarter, which meant that it was inaccessible to the motorized British units. The room itself was built on pillars in a closed courtyard, and hence we called it the 'attic'. The owners – simple, pleasant people – lived nearby. We sealed the deal with a handshake and agreed to pay two months rent in advance. We furnished the room with a table with a secret drawer, several chairs and a metal bed covered with a thin woolen blanket. I often used the 'attic' and became friendly with the owners. One autumn day I held a meeting in the 'attic' and afterwards stayed behind to make up some lists. I was absorbed in my work, and did not notice that a curfew had come into effect. I did not want to take unnecessary risks and decided to sleep there. It was a cool night and the thin blanket did not

keep me warm. I lay there, shivering, unable to sleep. Suddenly I heard a tap on the door and leapt out of bed, thinking that someone had come to arrest me. Then I heard the voice of my landlady, who was standing outside my door with a large feather quilt. She told me that she had been saving it for her daughter's marriage, and that it had never been used. That night the quilt warmed my bones, whilst my heart was warmed by the concern of this kind and gentlewoman.



**Around the Russian Compound**

One day, as I made my way along a Jerusalem street, I came across a roadblock and was asked by a British soldier to show my identity card. After he had examined it closely, he decided to hand me over to his officer. Though I feared the worst, I tried not to appear nervous. The fact that I was not the only one being sent for further examination reassured me somewhat. The officer asked me what I was doing there, and I told him that I had come to visit my grandparents. He asked me for their name and address and then told me to stand aside and wait. (The other people had meanwhile been released). I was then summoned for further interrogation. This time the questions revolved around the situation in the country, and the officer asked me for my political views and my opinion of the underground movement. I said something noncommittal and then my interrogators held a consultation, watching me to see how I reacted. Finally the officer outlined the gravity of the situation in Jerusalem and advised me to leave the city as soon as possible. I thanked him for his advice, took my identity card and hurried away.

I reported the incident to my superiors the following day and they decided that I should leave the city for a time. Since I was afraid to return to the coastal plain, I decided to join an organized trip to the Negev. We drove along the dirt roads of the Negev, and visited the new Jewish settlements in the region. We also visited the town of Gaza, and on our way back stopped at the Bet Govrin caves. I was enchanted by the vast spaces of the Negev, but the caves made a special impression on me. I thought that if they had been closer to a Jewish settlement, we could have used them to conceal arms and even for training sessions, as our forefathers had probably done when they fought the Romans. The trip helped me to relax and I returned to the city with renewed enthusiasm for underground work.

## THE BRITISH BRING THE PALESTINE PROBLEM BEFORE THE UN

Before the Second World War had come to an end, the Irgun and Lehi stepped up activity against the British rulers of Palestine, focusing their attacks primarily on civilian targets. From May 1945 they also directed their efforts against the British army. To safeguard government and military installations, Britain was forced to augment its forces in Palestine to such an extent that by the end of the year there were 100,000 British troops and policemen in the country. Maintaining this force placed a heavy burden on the British government. Exhausted from the protracted war against Nazi Germany, troops that had looked forward to demobilization were instead being dispatched to Palestine. British public opinion was highly sensitive to British casualties there and to any perceived undermining of the Mandate government by the activities of the underground.

The British press reported extensively on deaths of Mandate officials and questions were regularly asked in the House of Commons. As the underground campaign grew fiercer, and the number of British casualties increased, pressure was exerted on the government to withdraw from Palestine. The mothers of soldiers serving in Palestine were particularly active, bombarding the Colonial and the Foreign Secretary with letters demanding that their sons be brought home. These letters found their way to the House of Commons, where MPs quoted them to embarrass the government.

In addition to their problems with the Jewish underground, the British were facing severe economic troubles. The Second World War had severely undermined the economic infrastructure of the country and the government lacked the means to rehabilitate it. Soldiers returned home to austerity and

unemployment, to food and clothing rationing. There was not enough fuel to meet consumer needs in electricity and transportation. To add to these difficulties, the winter of 1947 was of unprecedented severity. The cold and snow brought life to a standstill in town and countryside. There was no coal to heat homes and supply electricity. Factories were closed down and rail services drastically reduced. Beer production was halted and cigarette manufacture curtailed. Britain, with its vast coal reserves, was forced to pay out its limited foreign currency to import coal from the United States. Churchill, then leader of the opposition, declared in his speeches in the House that post-war Britain was too weak to bear the burden of fighting the underground movements in Palestine. He argued that Britain's interests in Palestine were not so vital as to justify maintaining one hundred thousand soldiers and policemen, a heavy load on the taxpayer. He demanded that the British withdraw without delay.

On February 19, 1947, the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, announced that he was about to hand over the Palestine problem to the United Nations. In mid May, a meeting of the General Assembly decided to appoint a United Nations Special Commission for Palestine (UNSCOP) to examine the problem and offer recommendations for its solution. The first session of UNSCOP was held in Palestine on June 16, 1947, the day on which the death sentence was pronounced on Avshalom Haviv, Meir Nacker and Yaakov Weiss, who had been caught in the raid on Acre goal. After the sentence was passed, the members of the Commission joined many leaders and public personalities in Palestine and throughout the world in appealing to the Mandate authorities to pardon the condemned men, but to no avail. The British, determined to demonstrate their strength and to suppress the Jewish uprising by force, hanged the three men a month later in Acre goal.

At the conclusion of UNSCOP's enquiry, it recommended to the UN Assembly that Palestine be partitioned into two states: Jewish and Arab, with Jerusalem under international jurisdiction.

The UN Assembly debated these recommendations on September 16 at Lake Success in New York State. At that time, I was in Jerusalem devoting all my time and efforts to the underground movement. A shortage of Irgun officers occasioned by their arrest and kidnapping by the Haganah meant that I was put in charge of two platoons and was given direct command of a unit of girl soldiers. My first meeting with the girls was held one Saturday afternoon, in a deserted thicket behind the Schneller camp. "Tehia" (Adina Hai), the previous commanding officer, arranged the girls in a line and handed over command to me. It was not easy for them to bid farewell to their well-loved officer, but there was no time for ceremonies. The meeting was brief, since I feared unwanted intrusion, and it was agreed that future meetings would be held under cover of dark. I spoke to them at length, clarifying the Irgun's stand on events at the UN and on plans if the UN decided to adopt the recommendations of the Commission. The Irgun was opposed to the partitioning of Palestine, and had expressed its views on various occasions, but inside the movement it had been made unquestionably clear that if a Jewish state were established, even if only in part of Palestine, the Irgun would lay down its arms within the territory of the state. In Jerusalem, however, which was to be an international protectorate under UN supervision, the Irgun would carry on the fight until the city became an organic part of the new state. Since many facts were still vague, we did not go into detail on the nature of the Irgun's activities in Jerusalem if and when the city became an international area. Meanwhile, we had a much more urgent problem: to prepare for imminent war with the Arabs.

One evening I assembled the girls in a deserted field near Sanhedria to discuss the situation. It was a clear moonlit night,

and the soil was redolent with the aroma of autumn. As we sat talking, a British armored car with a strong searchlight in its turret suddenly appeared at the end of the field. I ordered the girls to lie flat so as not to be caught in its beam. Suddenly, "Nurit" (Rachel Brandwein) scrambled up and began to walk deeper into the field. I was angry with her for disobeying my order, and feared that her action would give away the entire group. Fortunately, the British did not notice her and left a few minutes later. Silence fell again and Nurit returned to the group. She apologized and explained that she had acted instinctively, since she was still suffering from the trauma of hearing that her good friend "Smadar" (Esther Benziman) had been arrested that day. I cut the meeting short and escorted Nurit home.

Nurit stood out from the rest of the group. Tall, slim, attractive and intelligent, vivacious and charming, she was totally dedicated to the Irgun and carried out all assignments precisely and efficiently. Fluent in English, she was appointed liaison to foreign journalists, handing over written material to them and passing on their requests. Nurit was only 16, but wore silk stockings, and lipstick to make herself look older.

One evening I gave her some material for a journalist named Heffner, correspondent of the New York Herald Tribune, and to my surprise she asked me to come with her. The request seemed strange since I tried to avoid encountering journalists. She was insistent and finally confessed that at their previous meeting Heffner had plied her with alcohol and made a pass at her. She had fled and told nobody. I agreed to join her at the meeting. Heffner, an intelligent and quick journalist, was well acquainted with the complexities of the Palestine dispute. We talked at length and I took advantage of Nurit's good English to explain our stand. I made it clear at the beginning of the meeting that before he sent any material off for publication, he should show it to us for approval. Unfortunately, the long and

thorough article he finally wrote on the views and the plans of the Irgun was not approved for publication.

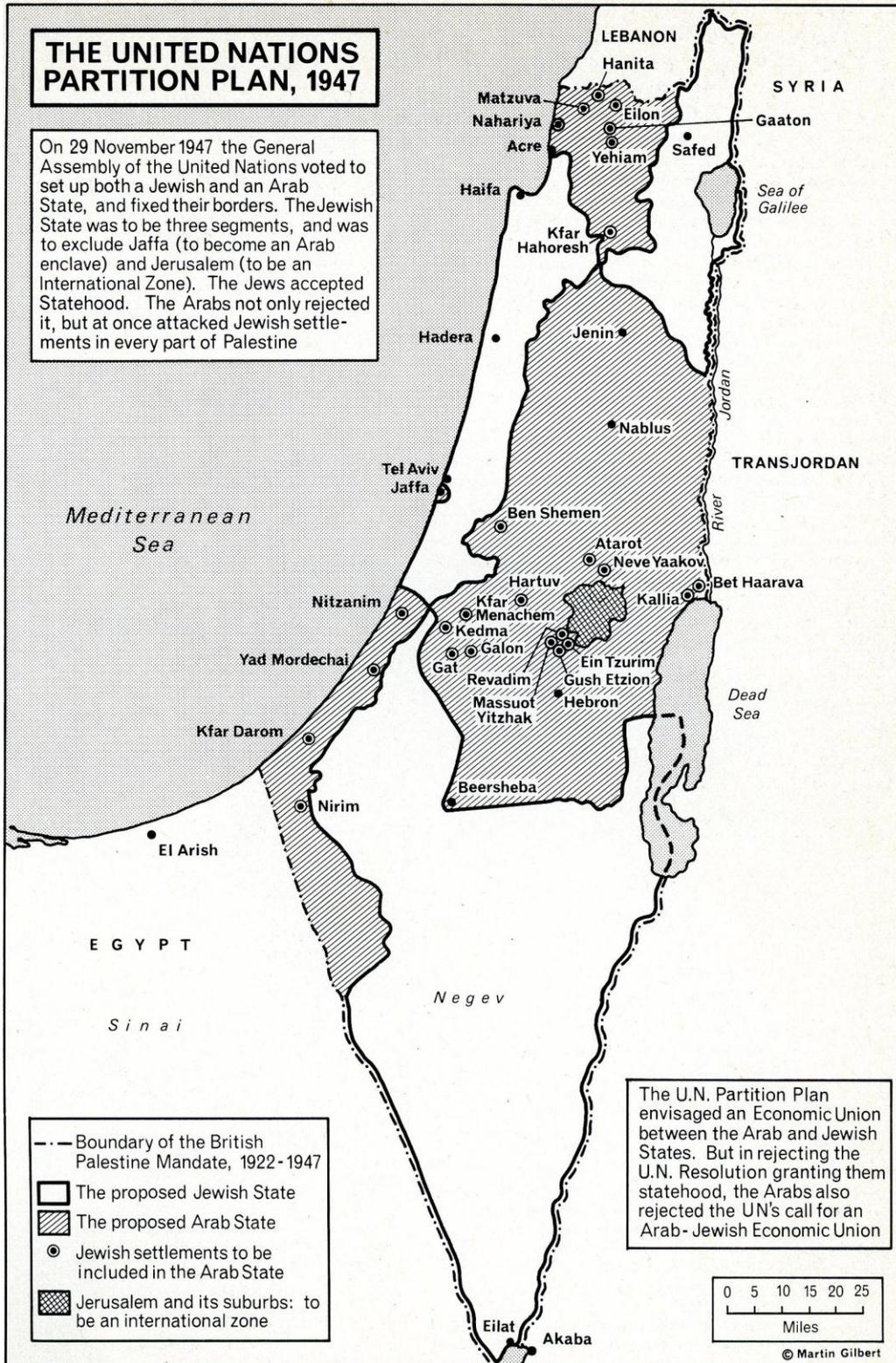
On November 29, 1947, the UN Assembly convened again to vote on the partition scheme as prepared by the sub-committee appointed for this purpose. A two-thirds majority was required to ratify the proposal. After a dramatic roll call, which had millions throughout the world pinned to their radio sets, the partition proposal was passed by 33 to 13, with 10 abstentions. The resolution created a strange hybrid: a Jewish state composed of three tenuously linked parts (eastern Galilee, the coastal plain to Ashdod, and the Negev), and an Arab state also consisting of three tenuously linked sections (western Galilee, Judea and Samaria, and Gaza, which was connected to part of the Negev) (see diagram). The Jewish state included neither Jaffa (which was supposed to be part of the Arab state) nor Jerusalem, which according to the resolution, was to be under international trusteeship.

The vote at the UN Assembly was taken at midnight on Saturday, Palestine time. That same weekend I was visiting my parents in Ramat Gan, and after the broadcast, two thoughts troubled me: the first that war would break out; the second that we were not prepared for it. While the decision to go to war was not in our hands, there was something we could do about our state of preparedness. I was assigned the task of training fighters and preparing a cadre of officers capable of absorbing the new volunteers who were expected to flock to our ranks.

I felt the weight of responsibility on my shoulders and did not join the crowds celebrating on the streets. I took leave of my parents and hastened back to Jerusalem to work, since time was short and the task pressing. When I reached the city, I made my way to the Aviv Hotel on Jaffa Street, location of the office of "Aviel" (Eliyahu Levi), my commanding officer. The hotel-owner was an Irgun sympathizer and allocated us as many rooms as we needed. As soon as I arrived, they asked

me where "Nurit" was, since she was due to read the radio broadcast that evening. No one had any idea. The tension mounted as the hour of the broadcast approached. At the very last moment, she arrived at the home of Mrs. Dost, in whose Jerusalem home the mobile Irgun broadcasting station was located. Only after the broadcast did I hear her story: on Saturday night, Nurit had been at home with her father, Levi Yitzhak Brandwein, (known as 'Gandhi'), listening to the broadcast of the UN vote. After midnight, when the resolution had been passed, the two of them went out into the street and began shouting: 'Get up everyone, we have a state.' A British armored car halted beside them and to their great surprise, the soldiers climbed down, shook their hands and congratulated them on the partition resolution. Meanwhile, men and women were flocking onto the street and moving towards the courtyard of the Jewish Agency buildings. On the way, another armored car stopped and offered them a lift to their destination. As they drove along King George Street, Gandhi asked the driver to stop and told Nurit to run home and bring the national flag. Thus they continued their journey with the national flag flying from the turret of the armored British car.

A large crowd had gathered in the courtyard of the Jewish Agency building, and there was singing and dancing. Golda Meir made an emotional speech, and towards morning the crowd dispersed to their homes. On Sunday morning Nurit had left for Tel Aviv with friends – on a motorbike – hence her late arrival at the Dost home that evening.



From: *The Arab-Israeli Conflict, its History in Maps*, by Martin Gilbert, page 38.

Whereas the Arab states rejected the UN resolution outright, and threatened to destroy the fledgling Jewish state, the Jewish Agency welcomed it, believing that the compromise agreement could be implemented without bloodshed. The Irgun, on the other hand, issued two statements the day after the resolution was passed. The first, directed at the Yishuv, said in part:

The bisecting of the homeland is illegal. It will never be accepted. The signatures of institutions and individuals on the agreement are invalid. It is not binding on the Jewish people. Jerusalem has always been and will continue to be our capital. Eretz Israel will be restored to the Jewish people.

A second proclamation, an 'order of the day' addressed to the commanders and soldiers of the Irgun, read:

The state for which we have striven since our youth, the state, which will grant the people their liberty and safeguard the future of their sons, this state remains our objective. It will not be easy to attain it. Much blood will yet be shed for its sake.

The day after the UN resolution, the first Jewish victims fell. Seven Jews were killed on November 30, four of them passengers in buses attacked by Arabs en route to Jerusalem. The Supreme Arab Committee proclaimed a three-day general strike. We knew from past experience that such a strike would be accompanied by mass demonstrations, which would end in attacks on Jews. The Haganah declared partial mobilization in order to prepare for all eventualities, but the mobilized force was too small to check the attacks. As anticipated, a large crowd of demonstrating Arabs set out on December 2 from Jaffa and Nablus Gates in Jerusalem. The crowd moved towards the New City, attacked Jewish stores in Princess Mary Street and from there surged on to Jewish-owned stores in the commercial

center. The demonstrators looted and plundered, setting fire to stores and garages. Jews fled in panic and appealed to the police and the Haganah for aid; the Haganah force was too small to check the looters, and the British did nothing to defend them. The riot continued for hours, leaving devastation in its wake. Finally, to restore calm, the British imposed a curfew on the Arab quarters and the riot died down.

The destruction of the commercial center stunned the Jewish community in Jerusalem. The spontaneous outburst of joy at the news of the UN resolution, gave way to concern and apprehension. Anger was directed at the British who had watched passively as the Arabs rioted. Worse still, when armed young Jews had arrived, they were arrested by the British and their weapons confiscated. There was also disappointment that the Haganah forces had not succeeded in forestalling the attack on Jews.

The Arabs, encouraged by their success in the commercial center, moved on to attacks on Jewish transport in Jerusalem. Arabs attacked a Jewish bus, on its way from Talpiot to town, from the Baka quarter; another bus, on its way to the Jewish quarter of the Old City, was attacked at the entrance to Jaffa Gate. From urban attacks, the Arabs progressed to raids on inter-urban traffic. Arabs in the Arab town of Ramleh set upon a bus, which set out from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. The route to Jerusalem became dangerous – the initiative always in Arab hands.

And what was the Jewish reaction to these murderous attacks? The leaders of the Yishuv believed that restraint would calm things down and prevent the armed struggle from gathering momentum. The Irgun believed otherwise and, subsequent to the bloody scenes in Jerusalem, broadcast the following statement on Kol Zion Halohemet (the Irgun radio station):

[...] Not only were Jews injured and thousands of pounds worth of damage done to Jewish property in Jerusalem. Our national pride was injured as well. Once again we became 'protected Jews' as British troops pretended to defend us...

Several days later, an Irgun leaflet was distributed in Arab settlements. It explained that we were not seeking war and that our hand was extended in peace. However, the leaflet contained a grave warning that if the Arabs did not cease their acts of hostility, retaliation would follow swiftly.

The Arabs did not heed the Irgun warnings, and continued to launch onslaughts on inter-urban traffic and isolated Jewish settlements. While the Haganah added escorts and guards, the Irgun launched acts of retaliation.

The Arab acts of hostility did not cease; in December 1947 alone, some 184 Jews were killed throughout the country.

## THE IRGUN IN JERUSALEM PREPARES ITSELF

Feverish discussions were held at the Irgun headquarters in Jerusalem on its role in the imminent war. Since we were now totally cut off from the coastal plain, all the decisions taken were at the local level. HQ was faced with two central problems: the serious lack of weapons, and the fact that Irgun training was not adapted to conventional warfare. Whereas the equipment problem was dealt with at the national level, the question of training was under regional jurisdiction. It should be recalled that since we were still operating under clandestine conditions, we were basically equipped with revolvers and submachine-guns. It was very difficult to use rifles in Jerusalem, and machine-gun training was usually carried out in Irgun units on the coastal plain.

I was given two assignments: to organize courses where both officers and troops would learn to use rifles and Bren guns and to prepare a cadre of officers able to train the many volunteers who would flock to the Irgun. I had to find suitable locations in which to hold rifle-training sessions without attracting the attention of the British and to find ways of transporting and concealing the weapons. My most worrying problem, however, was my right arm. Since my injury in April 1946, my arm had improved considerably, but I still could not pull the spring of the Bren gun. I was determined to make a supreme effort to overcome this impediment and practiced for hours on one of only two Bren guns in Jerusalem. I was often reduced to despair, but finally my persistence paid off. I immediately began organizing the courses, firstly for commanders and then for the rank-and-file. We tried holding the training sessions in our meeting rooms, but when they proved too small, I gave the boys the task of finding a better place. One of them came up with the

idea of using the synagogue in the Bukharin quarter, which was empty from the end of morning prayers till the afternoon service. We obtained the keys, brought in the weapons and held a series of training sessions from eight in the morning to three in the afternoon. Throughout the sessions we left guards outside the synagogue to warn us of approaching danger. One day, the guard came running to say that someone insisted on entering the synagogue. We hid the rifles in the Holy Ark and pretended to be studying. The person came in and explained that it was a family memorial day, and that he wanted to light a candle in the synagogue. Before he left I told him who we were and swore him to secrecy. He wished us well and left.

On Saturdays we had to find an alternative meeting place. One of the commanders, Shlomo Shvebel ("Zvi"), worked in a bakery owned by his father and suggested we meet there. The bakery was spacious and the heat from the oven made it a pleasant haven on cold Jerusalem days. Training that first Saturday we heard knocking at the door. We rushed to hide the guns under sacks of flour before opening the door to a group of women who said they had come to collect the Sabbath cholent (stew), which had been put in the oven on Friday. I explained that I was the watchman, and they left with their cooking pots. When the danger had passed, our friend Zvi arrived and apologized for having forgotten to inform us of this minor detail.

The task of organizing officers' courses was more complicated. I had to find a place where a group of 16 people could spend the entire day for a period of some six weeks. Again Shlomo Shvebel provided the solution. He told me that his friend, Carmeli Baron, had an apartment in Kiryat Shmuel, which he was willing to place at our disposal. The story seemed somewhat unlikely, and I went with Zvi to meet him. Carmeli told me that he was about to leave Jerusalem, and had decided to hand the apartment over to us. When I asked to whom it belonged, he explained that the entire building belonged to his

father, and the apartment on the ground floor had been given to him as a gift. The story sounded convincing and I was relieved to have found a place. Only later did I discover that not only had Carmeli's father not given his approval, but that he in fact knew nothing about the arrangement. Carmeli had given us the apartment to get back at his father after an argument. Be that as it may, we settled into the little apartment, which we called the villa, moved the furniture onto the balcony and set to work.

Throughout this period I continued to live in the home of Chaya and Yaakov Hoffman, who had gradually come to realize that I had nothing to do with the Hebrew University. I got up early and returned home late, tried hard not to disturb them and would rarely eat at home. Realizing this, Chaya would often wait for me to go to the bathroom and would then place a steaming cup of coffee and several slices of cake on my table. She was back in bed before I could thank her.

Once we started using the villa in Kiryat Shmuel, I used my own room less. There were two rooms in the villa, one large and the other small. During the day activities were conducted in the larger room, and at night we split up as follows: the 12 boys spread blankets on the floor of the large room while the four girls slept in the smaller room. Since there was no room left for me in the boys' room, it was unanimously decided that I would sleep with the girls. Not without its obvious attractions, this arrangement had one significant drawback: I was repeatedly being asked to avert my eyes whilst the girls dressed and undressed. The morning routine was particularly complicated, since seventeen people had to make do with one small toilet in the bathroom. I introduced a very strict arrangement, according to which everyone was allocated just five minutes. We got up at 5:00, and by 6:45 everyone was standing in line ready for the morning run. Classes began at 8:00 and lasted until late in the evening. Since we lacked suitable cooking facilities, we ate

sandwiches three times a day. On Saturdays, the trainees were given leave and could finally get a hot meal.



### Training with a Bren gun

One day the guard outside the villa informed me that he had noticed a suspicious movement on the second floor of the house opposite. The next day one of the trainees told me that he had the feeling that someone in the house opposite was watching us, and asked permission to go check. Three trainees went over and returned triumphantly half an hour later: a woman lived there alone, but they had found a suspicious Armenian from the Old City there too. They confiscated his revolver and cautioned him against returning to the apartment. We added the revolver to our collection, and I went to town for a meeting at the regional headquarters. When I returned, I was shocked to see the villa surrounded by Haganah people, who were allowing nobody to enter or leave. I asked to see their commanding officer, and was directed to Zeev Shickler. I introduced myself and Shickler explained that the Armenian was in fact a Haganah

informer and that we had no right to confiscate his revolver. I explained that my boys had been acting under orders, and that if he lifted the siege, I would sort the matter out. We began negotiating what should come first – the return of the revolver or the lifting of the siege. Finally Shickler called his men off, and I went into the apartment and gave back the revolver. But that was not the end of the affair. Shickler returned shortly afterwards and told me that the woman had been deeply insulted by the search and would only be placated by a personal apology. We subsequently went up to her apartment together and expressed sufficient remorse for her to feel considerably better.

The high point of the course was the target practice, which we conducted at the abandoned Arab village of Sheikh Bader (where the Knesset building now stands). We fired live ammunition from all the firearms in our possession, which included rifles, submachine-guns and revolvers. We were so excited finally to be practicing that we used up far too much of our supply, leaving precious little in the event of attack. After completing the practice, we marched through Rehavia singing and cheered on by residents.

When we reached Kiryat Shmuel, a military truck drove by with five armed British soldiers on board. I immediately ordered my group to halt and to remain as calm as possible (we could not attack since we did not have enough ammunition). The only thing to do was to stand still and await developments. I guessed that the British would think we had plenty of ammunition, and since we outnumbered them (seventeen to 5), would refrain from attack. We stood there for several long minutes until the British finally decided to continue their journey.

When the course ended, we had a pleasant surprise. One of the trainees, "Yona" (Moshe Lerman) was friendly with the Feferberg family, who owned the well-known restaurant of that name. Yona told one of the Feferberg sons about the

sandwiches we had been eating throughout the course, and how we had not had a hot meal for more than a month. (It should be recalled that the siege of Jerusalem had begun and food was in short supply). Shlomo Feferberg took pity on us and at the end of the course invited the whole group to his home for a lavish meal.

Years later, when I was married to Nurit and our eldest son was three, we were looking for a suitable kindergarten for him. One of our acquaintances highly recommended 'Chaya's kindergarten' in Kiryat Shmuel, not far from our home. When we went to register him, we were taken aback to discover that the kindergarten was located in the villa. We had come full circle: little Rami was studying in the building where his parents had trained for the War of Independence.

## The Security Situation in Jerusalem Deteriorating

In January 1948 fighting became fiercer throughout the country, with Jerusalem suffering the severest crises. The city was connected to the coastal plain by a narrow road twisting through the hills, with Arab villages on either side. The topography of the road was such that the Arabs could harass any traffic entering or leaving Jerusalem. In addition to this, there were several geographically isolated settlements around Jerusalem: the Etzion Bloc south of Jerusalem was cut off from the city, with the Arabs controlling the road linking the Bloc with Jerusalem. Atarot and Neve Yaakov north of the city were also isolated and the journey there was hazardous. The village of Hartuv (present-day Bet Shemesh), west of Jerusalem, was also cut off, as were Kalia and Kibbutz Bet ha-Arava on the northern Dead Sea, which were under the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem District. In Jerusalem itself, the Jewish quarter of the Old City was cut off and accessible only by convoys escorted by the British army. The remoter quarters of the city, Talpiot and Mekor Hayim in the south and Mount Scopus in the north were also isolated and access risky.

The presence of the British was one of the main factors hampering Jewish defensive action. It should not be forgotten that Mandate government offices, military headquarters and the High Commission were all located in Jerusalem. The British maintained a heavy military presence there in order to protect their institutions and to facilitate orderly withdrawal when the Mandate came to an end. They adopted a 'neutral' policy, which prevented them from intervening when Arabs attacked Jews, but somehow involved the confiscation of arms from Jewish defenders. In one instance the British seized weapons from a post in the Nahlat Shimon quarter and arrested the Haganah

fighters manning it. The following day the bodies of all four defenders were found near Herod's Gate in the Old City.

### The "35"

On January 14, the Arabs initiated a heavy attack on the Etzion Bloc. Repelled at great cost to the enemy, the Bloc defenders also suffered casualties: three dead and twelve injured. After the battle, the commander of the Bloc, Uzi Narkis, called for reinforcements of fighters, ammunition and medical supplies. Since the road from Jerusalem to the Bloc was under Arab control, HQ decided to send the reinforcements on foot. On January 15, at 9:30 p.m. a well-equipped platoon of 38 fighters loaded with ammunition and medical supplies set out from Hartuv. One of them sprained his foot en route and was sent back to base escorted by two companions; the remaining 35 continued through the hills towards the Etzion Bloc. Since the platoon had left Hartuv relatively late, it did not reach the Bloc under cover of darkness, and was subsequently spotted by the Arabs. According to Arab eyewitnesses, a large force surrounded the platoon and a fierce battle ensued lasting several hours. Despite putting up a courageous fight, all 35 fighters lost their lives in the battle. The following day their bodies were handed over to the authorities in Jerusalem and the Yishuv was plunged into deep mourning.

### The bomb near the Palestine Post building

Between January and March 1948, the Jewish community in Jerusalem suffered blow after blow. On January 1, a booby-trapped car exploded in Hasolel Street (present-day Hahavatzelet Street) near the editorial offices of the Palestine Post, the Jewish-owned English-language daily. The building

was destroyed and the printing press set alight; nearby buildings were damaged and there were some casualties

## THE EXPLOSION IN BEN-YEHUDA STREET

On February 22, another tragedy – later known as the 'Ben-Yehuda Street incident' - occurred in Jerusalem. At 6:15 a.m. a convoy of three military trucks accompanied by an armored police vehicle approached the Jewish check-post in Romema. The British soldiers prevented the guards at the check-post from examining the contents of the vehicles and the convoy continued on its way to the center of Jerusalem. It halted at the top of the Ben-Yehuda Street. The soldiers abandoned the trucks and left the site in the armored car. Shortly afterwards, Jerusalem was shaken by a mighty explosion. Four buildings crumbled, their residents killed or trapped among the debris. Jerusalem civilians were summoned to transport the wounded to hospital and find the bodies amongst the rubble. Some 50 Jews were killed, with more than 100 injured.

The city was stunned. From the testimony of the guards at Romema, it was clear that it had been a deliberate and well-planned act of sabotage on the part of the British. Whilst the Haganah command in Jerusalem decided to exercise restraint, the Irgun published a statement asserting that any British soldier or policeman found in a Jewish area would be shot. Armed Irgun groups patrolled the streets, attacking any Englishman they encountered. That day alone ten British soldiers were shot dead in Jerusalem, prompting the British to confine themselves to their security zones and to suspend their patrols. From then on, the Jewish forces (Haganah, Irgun and Lehi) roamed freely in Jerusalem without fear of harassment.



**Be-Yehuda Street after the Explosion**

### **The escape from Prison**

Two days before the explosion in Ben-Yehuda Street, a daring escape had taken place from the central prison in Jerusalem. Lehi prisoners had succeeded in digging a tunnel, which connected up to the old municipal sewage system. On February 20, eight Lehi and four Irgun fighters, all undergoing long prison sentences, climbed down into the tunnel, crawled along the sewage channel and out through an aperture outside the prison area. There friends met them and given uniforms of the Public Works Department; thus attired, they were spirited away to freedom. Some of the Irgun fighters were hidden in the home of "Gandhi" (Levi-Yitzhak Brandwein) in Yaavetz streetq, near Ben-Yehuda Street.

In my room in the Ahvah quarter on the morning of February 22, I heard that an explosion had taken place near the Gandhi home and rushed over to see if everyone was all right. I was relieved to discover that no one had been injured, and was

particularly glad to hear that Nurit had spent the night at the home of her friend in Rehavia. Things looked horrific: the apartment roof and ceiling had totally collapsed, and the dust was so thick that it was impossible to see more than a few feet away. I rolled up my sleeves and, together with the boys who had dug the tunnel in the prison, started clearing the debris in Gandhi's home. It was some time before building materials could be found to mend the roof and ceiling, and our meetings meanwhile were held perforce 'under the stars.'

From the beginning of the revolt against the British, Gandhi had been sympathetic towards the Irgun and done everything he could to help the fighters. By the time I arrived in Jerusalem, he was a fully-fledged Irgun member, and meetings of the Jerusalem Command were held in his home. He was nicknamed "Gandhi" in honor of the Indian soldiers club at the end of his alley.

In addition to serving as a meeting place for the Jerusalem Command, the Gandhi home was a refuge for any Irgun fighter who came to Jerusalem and had not yet found accommodation. For us 'refugees' it was a second home and Mrs. Brandwein, whom we called "Mother Gandhi", placed herself at risk by giving us haven. The house also served as a haven for the wounded. "Elimelech" (Yehoshua Gorodenchik), wounded in one of the Irgun operation, was such a guest. Dr. Kook, who often treated Irgun wounded, was summoned to examine him and decided that it was essential to remove the bullet lodged in the patient's buttocks. Since it was too dangerous to take him to hospital, there was no alternative but for Dr Kook to carry out the operation there and then, without anesthetic. Two people held Elimelech down whilst Dr. Kook sliced into the wound with his scalpel and successfully removed the bullet. After the operation, Nurit and I threw his bloodstained clothes into the garbage cans in the Mahaneh Yehuda market.

This was not the end of Mother Gandhi's adventures. One Friday afternoon, resting on her bed after the Sabbath preparations, she heard a knock on the door. She was taken aback when she opened it to see a policeman, who asked in Hebrew if this was the Brandwein residence. When she confirmed that it was, he asked if he could come in, since he wanted to talk to Yoram. Mrs. Brandwein was apprehensive, but remained calm and said that there was nobody there of that name. The policeman insisted and asked if she knew Yaakov (code-name of the District Commander). She again denied it and asked him to leave. He tried to enter, but in light of her behavior, decided that he must have made a mistake and left.

Mrs. Gandhi, who was alone in the house, did not know what to do. She concluded that the place had been discovered by the police, and did not know how to warn Yaakov, who was due to arrive for a meeting shortly afterwards. She was pacing up and down anxiously when he arrived. Before he could say anything, she explained the story and urged him to leave. Yaakov asked her for a description of the man and said:

**Why did you let him go? He's one of our boys who just escaped from prison!**

It was "Kabtzen", (Eliezer Sudit), one of the best-known Irgun fighters, who had been caught in one of the actions and sentenced to a long prison sentence. His friends had succeeded in smuggling a policeman's uniform into jail and he had escaped in it without arousing suspicions. He was equipped with two addresses – the Brandwein home was his first choice – but nobody had told Mrs. Brandwein to expect him. Having escaped from the prison, Kabtzen had been unable to outwit Mrs. Brandwein. He went to the second address, the Greenwald family. There

he changed his clothes and waited until he was smuggled out to Tel Aviv.

When fighting began in Jerusalem, Gandhi was placed in charge of supplies for the Irgun bases in the city. It was amusing to see him in the Betar club, which became a supply depot, with a small caliber revolver on his imposing stomach.



Levi Itzhak Brandwine



Lea Brandwine



Rachel Brandwine-Lapidot ("Nurit")

## THE EXPLOSION IN THE JEWISH AGENCY BUILDING COURTYARD

On March 11, 1948, a tremendous explosion shook the Rehavia quarter, and reverberated throughout the city. A booby-trapped car had exploded in the courtyard of the Jewish Agency building, killing 12 people and injuring 44, and causing great damage.

Investigation revealed that the Haganah Intelligence Service had been in contact with an Arab named Anton Daoud Karmilo, who was a chauffeur for the American Consulate in Jerusalem. He told the Service that he could supply them with arms and duly produced three revolvers, for which he was paid. He then told them that he could get hold of two machine-guns, rare acquisitions in those days. Anton proposed the Jewish Agency buildings as the place of assignation, since he claimed that he might be recognized and harassed elsewhere. Subsequently, Anton Karmilo arrived in the courtyard of the building on March 11. His liaison person told the guards at the gate to let him in with his car, which belonged to the American Consulate and was flying the US flag. Anton parked his car in the courtyard, got out holding a bag and handed it over to the liaison officer. Anton told him that there was only one machine-gun in the bag, and that the other one was waiting elsewhere in Jerusalem. The two set out in the liaison officer's car, leaving the American consulate car in the courtyard.

When they failed to return, the guards went over to check the American car and discovered a suspicious parcel inside. They drove the car out of the courtyard and parked it in an empty lot to conduct a more thorough check, without summoning a sapper. After the inspection, they returned the car to the courtyard, where it exploded several minutes later.

The explosion stunned both the general public and the leaders of the Yishuv. After the booby-trapped cars near the Palestine Post and in Ben-Yehuda Street, the nerve center of Jewish

government had now been penetrated. This meant that there were no secure places in Jerusalem.

The Arabs stepped up their activities outside Jerusalem as well, and attacked Jewish convoys en route to the isolated settlements around Jerusalem. On March 18 a supply convoy set out from Jerusalem for Hartuv. It included four trucks loaded with supplies, escorted by four armored cars. The convoy reached Hartuv and unloaded the supplies without a hitch, but on the way back to Jerusalem, armed Arabs attacked it. In the exchange of fire, one of the armored cars was hit and remained stranded, while the others beat a retreat to Hartuv and summoned aid from Jerusalem. Reinforcements arrived in the evening, and rescued the convoy. In the exchange of gunfire, 11 fighters were killed, and two armored cars were lost.

Two days after this catastrophe, the Arabs set fire to the Shimshon cement factory near Hartuv and fired on the settlement. The defending force at Hartuv was not able to withstand repeated Arab attacks, and on April 16 the CO Jerusalem District received permission from national HQ to evacuate the settlement.

Arabs also attacked a convoy, which set out from Jerusalem for Atarot. The two armored cars, which accompanied the convoy, hit mines, and 14 fighters were killed and 9 injured in the fierce gunfire directed at the convoy.

The Haganah's failure to repel the Arab onslaughts had an impact not only on the Jewish community in Palestine, but also on the US Government, which decided to withdraw its support for the November 29 UN resolution.

On March 19, the US representative to the Security Council announced that since there was no possibility of implementing partition by peaceful means, the plan should be shelved and in its place Palestine should become a UN trusteeship.

## THE DEBACLE AT NEBI DANIEL

In March 1948, the national HQ decided to significantly reinforce the Etzion Bloc to prepare it for siege. To this end, a large convoy was planned, carrying supplies, military equipment and fighters. Surprise tactics were deemed necessary to prevent the Arabs from attacking the convoy en route. The plan was for the convoy to leave Jerusalem at 4:30 in the morning, to reach the Etzion Bloc within an hour, to unload as rapidly as possible (within 15-30 minutes) and then to set out on the return journey. According to this timetable, the Arabs would not have time to set up roadblocks and the convoy could return safely to Jerusalem. But things did not go according to plan.

The convoy – 33 armor-plated trucks carrying supplies, 4 armor-plated buses carrying fighters to replace those at the Bloc, and 14 escorting armored cars – set out two hours late. They reached the Bloc an hour later without incident and the supplies were rapidly unloaded. However, instead of starting back to Jerusalem after fifteen minutes, the convoy was delayed for two hours. The delay was caused by attempts to load the fuselage of a damaged Piper light aircraft onto one of the trucks, as well as a stubborn bull, which was to be transported to Jerusalem.

This unnecessary delay, in addition to the delay in setting out, sealed the fate of the convoy. By the time it left, the Arabs had succeeded in setting up roadblocks en route to Jerusalem, making progress virtually impossible. Near Nebi Daniel, several kilometers southwest of Bethlehem, the convoy encountered an impassable roadblock and came to a halt. The convoy remained stranded on the road, unable to move. The Arabs, positioned on both sides of the road, opened fire, and the fighters abandoned their vehicles and took up positions in an isolated house. When word of the fate of the convoy reached Jerusalem, it was decided to order Shaltiel, CO Jerusalem district, to contact the British and ask for their help. The British were in no hurry to

respond, and troops were not sent to rescue those trapped at Nebi Daniel till the following day. The British stipulated that the Jewish fighters had to lay down their arms and return to Jerusalem unarmed. Only after all their demands had been met, did the British rescue the fighters and transport them to Jerusalem, while the weapons and armored cars were handed over to the Arabs.

Jewish casualties at Nebi Daniel numbered 15 dead and 73 wounded. 150 weapons were lost. Also lost were 10 armored cars, 4 armored buses and 25 armor-plated trucks - most of the Haganah's fleet of armored transport vehicles.

The damage to the Haganah's military capacity in Jerusalem was severe, but even graver was the blow to the morale of fighters and civilians. The defeat at Nebi Daniel undermined the self-confidence of the defenders and leaders of Jerusalem.

## JERUSALEM LEADERS ARE AT A LOSS

The battle of Nebi Daniel undermined the self-confidence of the leaders of the Jerusalem Jewish community, who sent desperate appeals for help.

On March 28, the Political Department of the Jewish Agency in Jerusalem sent a cable to the Department Head, Moshe Sharett (Shertok), who was then in New York. The cable read, inter alia: <sup>10</sup>

We feel that it is our duty to tell you the truth about the current situation in Jerusalem. The conditions vis a vis supplies and equipment are close to catastrophic. After the Etzion Bloc tragedy, we lost all the city's armored vehicles. Contact with Atarot, Hadassah and even Talpiot is problematic...There are long lines for bread. Morale of the population is very low and the

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<sup>10</sup> The History of the Hagana, vol.3, p.1403

dissidents [i.e. Irgun and Lehi] are benefiting from the situation...The Jewish Agency has almost totally forfeited its authority. We urge you to do whatever you can to expedite the negotiations for a truce in order to avert the severe threat to Jerusalem.

A day later, Golda Meir (Meyerson) dispatched a message from Jerusalem to David Ben-Gurion, who was then in Tel Aviv: <sup>11</sup>

The situation in Jerusalem is very grave. The debacle on the Etzion road has undermined public morale...the worry because of the shortage of food supplies and petrol has caused panic. As milk has vanished and bread begun to disappear... some people are saying that it is essential to ask the English to stay in Jerusalem or to seek a way of arriving at a settlement with the Arabs.

This was outdone by Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Chairman of the National Committee (and later President of Israel). In a memorandum sent at the beginning of April to members of the Jewish Agency Executive convening in Tel Aviv, he wrote: <sup>12</sup>

[...] Since I have neither the practical opportunity nor the emotional ability to leave the besieged and isolated city of Jerusalem and to come to the Executive meeting, I have decided to express my views in writing...

I will not conceal my opinion: I view our situation with dread. One of the reasons may be that I am not in Tel Aviv, in the territory of the sovereign state, but in the besieged city of Jerusalem, and that I am familiar with the situation at first-hand

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<sup>11</sup> Political And Diplomatic Documents, December 1947 – May 1948, p.559 , ISRAEL State Archives

<sup>12</sup> Plitical And Diplomatic Documents, December 1947 – May 1948, p.491, ISRAEL State Archives

and not through rumors. Every hour of the day and night I live under siege together with the one hundred thousand Jews of Jerusalem.

Jerusalem is cut off from the outside world and split from within. There has been neither access to nor exit from Jerusalem for the past ten days, except on the wings of eagles [reference to light aircraft operating between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem]. We do not see the Tel Aviv newspapers. There are no convoys, no regular food supply, no regular mail, almost no telephone connection with the outside world, and though important steps have been taken to safeguard the road to Jerusalem, there are no immediate prospects that the situation will improve. On the contrary, it may be assumed that it will worsen considerably.

And inside the city?

The city is divided. For the past four months the Old City has been under enemy rule, and the entrances are occupied by armed Arabs. Nobody enters or leaves. The Jewish inhabitants are surviving on the meager rations brought by tortuous routes with the help of the [British] army, and its defenders are courageously trying to maintain the status quo.

The northern and southern quarters are also cut off from the city.

To the north: Hadassah and the University are within range of enemy gunfire, which threatens to burn them down, and the route to the Mount of Olives cemetery is blocked. To the south – Mekor Hayim and Talpiot, Ramat Rahel and the Training Farm, are cut off and the defenders are maintaining contact with those parts of the city with great difficulty.

The entire city is cut off. We feel the shortage of supplies, and hunger has begun to make itself felt. The whole of Jerusalem is in the same situation as the Old City.

And what is more: the danger to Jerusalem is two-fold: external and internal. Let us not forget that half of the population is from the Sfaradic communities, among whom the 'dissidents' [i.e.

Irgun and Lehi] have long since found a haven. And as for the Ashkenazi community – half follow the Agudah [Agudat Israel which was opposed to Zionism]. Among all these elements national discipline is lax, and demoralization is setting in – and cannot be ignored. Violent incitement against the national institutions has begun, and there have been threats of establishing separate institutions, and even attempts to go out with white flags to appeal to the Governor and the Arabs.

It is true that great efforts have been made by the authorities in the past few days to rally forces, to organize the population into a national framework and to impose Zionist discipline, both economically and organisationally. But we cannot ignore the internal danger, and there is no guarantee that when the situation worsens, we will be able to hold fast on this front.

We need a ceasefire, first of all in order to save Jerusalem.

We are anxious for food, ammunition and people. We urgently need fortifications. We must remember that the Arabs have free access to the villages. Food, weapons and people are available to them freely, without impediments.

Without reinforcements of manpower, food supplies and arms we cannot hold on and we will be faced with a decision which will be fatal for Jerusalem, a decision which augers ruin and destruction of the Jewish community in Jerusalem...

To sum up: we are interested in an armistice, first and foremost in order to save Jerusalem. The Arabs are not interested, but the British have an interest in an armistice: they will lose nothing thereby but at the same time it is not a question of life and death for them.

## OPERATION NACHCHON

In March, the acts of hostility reached their peak, and it seemed that the Yishuv (pre-state Jewish community) could no longer endure the blows inflicted by the Arabs. The irregular Palestinian forces controlled all the inter-urban routes, the road to Jerusalem was blocked and the city was under siege. The settlements of the Galilee and the Negev were also cut off. Murderous onslaughts were launched on convoys, and the numbers of Jewish victims grew from day to day.

The dispatch of armed escorts with convoys had not proved effective, and most armored vehicles, which had been gathered with great difficulty, had been destroyed or lost. The Arabs were taking the initiative, and were aided to no small degree by the 'neutrality' of the British, who were doing nothing to maintain law and order in Palestine.

Irregular forces streamed into the country from across the border and reinforced the Palestinian units already active there. Kaukji, who had arrived from Syria at the head of a large force, operated in the north, and a large unit led by Hassan Salameh was active in the center of the country. Abdul Kadr Husseini, who used Iraqi volunteers who had crossed from Transjordan, as well as deserters from the British army, commanded the Arab forces in the Jerusalem region.

Jerusalem was surrounded by Arabs, who harassed the inhabitants of the widely dispersed Jewish neighborhoods, greatly restricting the area in which Jews could move safely. It should be recalled that although British troops had been evacuated from all the Jewish settlements in the country in February, the British remained in Jerusalem until May 14, 1948, hampering the maneuverability and defence capacity of Jewish forces. The indifference of the British and their reluctance to intervene made it easier for the Arabs to attack the Jewish community.

Over the months, the Jews of Jerusalem had absorbed blow after blow: the death of thirty five members of a convoy en route to the Etzion Bloc region; the explosions caused by booby-trapped cars, first in Hasolel Street near the Palestine Post offices, then in Ben-Yehuda Street, and finally the explosion in the office building of the Jewish Agency. Moreover, the debacle at Nebi Daniel had a crushing effect on morale in Jerusalem. At the end of March, Jerusalem had its first taste of siege. Contact with the coastal plain was severed and provisions began to dwindle. The exhilaration occasioned by the November 29 UN Resolution had given way to grave concern and disillusionment. By the end of March, some 850 Jews had been killed throughout the country (out of a Jewish community numbering 600,000), most of them in Jerusalem.

It should be remembered that most of the Jewish community in Palestine was concentrated in the coastal plain, while the Arabs were clustered on the hillsides. Jerusalem had no hinterland of Jewish settlements and was totally dependent on the coastal plain. A narrow, winding road, surrounded on both sides by Arab villages, connected the city with Tel Aviv. Only a small number of Jewish settlements were established west of Jerusalem (such as Kiryat Anavim, Maaleh Hahamisha and Motza), and they controlled only a small section of the mountainous road. The Arabs were well aware of Jewish Jerusalem's dependence on the coastal plain, and hence, every time they wanted to harass the Jews, they attacked traffic bound for Jerusalem.

The Haganah's failure to drive back the Arab attacks affected not only the Jews in Palestine but the US Government as well. And on March 19, the US representative to the Security Council announced that the UN should postpone the partition resolution, and establish a Trusteeship Regime under the UN sponsorship.

On March 31, 1948, all national efforts were directed towards liberating the road to Jerusalem. The focus shifted from escorting convoys to seizing fortified positions on both sides of the road. Jewish forces were now on the offensive and would determine the course of events.

This was the background to Operation Nachshon, whose name derived from an inspiring biblical figure. When the Children of Israel fled Egypt and found themselves helpless on the shores of the Red Sea, Nachshon Ben Aminadav of the tribe of Judah took the initiative and leapt into the Sea, whose waters parted. The breakthrough to Jerusalem was seen in analogous terms.

Operation Nachshon began on April 6 and included, for the first time, a pre-emptive military attack by a brigade-size force. Some 1,500 fighters were concentrated for the operation, whose aim was to open up the road to Jerusalem and to facilitate the transportation of food, fuel and military materials to the besieged city. It was the largest operation conducted till then and laid the foundations for further wide scale action.

The plan for Operation Nachshon was to take over all the Arab villages on both sides of the road to Jerusalem, thus freeing the road for the convoys. Deir Yassin was listed among the Arab villages to be occupied during this Operation.

## DEIR YASSIN

In mid-March negotiations had begun between and "Raanan" (Mordechai Raanan-Kaufman), Irgun Commander in the city, and Lehi Commander in Jerusalem, "Meir" (Yehoshua Zetler), leading to close co-operation between the Irgun and Lehi. This was no mean achievement in light of the resentments and rivalry, which had developed between the two organizations since the 1940 split.

It was decided to conquer the village of Deir Yassin with a joint force of the Irgun and Lehi.

Deir Yassin lies on a hill west of Jerusalem, eight hundred meters above sea level, and seven hundred meters from the Jewish neighborhood of Givat Shaul. The Deir Yassin fortified position overlooked the westerly Jewish neighborhoods of Givat Shaul, Bet Hakerem, Yefe Nof, and the road to Bayit Vegan, as well as the section of road linking Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. The village served as a halfway site for forces moving up from the Arab villages of Ein Karem and Malha in the south to Kastel and Kolonia, which overlooked the main Jerusalem – Tel Aviv road.

As mention before, Deir Yassin was listed among the Arab villages to be occupied during this Operation Nachshon. During the fierce battle for Kastel at the beginning of April, Arab reinforcements had passed through Deir Yassin on their way to the battlefield and had helped to drive out the Jewish occupying force.

When the Haganah command learned of the plan to occupy Deir Yassin, Shaltiel asked Raanan to co-ordinate the operation with the scheduled renewed assault on Kastel. Shaltiel even

dispatched identical letters to Raanan and Zetler, in which he approved the operation in advance:<sup>13</sup>

To: Raanan

From: Shaltiel

I have learned that you intend to carry out an operation against Deir Yassin. I would like to call your attention to the fact that the occupation and holding of Deir Yassin are one of the stages in our overall plan. I have no objection to your carrying out the operation on condition that you are capable of holding on to it. If you are incapable of doing so, I caution you against blowing up the village, since this will lead to the flight of the inhabitants and subsequent occupation of the ruins and the abandoned homes by enemy forces. This will make things difficult rather than contributing to the general campaign and reoccupation of the site will entail heavy casualties for our men.

An additional argument I would like to cite is that if enemy forces are drawn to the place, this will disrupt the plan to establish an aerodrome there.

When Shaltiel wrote the letter to Raanan, it was already known to the Haganah Intelligence that armed forces, including Iraqi volunteers, had entered Deir Yassin. The Mukhtar (head) of the village himself had met with the Haganah liaison in order to inform him that he had no control over the armed forces in the village, and that his promise that Deir Yassin would remain peaceful was no longer biding.

Deir Yassin was never a peace-seeking village. Akiva Azuly who served as Haganah Second in Command in the Givat Shaul area testifies that shots were fired toward Givat Shaul from time to time. On April 3, 1948 fire was opened from Deir Yassin towards the Jewish quarters of Bet Hakerem and Yefe

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<sup>13</sup> IDF Archives, Deir Yassin, File 3/281

Nof. In addition it was found that the Arabs built fortifications in the village and that a large amount of ammunition was being stored there. A few days before the attack on Deir Yassin there were reports about the presence of foreign fighters in the village, among them Iraqi soldiers and Palestinian guerrillas.

Research carried out by the University of Bir Zeit reveals that Arabs from Deir Yassin participated in violent actions against Jewish targets and that during the battle for Kastel many villagers fought with Abd-el-Kadr el-Husseini. It is also stated in the above research that ditches had been dug at the various entrances to the village, and that more than 100 men had been trained and equipped with rifles and 2 Bren guns. There was also a local guard force at the entrance to the village.

The armed forces, which had taken over the village, constituted a grave threat not only to the small airfield, which was to be constructed nearby, but also to the adjacent Jewish neighborhoods and to vehicles on the main road to the coastal plain.

About a week before the operation, I was summoned to a meeting at regional HQ, attended by Raanan "Giora" (Ben-Zion Cohen), who had been appointed commander of the operation. Raanan explained that the capture of Deir Yassin had both military and political objectives. Militarily speaking, the aim was not only to free the western suburbs of Jerusalem from the threat of Deir Yassin, but also to clearly seize the initiative for once. Occupation of the village would demonstrate to the Arabs that the attacker could also be attacked. It would elevate the morale of the people of Jerusalem and restore their self-confidence.

Politically speaking, the operation would mark a change in conception and would alter the direction of the war. Action would no longer be reactive, but proactive, with the intention of holding onto battle gains. The world would see that the Jews

were not willing to relinquish Jerusalem, but prepared to fight for it.

I was obliged to curtail my participation in the course then taking place at the villa in Kiryat Shmuel in order to devote my time to preparations for the operation. At a meeting held in Gandhi's home, where the Irgun's regional command was housed, we had a great surprise: Raanan opened a parcel containing new home-made Sten guns which had arrived from Tel Aviv. The fact that the Irgun had progressed to the point where it was capable of manufacturing its own weapons was considered a significant development. Living in Jerusalem under the shadow of the British occupation, we found it hard to grasp that the coastal plain had been enjoying autonomy for the past few months (in accordance with the UN resolution, the British had left the area on February 1, 1948). Gandhi immediately organized wineglasses, and Mother Gandhi opened a barrel of homemade pickled cucumbers. We drank a toast and gorged ourselves on the delicacies laid out before us. Merry from the wine, we asked permission to fire a few rounds from one of the new Stens. Raanan feared that the firing would place us at risk (Gandhi's apartment was in the center of town), but he succumbed to the pressure and eventually allowed us to fire three shots. I was awarded the great honor: we went out onto the balcony and I fired a single shot. When I then set it to fire rounds, it once again emitted a single bullet. This malfunctioning was to recur often, causing us great frustration.

Returning to the villa late at night, I thought to what a pity it was that they hadn't sent us Bren guns instead of the Stens. Didn't they understand that the underground days, when the submachine-gun was our chosen weapon, were long gone, and that we now needed heavy machine-guns?

Two days before the Operation we held a daytime briefing with all the section commanders, and later went out on a night patrol. At the first meeting, I made the acquaintance of "Avni"

(Yosef Avni-Danoch), who had recently been released from the Latrun detention camp. His courage in actions against the British had earned him the nickname "Abu Jilda", after a notorious Arab brigand of the 1930s. At the briefing location, at the far end of Bet Hakerem, Giora explained the plan of action and the role assigned to each of us. That night we patrolled the route we were to take during the operation, coming very close to the village without attracting attention. We halted only when the dogs began barking, since we feared that they would rouse the guards and we wanted to avoid an exchange of gunfire. The fact that we had succeeded in coming so close to the houses of the village inspired us with confidence and convinced us that the battle would be brief and uncomplicated.

## GOING INTO BATTLE

On Thursday, April 8, about 80 Irgun fighters assembled at the Etz Hayim base (the Lehi met separately at Givat Shaul). This was the first time that so large a number of underground fighters had gathered openly, without fear of British policemen or soldiers. The atmosphere was festive and our spirits were high; at last we were on the offensive. The fact that two underground movements were collaborating increased our sense of security and solidarity, and in honor of the event we chose the password "Fighters Solidarity" (Ahdut Lohemet).

Raanan, Commander of the Irgun in Jerusalem, opened the meeting. Raanan, tall and impressive, had come to Jerusalem from Petah Tikva, where he was on the wanted list. Raanan surveyed the strategic plan, aimed at liberating the whole of Jerusalem and annexing it to the Jewish state. He emphasized that this was not a punitive action, but the conquest of an enemy target, and that we must avoid causing unnecessary injury. He stressed repeatedly that we must not harm old people, women or children. Moreover, any Arabs who surrendered, including fighters, were to be taken prisoner and

not hurt in any way. Raanan related that in order to prevent superfluous casualties, it had been decided that an armored car equipped with a loudspeaker, which would enter the village ahead of the troops before they opened fire, would launch the operation. By this means the villagers would be informed that the village was surrounded by Irgun and Lehi fighters, and would be exhorted to leave for Ein Karem or to surrender. They would also be informed that the road to Ein Karem was open and safe.

"Gal", Irgun Operations Officer in Jerusalem, spoke after Raanan. He explained that the objective was to occupy the village and to hold the position. The plan was to attack in two spearheads: a force of two Irgun platoons would attack from the Bet Hakerem direction, and a platoon of Lehi would attack from Givat Shaul. Another small force, consisting of a section commanded by "Menashe" (Yehuda Treibish) was assigned to capture the fortified position south of the village (mount Herzl direction), with the aim of preventing Arab reinforcements arriving from Ein Karem and Malha.

At 2 a.m. the Irgun fighters were driven from the Etz Hayim base to Bet Hakerem. The force moved into the wadi, where the platoons split up, each platoon climbing up the terraced slope to its assigned area of action.

The Lehi unit assembled at Givat Shaul and proceeded from there towards the target. Some of the force advanced behind the armored car, which was proceeding along the path towards the center of the village.

The armored car advanced along the path to the outskirts of the village, where it encountered a trench and was forced to come to a halt. A message was read out over loudspeaker at the entrance to the village, whilst shots were fired at the car from the adjacent houses. Injuries inside the vehicle were reported and a first-aid unit set out from Givat Shaul. Dvora

Simchon, one of the rescue team, was wounded in the arm while attending to the injured.

The other units launched an onslaught, accompanied by explosions and gunfire. Arab resistance was strong and every house became an armed fortress. Many fighters were injured in the first onslaught, including a number of commanders who had been advancing ahead of their units.

When the center of the village had been occupied, we concentrated all the wounded in a courtyard and sought ways to evacuate them. Among them was "Yiftah" (Yehuda Segal), who had been hit in the stomach, but remained fully conscious. When I asked how he was, his reply was unambiguous: "Please do me a favor and shoot me in the head. I can't bear the pain any more." We laid him on a and four fighters carried him towards Givat Shaul. It turned out that the road was impassable because of gunfire from the Mukhtar's hilltop house and we were forced to take a roundabout route. Yiftah reached Givat Shaul safely, and was evacuated to hospital from there. Another casualty was Giora, commander of the operation, who was hit in the leg by a bullet fired from one of the houses.

The pace of the battle was slow because we were fighting in a built-up area, and both sides suffered heavy losses. In order to silence the source of fire, our fighters were forced to use hand-grenades, and in some cases even to blow up houses. Shots were fired from all sides and we rapidly half our fighters, and our ammunition was seriously depleted.

A report on the course of the battle was transmitted by courier to headquarters at Givat Shaul (neither the Irgun nor the Lehi had wireless equipment). When news of the steadily growing number of casualties and the shortage of ammunition became known, several Lehi people went to the Schneller camp and asked a Palmach unit to come to our aid. The troops set out in an armored car, equipped with a machine-gun and a 2" mortar. On arrival at the village they fired several shells and

machine-gun rounds at the Mukhtar's house. At that very moment and without prior co-ordination with the Palmach, Avni charged and took over the Mukhtar's house. All firing ceased and occupation of the village was complete. Avni, who had been wounded, was bandaged and evacuated to hospital.

After the Mukhtar's house had been taken, I went out to patrol the village. I climbed to the top of one of the two-storey houses to survey the surroundings. On the roof I was greeted by the sight of the body of an Arab fighter, with a rifle beside him and an ammunition belt on his body. I stood there, hypnotized. A vision passed before me of comrades who had been killed and injured in a war, which we had never wanted in the first place and for which we (and the Arabs) were paying heavily in terms of human life. Could we really not settle the dispute without bloodshed? The whistle of a bullet passing nears my head, which buried itself in the wall opposite. I snatched the rifle from the ground and jumped down into the courtyard. The sniping continued well into the evening.

Towards evening a unit arrived from town to take over the duty of guarding the village. From Givat Shaul I went by motorbike to visit the wounded in hospital. To my shock, I discovered that I had forgotten to remove the rifle from my shoulder. This was the first time that I had driven through the City Street openly armed. It was Friday evening, and Jews in festive attire were making their way to synagogue. The crowds cheered as I passed, a clear expression of solidarity with the underground movements fighting for the city. When I reached our provisional hospital, I was happy to meet Nurit who had come to nurse the wounded.

After the battle we learned what had happened to Menashe's unit. On reaching the fortified position overlooking the road to Ein Karem, they had encountered heavy fire. One of the fighters was killed and two were wounded, and after their ammunition had run out they had withdrawn to Bet Hakerem. On their way to

the battle, they had met a Haganah unit, which had received prior word of the action and wished them success.

Only years later was permission given to publicize the report written at the time by the Haganah Intelligence Officer, describing the role of the Haganah in the battle for Deir Yassin. It reads, in part, as follows: <sup>14</sup>

In the morning hours, it was decided to extend fire support. This support took two forms:

a) Blocking the way to Arab reinforcements coming up from Malha and Ein Karem.

b) A rear attack on Arabs dug in on the western slope of the village.

The two actions were carried out from the Masrafa (Mt Herzl) positions. In order to enable the forces to attack from the rear, a Spandau machine-gun was brought. The Arabs were taken by surprise by the gunfire and suffered considerable losses when forced to reveal themselves to our positions.

When the fighting ended, it was discovered that hundreds of villagers had retreated to Ein Karem, exploiting the fact that the road was open. Those who remained in the village surrendered and were taken prisoner. The prisoners, mostly women and children, were loaded onto trucks and taken to East Jerusalem, where they were handed over to their Arab brethren.

On Friday evening it was brought to Raanan's attention that foreign journalists were roaming the village seeking information about what had happened. He asked "Dan" (Kalman Bergman), a member of the Irgun H.Q. in Jerusalem, to call an improvised press conference, at which he described the course of the battle. He said that the action had been carried out with the knowledge of the Haganah, and that stringent instructions had

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<sup>14</sup> Shaltiel, Jerusalem 1948, p.141

been given to the fighters not to harm women and children. Dan reported that heavy losses had been incurred because the fighting had been conducted in a built-up area, and said that those inhabitants who surrendered had been taken prisoner and transferred to East Jerusalem. He concluded by saying:<sup>15</sup>

The capture of Deir Yassin is the first stage. We intend to attack, to occupy and to hold fast until all of Eretz Israel belongs to the Jewish State... and if the British come to the village, we will fight them.

The last comment reflected the fear that the British would take advantage of the fact that a large number of Irgun and Lehi fighters were concentrated in the village to try to attack them. In fact, it later transpired that the High Commissioner had consulted with the British commander and had indeed decided to bomb the village. However, by the time technical arrangements had been made for the air attack (RAF planes had already been transferred to neighboring countries), the Irgun and Lehi forces had left the village. The British considered using ground forces, but rejected the idea for fear of incurring heavy losses.

Fear of a RAF bombardment led Raanan to inform Shaltiel that the Irgun could no longer hold on to the village. They withdrew three days later and were replaced by the Haganah.

The day after Deir Yassin was taken, enemy guns positioned at Nebi Samuel shelled Givat Shaul. This was the first bombardment of Jerusalem and it caused great panic. Some residents packed their belongings and moved in with relatives in other parts of the city. This was the first of a series of bombardments, which intensified when the Arab Legion entered Jerusalem. They were to claim many casualties and cause

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<sup>15</sup> Public Records, London, CO 733 477/5

great disruption to life in the city. On that first Saturday, however, we made the important discovery that Jerusalem's stone houses were impervious to shelling and that the city could not be subdued by that means alone.

Word of the occupation of Deir Yassin spread through the city and the Jews of Jerusalem greeted it joyfully. Not only were the western neighborhoods safe, but also the Jews had taken initiative. The capture of the village marked the completion of the breakthrough of Operation Nachshon, and instilled New Hope in the hearts of Jerusalemites. The fighting force that returned from the battle was cheered by a large crowd, which thronged the streets. The slogan "Ahdut Lohemet" ("Fighters Solidarity") came to symbolize the new offensive stance against the Arabs and the Irgun became a focus of renewed pride for Jerusalemites.

## FACTS AND COMMENTARIES

So much has been written and said about what happened at Deir Yassin, that the battle waged on the morning of April 9 has taken on mythological proportions. Careful analysis of the events is necessary in order to distinguish between fact and fiction.

The first issue needing clarification concerns the number of Arab casualties in the battle.

On Saturday night, April 10, the Irgun radio station 'Kol Zion Halohemet' broadcasting from Tel Aviv announced that, according to a wireless report from the Irgun HQ in Jerusalem, the attackers had suffered four dead (the number later rose to five, when Yiftah died) and 32 wounded. According to the report 240 Arabs had been killed

This news item was in fact inaccurate: the Irgun commander in Jerusalem had deliberately exaggerated the number to undermine the enemy. In his testimony, Raanan related that

when he radioed HQ in Tel Aviv, he had been unaware of the precise number of casualties. He had invented a number, and had been aware that the true figure was much lower. Exaggerated reports of enemy casualties, he argued, would instill fear in Palestine's Arabs and deter them from attacking Jews. It is interesting to note that the Supreme Arab Committee, in its turn, believed that claims of a large number of Arab casualties would lead them to seek vengeance and only render them more militant. Hence the Committee further exaggerated the story and reported 254 Arabs killed.

Research conducted some time later, based on Arab sources, reveals that the number of Arab dead did not exceed one hundred.<sup>16</sup> An accurate body count of the Arab victims was conducted after the battle by two physicians, Dr. Z. Avigdori (who was Chairman of the Palestine Physicians Association, Jerusalem branch), and his deputy, Dr. A. Druyan. These physicians came to the village and asked permission to examine the bodies. They told the Irgun commander that they had been sent by the Jewish Agency to report on any mutilations or other atrocities perpetrated by Irgun and Lehi fighters on the Arabs. They asked to be able to move freely about the village so that they could report only what they saw with their own eyes. They went from house to house, unimpeded, counting the bodies and checking the cause of death. The report, which is filed in the IDF Archives, attests that there were no more than 46 bodies in total. In addition, they reported that bullets or bombs had caused the deaths, and that "all the bodies were dressed in their own clothes, limbs were whole and we saw no signs of mutilation."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Cnaana Sharif, Arab villeges destroyet in 1948.

Anton La Guardia, War With out End, Thomas Dunne Books, New York (2000).

. Dan Kurzman, GENESIS 1948, p. 148

<sup>17</sup> IDF Archives, 500/48-54

However, all publications reporting on the Deir Yassin affair quoted the initial Irgun figure of 240. Those who knew the truth preferred not to reveal it, since their propaganda needs were better served by the inflated figure.

The enhanced prestige of the Irgun was anathema to the leaders of the Yishuv. The occupation of the village as such, and the Irgun report that such actions would continue, were irreconcilable with the treaty with King Abdullah and with Ben-Gurion's plans for the future of Jerusalem. This was the background to the smear campaign launched by the Jewish Agency in the wake of the occupation of Deir Yassin. Three days after the battle, David Shaltiel published a damning leaflet in which he ignored the physicians' report and that of the Haganah unit, which had taken part in the battle. The leaflet overlooked the fact that Shaltiel had known of, and even approved, the action and had claimed in a letter to Raanan that the conquest of Deir Yassin was part of the Haganah's plan. It described the Irgun and Lehi fighters as a band of robbers, whose aim was murder and looting. He declared, among other things, that:<sup>18</sup>

The Irgun and Lehi were not aiming at a military operation when they set out on Friday morning, although in their whispered propaganda they broadcast the falsehood that they were going to save Kastel. If they had had real military objectives and not mere propaganda aims, they would have moved against the nests of marauders in the Jerusalem district, where they could have helped ease the heavy pressure on the capital. But they chose one of the quiet villages nearby... and for an entire day Irgun and Lehi troops slaughtered women, children and men, not in the course of a military action, but deliberately and directly for purposes of butchery and murder alone....

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<sup>18</sup> . IDF Archives, 500/48-54

The Irgun hastened to reply, and issued a leaflet, denying the Haganah charges one by one. The leaflet states that: <sup>19</sup>

Deir Yassin was captured after heavy fighting. Our fighters were shot at from almost every house with rifles and machine-guns. The large number of our casualties, several dozen, bears witness to this, as does the quantity of arms which fell into our hands and the number of Syrian and Iraqi dead, who were part of the regular army force there. Our troops conducted themselves, as no other military force would have done: they waived the element of surprise. Before the actual battle began, they cautioned the villagers by loudspeaker and appealed to women and children to leave at once and find shelter on the slope of the hill...

We would like to express our deep regret at the fact that there were women and children among the casualties, but this is not the fault of our fighters. They did their humanitarian duty and even more...

The Irgun published Shaltiel's letter to Raanan, which revealed that Shaltiel had not only known about the operation and sanctioned it, but had even considered it part of the Haganah plan. The publication of the letter caused great embarrassment to the Haganah leadership and severely undermined Shaltiel's credibility.

The Jewish Agency went even further when; in addition to the leaflet it also sent condolences to King Abdullah.

This cable from the Jewish Agency to King Abdullah was unprecedented and is worthy of deeper scrutiny. Kirkbride, the British Minister in Amman, in his cable to London, expressed his surprise at the message since Jordan was part of the Arab

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<sup>19</sup> Menachem Begin, in the Underground, 4, p. 276

League, which had declared war on Israel even before its establishment. Moreover, Arab Legion soldiers stationed in Palestine had often taken part in acts of hostility perpetrated against Jews. Jordan had even allowed Iraqi troops to pass through her territory to join Arab forces fighting the Jews. In Deir Yassin itself, Iraqi soldiers had fought alongside the Palestinians. Jordan, Kirkbride felt, ought rightfully be regarded as an enemy or at least a potential foe.

The fact that Abdullah's friendship was of strategic importance to the Jews might explain why the Jewish Agency sent him such a conciliatory cable. It was their way of indicating to him that they did not consider him an enemy, and that they continued to honor the agreement made with him in November 1947. Furthermore, although Abdullah was monarch of Transjordan, he was also the uncrowned leader of Palestine's Arabs. Thus Abdullah was the person to whom to address any apology concerning the 'barbaric acts' committed against the Arabs of Deir Yassin who were not Jordanian subjects. It seems that the Jewish Agency wanted to make it clear that it dissociated itself not only from the acts of the 'dissidents' at Deir Yassin, but also from their declaration concerning the liberation of Jerusalem and the entire country.

King Abdullah, not easily appeased, rejected the apology. In his reply, he noted that it was generally accepted that the Jewish Agency was responsible for all Zionist activities everywhere and that no Jew would act in such a way as to flout its policies. Abdullah concluded his cable by leaving open the option for dialogue, and wrote that "the Jewish Agency will do all that is necessary with regard to such atrocities..." and that the Irgun and others "must take careful note of the possible consequences of their savage acts and their inevitable outcome, if they continue in this manner."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Central Zionist Archives, S 25/1704. English Translation S 25/4150

Deir Yassin, rightly or wrongly, became synonymous with Jewish atrocities against Arabs, and It is important to ascertain whether in fact a massacre took place at Deir Yassin and whether or not Arab bodies were mutilated.

'Massacre' means the premeditated slaughter of defenseless human beings. The unprovoked Arab attack on the Jews of Hebron in 1929 and their indiscriminate murder was a massacre. The murder in February 1948 of more than forty Jews by their Arab co-workers at the Haifa Refineries was a massacre. In both cases, the massacre had been planned and the murders were premeditated. The murder of the Etzion Bloc settlers by Arab Legion troops after the defenders had surrendered and were unarmed was another massacre. But Deir Yassin?

Firstly, one should recall the strict orders given to the fighters before the battle not to harm women, children and old people. It was also explicitly stated that Arabs who surrendered were to be taken captive

Secondly, and unprecedented in battle, the villagers were informed by loudspeaker that the road to Ein Karem was open and secure and that those who left would not be harmed. The commander of the Irgun in Jerusalem was willing to forfeit the surprise element of the attack in order to minimize Arab civilian casualties. The Arabs have never denied that a loudspeaker was used, and an Arab League publication on Israeli aggression notes, inter alia:<sup>21</sup>

On the night of April 9, 1948, the quiet Arab village of Deir Yassin was taken by surprise when a loudspeaker called the inhabitants to evacuate the village immediately.

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<sup>21</sup> Deir Yassin, Publication by the Israeli Foreign Ministry, March 1969.

Thirdly, it is universally conceded that a fierce battle raged at Deir Yassin. In the research carried out at Bir Zeit University, it was stated that more than 100 Arab fighters equipped with rifles and 2 Bren guns and plenty of ammunition did battle with the Irgun and Lehi. The Arabs were holed up in stone buildings whilst the attackers were exposed to enemy fire. The fierce gunfire directed from the houses forced the attackers to use grenades and in several cases to blow up houses in order to advance. Thus, women and children were among the victims.

The number of dead is a determining factor in considering whether Deir Yassin should be termed a battle or a slaughter. According to all extant documents and testimony, it is now clear that the number of Arabs killed was less than one hundred, and not 240 as published. Moreover, the battle was the first in the War of Independence to be waged in a built-up area, a feature known to make warfare extremely difficult and costly in human terms. Thus 35% of the Irgun and Lehi forces were injured or killed by enemy fire during the battle.

All the Arab victims at Deir Yassin were killed in battle and all killing ceased when the battle ended. Those villagers who surrendered were taken prisoner and no harm came to them. When the fighting was over, they were conveyed by car to East Jerusalem and handed over to their Arab brethren.

In the light of the facts surrounding the battle for Deir Yassin, one cannot escape the conclusion that in condemning the Irgun and Lehi, the Jewish Agency leaders were acting out of purely political considerations. They were concerned by the growing sympathy for the Irgun in the country at large and in Jerusalem in particular. An increasing proportion of the Yishuv now recognized the justice of the Irgun cause and believed that the end of the British Mandate was the outcome of the protracted struggle of the underground against the foreign rulers.

The unique situation in Jerusalem had intensified support for the Irgun in that city. The city was outside the borders of the

Jewish State and Jerusalemites felt orphaned. The growing number of Arab onslaughts and escalating casualties (more than anywhere else in the country), isolation from the coastal plain and food shortages had evoked disillusionment among them with the Haganah and the Zionist Executive. Establishment leaders who had remained in Jerusalem were deeply concerned about the underground's rising popularity, and they emphasized this in their reports to Ben-Gurion. Thus, for example, Yitzhak Ben-Zvi in a document describing the grave plight of Jerusalem at the beginning of April writes:<sup>22</sup>

[...] Let us not forget that half of the inhabitants of Jerusalem are Oriental Jews, among whom the Irgun has found a home...

Ben-Gurion feared that the rise in the Irgun's strength in Jerusalem would disrupt his political plans for the city, and hoped that the charges against the Irgun and Lehi would reduce public sympathy for them.

In its smear campaign against the Irgun and Lehi, the Zionist leadership tried to create the impression that they were marginal groups with no influence, and that their actions and declarations were not representative of the nation as a whole. The leadership wanted to isolate the two movements, both within the Yishuv and vis a vis the outside world. In this it failed. Sympathy for the movements among Jerusalemites was growing steadily and foreign diplomats recognized the Irgun as a factor to be reckoned with in discussions on the future of Jerusalem.

The Deir Yassin affair had a strong impact on the course of the War of Independence, and was summed up as follows in the "History of the War of Independence" produced by the History Division of the IDF:

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<sup>22</sup> State of Israel, Documents on the Foreign Policy of Israel, Dec. 1947 - May 1948, p. 559.

The Deir Yassin affair, known throughout the world as the 'Deir Yassin Massacre', damaged the reputation of the Yishuv at the time. All the Arab propaganda channels disseminated the story at the time and continue to do so to this day. But it indubitably also served as a contributory factor to the collapse of the Arab hinterland in the period which followed. More than the act itself, it was the publicity it received from Arab spokesmen, which achieved this aim. Their intention was to convince their people of the savagery of the Jews and to rouse their militant religious instincts. But, in actual fact, they succeeded only in intimidating them. Today they admit the error themselves.

Hazen Nusseibeh, an editor of the Palestine Broadcasting Service's Arabic news in 1948, was interviewed for the BBC television series, "Israel and the Arabs: the 50-year conflict." He describes an encounter with Deir Yassin survivors and Palestinian leaders, including Hussein Khalidi, the secretary of the Arab Higher Committee, at the Jafa Gate of Jerusalem's Old City.

I asked Dr. Khalidi how we should cover the story," recalled Nusseibah, now living in Amman. He said, "We must make the most of this." So we wrote a press release stating that at Deir Yassin children were murdered, pregnant women were raped. All sorts of atrocities."

A Deir Yassin survivor, identified as Abu Mahmud, said the villagers protested at the time.

We said, 'there was no rape.' Khalidi said, 'we have to say this, so the Arab armies will come to liberate Palestine from the Jews.

In an article "Deir Yassin a casualty of guns and propaganda", by Paul Holmes (Reuters), he interviewed Mohammed Radwan, who was a resident of Deir Yassi in 1948, and fought for several hours before being run out of bullets.<sup>23</sup>

"I know when I speak that God is up there and God knows the truth and God will not forgive the liars", said Radwan, who puts the number of villagers killed at 93, listed in his own handwriting. "There were no rapes. It's all lies. There were no pregnant women who were slit open. It was propaganda that... Arabs put out so Arab the armies would invade", he said. "They ended up expelling people from all of Palestine on the rumor of Deir Yassin."

In the book "War Without End", by Anton La Guardia (Thomas Dunne Books, N.Y. 2000) we find the following:

"Just before Israel's 50th anniversary celebration, I went to Deir Yassin with Ayish Zeidan, known as Haj Ayish, who had lived in the village as a teenager.

'We heard shooting. My mother did not want us to look out of the window. I fled with my sister, but my mother and my other sisters could not make it. They hid in the cellar for four days and then ran away.'

He said he never believed that more than 110 people had died at Deir Yassin, and accused Arab leaders of exaggerating the atrocities.

'There had been no rape', he said. 'The Arab radio at the time talked of women being killed and raped, but this is not true. I believe that most of those who were killed were among the fighters and the women and children who helped the fighters.'

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.metimes.com/issue98-16/reg/deir.html>

## THE MASSACRE OF THE CONVOY TO MOUNT SCOPUS

Yiftah, who had been seriously wounded in the stomach, was operated on at Hadassah hospital, now located in the English Mission hospital in the Street of the Prophets (Haneviim Street) because the route to the hospital's original location on Mount Scopus was too dangerous.

To reach Mount Scopus you had to pass through the Arab neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, a constant hazard despite the British unit stationed there to prevent attacks on vehicles travelling to and from Mount Scopus. The Haganah took additional precautions and hospital staff was transported to Mount Scopus in armor-plated buses, which were escorted by an armed Haganah force in armored cars. Even ambulances were covered with metal sheeting.

On April 13, a convoy of two ambulances, two buses, three trucks and three-armored car escorts, one at the head of the convoy and the other at the end, set out for Mount Scopus. The passage of the convoy had been co-ordinated in advance with army authorities through Dr. Reifenberg, the University's liaison officer, who had been a senior officer in the British army during World War Two. The British assured Reifenberg that the road was open and not dangerous. However, when the convoy reached Sheikh Jarrah, heavy fire was directed at it from Arab positions. The armored car returned fire, but the enemy fire continued, damaging the convoy's tyres and forcing it to halt.

British soldiers nearby watched the scene without doing a thing to help the passengers in the convoy.

Word of the attack on the convoy was transmitted to the Haganah command in Jerusalem, but instead of sending an armed unit to rescue it, the Haganah appealed to the British for help. The British promised to intervene, but remained passive.

By the time an attempt was made to send a Haganah military force to rescue the convoy, it was too late.

In the end, the Arabs succeeded in overpowering the armed escorts and setting fire to the vehicles. Of 112 passengers, 78 were killed and 24 injured. It was a catastrophe, which had a shattering impact on the Jewish community in Jerusalem. The British had again demonstrated that they were not worthy of their promises, and the Haganah had proved incompetent in its task of protecting the people.

Yiftah, then recuperating from his wounds, was in one of the ambulances on his way to Mount Scopus for further treatment. Although the ambulance succeeded in returning to the city, Yiftah's stitches burst open during the bumpy journey and he died shortly afterwards.

## THE ETZ HAYIM BASE

After our forces had withdrawn from Deir Yassin, I was appointed commander of the Etz Hayim base in place of Giora, who had been wounded. The base was located at the entrance to Jerusalem, close to the Etz Hayim yeshiva, in two unfinished buildings. One of them, which was still in the early stages of construction, consisted of a cellar, ground floor and an additional, uncompleted story. On the ground floor was a large hall, which served as a dining hall and meeting place and several rooms used by the base senior staff. The second building was nearer completion, and its three stories housed the sleeping area of the troops and officers. A large area in front of the building was used as a parade ground and parking lot. In the courtyard there was a large water cistern, which served the entire neighborhood during the protracted siege of Jerusalem.

In discussing the lessons to be learned from the battle of Deir Yassin, it was universally agreed that one of our greatest disadvantages had been lack of experience in fighting on open terrain. At the base we therefore concentrated on intensive daytime and night time field training. It should be recalled that the struggle against the British was conducted under difficult underground conditions, and that the Irgun had no opportunities for field training. The struggle until now had not entailed open warfare, and our small-scale forays and skirmishes had been brief and taken place in built-up areas. Units usually consisted of not more than a dozen or so fighters, who completed their mission within minutes and withdrew before large British reinforcements arrived.

We were training in preparation for the anticipated invasion of the country by Arab armies after the end of the Mandate. There were only forty fighters stationed at the base; other groups came for short periods of training and then returned home,

since we lacked the funds and technical possibilities to keep more personnel permanently at the base.

I tried very hard to establish a routine, and to instill discipline and order, but my task was not easy. Living conditions were primitive and supplies were very limited. The fighters were not issued uniforms and brought their own clothes from home. There were no laundry facilities or showers; thus, furloughs were relatively frequent to enable the fighters to take advantage of home comforts. Several of them had no relatives in Jerusalem, and I would accompany them once a week to the Turkish baths in Nachlaot. Later, when the baths were closed down for lack of water, we bathed in the spring in the abandoned Arab village of Lifta. The village was in no-mans-land and we always took our weapons with us: while one group bathed, the other stood guard.

After the occupation of Deir Yassin, the supply situation at the base improved greatly. It transpired that the village was very prosperous, and large amounts of food (sacks of flour, cans of oil, beans etc) were transferred to the Irgun's central supply depot at the Betar club in the Bnei Brit quarter. The tricky task of running the depot fell to Gandhi (Levi Yitzhak Brandwein) who, despite the shortages, succeeded in supplying essential foodstuffs to the various bases. He ran the depot with a firm hand and great efficiency, and it is thanks to him that we were never short of food during the siege.

In addition to the stock of food, we also took a flock of sheep and some poultry from Deir Yassin. Fortunately, one of the fighters at the base knew something about sheep and took the flock out to pasture every morning.

I also found poultry 'expert', and each morning we conducted a 'head-count' to make sure that none of our hens had disappeared overnight. We decided that the poultry-run would be dedicated to feeding the wounded, and we daily sent chickens to the Hahlamah hospital in Bartenura Street in Kiryat

Shmuel. It was located in an abandoned apartment, which had been converted into a hospital several days before the Deir Yassin action.

Later, as the number of wounded increased, the Hahlamah hospital moved to Villa Agion on the corner of Balfour and Smolenskin streets, in the former Mandate security area. When the Agion family evacuated the house, the British took it over as the residence of General Barker, Commander in Chief of British forces in Palestine. When the British left, Mrs Agion handed the keys to Mrs. Rivlin, who was particularly devoted to the wounded and turned the beautiful villa into a hospital. (Years later, when the Israeli Government moved to Jerusalem, the building was purchased by the Government and served as the official residence first of the Foreign Minister and then of the Prime Minister. Ironically, the building which had once been the residence of General Barker, fierce foe of the underground, became at first a hospital for Irgun fighters and later the residence of former Irgun Commander in Chief, Menahem Begin, when he was elected Prime Minister in 1977).

## THE BRITISH LEAVE JERUSALEM

On the morning of May 14, 1948 two British convoys set out from Jerusalem for the last time: one moved through Sheikh Jarrah north to Ramallah and from there through Latrun-Ramleh- Petah Tikva to the final objective, Haifa. The second convoy moved southward through Bethlehem-Hebron-Be'er Sheva to Rafiah. Each consisted of some 250 vehicles with the last of the British officialdom in Jerusalem and the army units which were guarding the convoys.

The departure of the two convoys marked the end of thirty years of British rule in Jerusalem.



The last parade. The High Commissioner at the left



### The British leave Jerusalem

In a cable to Washington on May 13th, the American Consul in Jerusalem described the balance of power in Jerusalem before the British left as follows:<sup>24</sup>

So far the Haganah has not moved outside the limits of the territory allotted to the Jewish state, with the exception of several positions on the Jerusalem - Tel Aviv road and the capture of Jaffa by the Irgun. The situation of the Arabs in the mixed towns is difficult.

If the Jews choose to do so, they can conquer all of Jerusalem, since most of the Arab leaders have fled to the neighboring countries.

It is our estimate that once the British Mandate ends, the Legion and apparently also other Arab armies will invade the area

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<sup>24</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States 1948, Volume V, Part 2 p.985

earmarked for the Arab state. They will not risk a serious clash with the Jews.

One should remember the informal agreement between the Jews and Abdullah. Abdullah's desire for additional territory (reference is to the area assigned to the Arab state) and for a good neighbor (i.e. the Jews) will enable the implementation of the agreement.

### OPERATION KILSHON (PITCHFORK)

Operation Kilshon commenced in the early morning hours of May 14. Its objectives were two-fold: firstly, to occupy buildings belonging to Jews, but confiscated by the British in order to set up the security zones (known as Bevingrads). Secondly, to create territorial contiguity with the isolated Jewish neighborhoods. The plan was essentially defensive, and was aimed at maintaining the status quo and protecting the Jewish community in Jerusalem. No attempt was made to exploit the opportunity to occupy the whole of Jerusalem.

Operation Kilshon was carried out from two headquarters: north and south. The northern headquarters was assigned the task of capturing buildings in the center of the city, within the British security zone, which included the Russian Compound, the Generali Building, the Post Office and the Anglo-Palestine Bank (later Bank Leumi). The second mission, assigned to the northern headquarters, was to seize the Police Academy and Upper Sheikh Jarrah, so as to establish contact with Mount Scopus.

The southern headquarters was assigned the mission of occupying buildings in the security zone in Talbieh and establishing territorial contiguity with the besieged quarters of Yemin Moshe, Talpiot and Ramat Rahel. Capture of Abu Tor was not included in the plan.

While the emphasis in Operation Kilshon was on making contact with the isolated Jewish neighborhoods (Talpiot and Ramat Rahel in the south and Mount Scopus in the north), the operational orders made no reference to the most cut off of all the Jewish communities, the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, whose 1,700 Jewish inhabitants had been under siege for several months.

Operation Kilshon began immediately after the British left Jerusalem.

A day previously, Shaltiel had reached agreement with the Irgun on the joint defense of Jerusalem and now assigned them the task of capturing the Police Academy and Upper Sheikh Jarrah.. Shaltiel later justified this decision:<sup>25</sup>

We estimated the Irgun strength as 250 armed men, a considerable force in Jerusalem at that time. I assumed that a force of that size was capable of carrying out the job. I did not want to assign them to an area with a Jewish population, lest they consolidate their rule there.

On the morning of May 14, 1948, the sentinel on guard at the Irgun base in the Feingold buildings noticed that the British were lining up for a final parade in the Russian Compound. After a brief farewell ceremony, the last of the British troops in Jerusalem set out in a convoy. The Irgun fighters immediately left their base and stormed the deserted Generali Building. From there they moved on across Jaffa Street to the Russian Compound.

The buildings in the Compound had been built in the 19th century to serve the Russian pilgrims who visited Palestine. During the Mandate, the Compound was taken over by the British and became one of the most fortified areas in the city. It

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<sup>25</sup> Izhak Levi, Jerusalem in 1948, p.228-234

housed the C.I.D. (Criminal Investigating Department, the British Intelligent Service) as well as by the British Police, who cast their shadow over Jerusalem. At the end of the Russian Compound, a building in the shape of three sides of a rectangle, built originally as a hostel for women, served as a central prison during the Mandate period. Underground fighters often found themselves incarcerated behind its stonewalls.

The Irgun fighters who broke into the Russian Compound made their way to this jail. The building itself was deserted, since all the prisoners had been transferred; the Jewish prisoners were sent to the Atlit detention camp, where they remained until the British left the country. Among the fighters who broke into the Compound were some who had spent time inside the jail – an irony, which was not lost on them.

Word of the British departure spread like wildfire and Jewish forces began to advance towards the evacuated areas. In Mea Shearim, the Irgun fighters left their base and made for the nearby Italian Hospital building. They then turned to the Arab quarter of Musrara, but were commanded by the Haganah to halt, since Musrara was not included in the battle plan of Operation Kilshon.

I was stationed at the Etz Hayim base at the time and was instructed to take my men to the Pagi buildings (near the Sanhedria quarter) to take part in the capture of the Police Academy. We boarded a large Leyland truck (confiscated from the British) and set out through the deserted Jerusalem streets. At the sound of our singing 'On the Barricades', windows opened, and people cheered us on.

When we reached the Pagi buildings, I realised that my unit was not large enough to take the Police Academy, particularly in light of the rumor that an Arab unit had already entered the camp from the other side and settled in. I phoned the Irgun headquarters in town and was told to wait nevertheless. Another unit arrived an hour later and we now totalled sixty. Among the

arrivals was "Gal" (Yehoshua Goldshmid) who, as Irgun Operations Officer in Jerusalem, took command of the entire operation.

My unit was selected as the spearhead, whose role it was to break into the camp, while the others stayed behind as cover. We crawled through a hole we had cut in the camp perimeter fence and found the camp empty (the rumor of an Arab unit proved unfounded). The entire force followed us and we searched the numerous huts. We found tables laid with unfinished food, an arms depot and considerable quantities of fuel. But we had no time to deal with such matters. After completing the first search of the camp, Gal called the three unit commanders: "Giora" (Ben-Zion Cohen), "Menashe" (Yehuda Treibesh) and myself. We climbed onto the roof of the central building in the camp, and Gal explained his plan. He instructed us to advance towards Sheikh Jarrah in three units, with twelve fighters in each unit, equipped with light weapons (the heavy weapons, including two Bren guns, were left behind for the defense of the camp). I tried to explain that this was too risky and that more fighters and weapons should be assigned to each unit. But he was in a state of euphoria, and my arguments were dismissed.

We had no choice but to set out as ordered. I had the hardest task, because open terrain separated us from our objective. I climbed down from the roof and returned to my unit. As we began our advance into the open terrain, snipers attacked us and my fighters were given their first opportunity to put their intensive field training into practice. After moving forward in a crouch for several hours, we reached our objective and met with little resistance. In a very short time, Upper Sheikh Jarrah was entirely ours and the road to Mount Scopus was open!

In the evening we were relieved by another unit and returned to the Etz Hayim base.

While we were in action at the Police Academy and Sheikh Jarrah, Haganah units in southern Jerusalem captured Talbieh and the British security zone, which stretched as far as the David building near Yemin Moshe.

The Lehi, which had not arrived at agreement with Shaltiel, operated independently. Immediately after the British departure, a Lehi force advanced up Jaffa Road and seized the Barclays Bank building, moving on from there to the Notre Dame monastery. After capturing Notre Dame, the Lehi fighters tried to advance towards the Old City, but encountered fierce gunfire and suffered heavy losses. Yehoshua Zetler, Lehi commander in Jerusalem, appealed to Shaltiel for aid, saying that with minimal reinforcements it would be possible to enter the Old City and link up with the Jewish Quarter there. Shaltiel turned down the request, arguing that the sites, which Lehi had taken, were not included in the battle plan of Operation Kilshon. Zetler went from Shaltiel to Raanan and asked the Irgun for reinforcements, but he discovered that all the Irgun units were deployed in the mission assigned to them as part of Operation Kilshon, namely to capture the Police Academy and open up the road to Mount Scopus. Disappointed, Zetler returned to the Notre Dame area, where the Lehi was fighting alone. The next day, Lehi was forced to retreat, and only some time later was the monastery retaken by a Haganah unit.

At that time, the Consular Truce Commission, appointed by the Security Council to try to obtain a ceasefire, was visiting Jerusalem. The commission was composed of three consuls who had served in Jerusalem: the Belgian Consul J. Nieuwenhuys, the Chairman, the US Consul T. Wasson and the French Consul, R. Neuville.

On the morning of May 14, at the height of Operation Kilshon, Walter Eitan of the Jewish Agency Political Department wrote to the Chairman of the Commission to inform him that Jewish armed forces had received orders not to attack or move into

areas in Jerusalem inhabited by Arabs, unless Jews or Jewish property were the target of attack in those areas:<sup>26</sup>

Under these conditions, the Jewish Agency agrees to order the extension of the ceasefire in Jerusalem, so as to give the Truce Commission the opportunity to conduct negotiations for a truce.

That same day, Leon Cohen from the Jewish Agency sent the following cable to Ben-Gurion:<sup>27</sup>

We have acceded to the consuls' demand to continue the ceasefire for eight days, to facilitate the completion of negotiations for an armistice according to your statements. It is highly possible that we will be forced to give our final reply as to the armistice before midnight to preclude the possibility of an attack on Jerusalem by Abdullah's forces. Please empower us to give the final reply according to your general policy and to sign if this is necessary. Give corresponding orders to the district commander.

Ben-Gurion's reply arrived the following day:

[...] We agree to continuation of the ceasefire in Jerusalem. If it is essential to arrive at an armistice agreement in Jerusalem, you are empowered to do so, on condition that you do not exceed the orders despatched to you several days ago.

Exchanges of fire between the sides went on all night, and the next day Operation Kilshon focused on the south of the city. The German Colony, Baka and the Allenby Barracks were captured. Thus the siege of Talpiot was lifted.

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<sup>26</sup> Central Zionist Archive, S 25/8176

<sup>27</sup> Dvid Shaltiel, Jerusalem 1948, p.166

Operation Kilshon, which had lasted three days, was over but not completed. Yitzhak Levi (Levitzah), a senior Haganah officer in Jerusalem in 1948, summed up the operation as follows:<sup>28</sup>

One might say that Operation Kilshon offered us a golden opportunity to conquer Jerusalem and to block access to it. This opportunity was not exploited properly. The British had left: we were facing irregular Arab forces, without military leadership and lacking heavy weapons. By employing a more daring approach, we could have taken the whole of Jerusalem within one or two days...

The History Book of the Palmach says of those same three days in May:

[...] The British had evacuated the city, and their 'security zones' were now in our hands. The Arabs in the city had not recovered from their defeat in the battle for Katamon, and in effect there was no Arab fighting strength in Jerusalem. But due to various political considerations and because of lack of initiative on the part of the Jewish forces, I believe that an assured military opportunity to capture the entire city was squandered...

Was it in fact 'lack of initiative' or was it deliberate policy on the part of Ben-Gurion, carried out meticulously by his loyal associate, David Shaltiel?

It will be recalled that on May 12, 1948, three days before the end of the Mandate, Ben-Gurion had refused to yield to Shaltiel's request to go into action in Jerusalem after the British departure. When he finally did give the go-ahead, he forbade Shaltiel to capture any territory in Jerusalem, the exceptions being occupation of Jewish buildings, which had been vacated

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<sup>28</sup> Izhak Levy, Jerusalem in the War of Independence, p.234

by the British, and establishment of contact with the besieged Jewish neighborhoods. Thus, to outward appearances at least, the ceasefire, which had been proclaimed on May 8 by the British High Commissioner, would be observed. In line with this policy, Walter Eitan informed the Chairman of the Truce Commission that the Jews would not invade areas inhabited by Arabs. Indeed, Arab neighborhoods such as Musrara and Wadi Joz were not attacked, and no attempt was made to break into the Old City.

Walter Eitan claimed, in the name of the Jewish Agency, that the German Colony and Baka were occupied solely in order to establish contact with the besieged neighborhood of Talpiot and that this action should consequently not be regarded as a breach of the ceasefire.

## THE BATTLE FOR THE OLD CITY

From the time of King David, Jerusalem has been the political and religious focus of the Jewish people. After the Jews were exiled from their land, Jerusalem became a primarily religious symbol, and yearning for the city was expressed in prayers throughout the world. The phrase 'for the law shall go forth from Zion' reflected the importance of Jerusalem as the spiritual heart of the Jewish people. However, the city was also of major national significance, since it was believed that the Messiah would emerge from there. With the rise of Zionism and the return to the homeland, Jerusalem once again became a national and political symbol.

At the end of the nineteenth century, the 19,000 Jews living in the Old City comprised the majority of the population there. This was too large a number to be comfortably housed in the limited area available in the Old City and construction began of dwellings outside the walls. Thus, while the number of Jews in Jerusalem as a whole increased, the Jewish population of the Old City dwindled. The exodus began at the turn of the twentieth century and continued until the 1948 war. In 1880 there were 19,000 Jews in the Old City and only 2,000 outside the walls. In 1931 the number of Jewish residents of the Old City had dropped to 5,500 with 48,500 in the New City. By the outbreak of the War of Independence, the number of Jews in the Old City did not exceed 2,000. Those who were able to do so moved out, leaving behind the poor and those in need of financial support from the residents of the New City (See table).

The revival of Zionism brought religious immigrants to Jerusalem, while secular immigrants generally preferred the agricultural sector. The Second Aliyah pioneers were ambivalent about Jerusalem: on the one hand, it symbolized the Kingdom of Israel in the days of David and Solomon, an era in which the Jews had been sovereign rulers of their land; on the

other, the socialist pioneers despised the 'Old Yishuv' in Jerusalem and wanted to create a new type of Jew, who worked on the land.

Changes in the Jewish population inside and outside the Old City of Jerusalem

Year	1880	1900	1910	1931	1948
<b>Old City</b>	19,000	16,000	15,000	5,500	2,000
<b>New City</b>	2,000	16,000	29,000	48,500	98,000
<b>Total Jews</b>	21,000	32,000	44,000	54,000	100,000

According to the UN resolution of November 29, 1947, Jerusalem was to be a corpus separatum under a special international regime. As fighting erupted in the first few months of 1948, doubts were raised as to the ability of the UN to enforce the internationalization of Jerusalem and the need arose to reinforce the city's defenses to enable it to withstand Arab onslaughts. A different view was taken of the Old City. The leaders of the Yishuv deluded themselves into thinking that there would be no fighting there on account of the unique religious standing of ancient Jerusalem, containing sites sacred to three world religions. They hoped the UN would succeed in implementing an armistice in Jerusalem if only to prevent harm to the Holy Places. In order to avoid provocation, the defenders of the Jewish Quarter were given strict orders not to open fire except in life-threatening situations. These orders aside, all military moves in the Old City were colored by the belief that there would be no fighting there. This conception proved catastrophic for the Jewish Quarter, but the Zionist leadership adhered to it despite repeated attacks on the inhabitants living there.

On December 3, 1947, a bus en route to the Quarter was attacked at Jaffa Gate. One Jew was killed and eight were

injured. The first shots were fired at the Quarter on the same day.

The fighting force in the Jewish Quarter at the time was tiny and in urgent need of reinforcements. In discussions with Raanan, Irgun Commander in Jerusalem, it was decided that one of the units of my company would be sent to the Old City. The choice fell on the unit commanded by "Amnon" (Yoel Friedler), who had recently arrived in Jerusalem from Givatayim. I had known Amnon in Ramat Gan, where we had both attended an officers' course and been assigned to operations aimed at blowing up bridges and railway lines. When I was wounded, it was Amnon who half-carried me on the long and difficult trek from Ashdod to Bat Yam.

On December 10 Amnon set out with his unit for the Old City, and was appointed Irgun Commander of the Jewish Quarter. At the same time, the Haganah dispatched a two-platoon-size force to the Quarter, commanded by Yisrael Funt.

The day after reinforcements reached the Old City, the fighters underwent their baptism of fire. In the morning hours, the Arabs tried to break into the Quarter under cover of light weapons fire. The defenders took up their positions and repelled the attack. The exchange of fire lasted some 7 hours, and the onslaught ended only after the Arab commander was killed. Two Jews were also killed and one injured.

## THE BRITISH ARMY ENTERS THE OLD CITY

After the battle between the Arabs and the Jews, the British authorities decided to send a military force into the Old City. Two platoons of British troops were deployed between the Jews and the Arabs, in the process of which some Jewish positions were seized, a search conducted, weapons confiscated and 15 fighters arrested (they were released several days later after the intervention of the Jewish Agency).

The British army warned that it would use force against the side, which opened fire. However, this 'neutrality' proved very one-sided, and action was taken mostly against the Jewish defenders. Searches were conducted in the Jewish Quarter and weapons confiscated, whilst the Arabs were allowed to move around openly armed. It is difficult to say why the Jews were harassed and the Arabs left alone, but a likely reason is the deep resentment the British felt towards the Jews stemming from the activities of the Jewish underground.

Convoys, which initially entered through Jaffa Gate, established contact with the Jewish Quarter of the Old City but as Arab onslaughts increased they began to use Zion Gate instead (a less dangerous route, since it did not traverse Arab neighborhoods). After the British entered the Old City, they undertook to escort the convoys, but prevented the transfer of arms and fighters to the Jewish Quarter. (The Arabs were not stopped from bringing weapons and troops into the City).

The British were anxious to reduce the Jewish force in the Old City. They carried out arrests from time to time, and scrupulously checked the identity of detainees. Those who were identified as permanent residents of the Quarter were released, while those who had come in from the New City were expelled. Eventually the British arrested "Amnon", together with "Yehuda" (Yitzhak Aharonov), who was a resident of the Quarter. Yehuda claimed that he and Amnon were brothers, but the British were not easily persuaded and kept them both under arrest until the matter was clarified. When word of Amnon's arrest got out, a replacement, "Gideon" (Isser Nathanson), was sent to command the Quarter.

Gideon did not enter the Old City in the usual weekly convoy organized by the Jewish Agency and escorted by the British army. Through the good offices of Romek, a Lehi member with extensive contacts among the British, one of the British officers was bribed twenty Palestinian pounds to smuggle Gideon into

the Quarter in a British armored car. A well-wrapped parcel, containing a submachine-gun and several revolvers, was hidden in the same armored car.

Several days after Gideon's arrival, the British were finally persuaded that Amnon and Yehuda were brothers and released them both.

The calm in the Old City was short-lived; in January 1948 Arabs attacked the Warsaw buildings and blew up the Jewish military post located there. The British watched from the sidelines and remained 'neutral'.

Several days later, a Jewish convoy was attacked en route from the Dead Sea to Jerusalem. The defenders of the Jewish Quarter, who were then in the 'Matzot' post saw what was happening and opened fire on the attackers. The British response was to confiscate all the weapons they found there before blowing the post up. This was the first case of the British attacking and destroying a Jewish position, and it indicated to the Arabs that they could attack the Jews with impunity. Not long afterwards they did precisely this during the evacuation of the Old Bikur Holim hospital.

At the time when the Old City had a large Jewish population and covered a large area, the Old Bikur Holim Hospital was located inside the Jewish Quarter. As Jews started to move out, the Quarter shrank and the hospital found itself outside the area encompassed by the Jewish Quarter. Access could be gained only through an area inhabited by Arabs and transportation of hospital workers became increasingly difficult. The Haganah command decided therefore to evacuate the building and to transfer its patients to the Jewish Quarter. The evacuation was planned for January 20, 1948, and the British undertook responsibility for security. A group of fighters, including several from the Irgun, set out to supervise the transfer, but the presence of British soldiers meant that they were unarmed. Suddenly an armed Arab opened fire on the Jews, while the

British soldiers looked on passively. Four men were injured, including Amnon. Three of the wounded managed to reach safety, but Amnon was left lying on the ground. By the time the British took him to hospital, he had already lost a great deal of blood and died several hours later.

I had lost a cherished friend and comrade.

The day after Amnon's death, I paid a condolence visit to his sister in the Shaarei Hessed Quarter. It was a cold, rainy night and as I was leaving the house by the outside staircase, I slipped and fell onto my right arm. I spent a sleepless night and the next morning went to Dr. Troy (a well-known Jerusalem orthopedic surgeon, who treated wounded underground fighters), who diagnosed a fracture and placed my arm in a cast. I went back to my room and prepared to adjust to my new situation. I found a special way of dressing and undressing, but one task proved too much – tying shoelaces. Chaya, my landlady, saw me come in and offered her assistance without asking questions. Her husband, on the other hand, asked me in which military action I had been wounded. I told him the truth, but he remained unconvinced. I very soon discovered that nobody was ready to believe that an able-bodied young man could slip on stones on a wet Jerusalem night and crack his arm. I had no choice but to “admit” that I had been wounded in action.

No longer able to train my troops in weapon handling, I was assigned to administration and liaison work with our unit in the Old City, where Gideon was now established as Irgun commander. He was a battle veteran and an authoritative personality who inspired confidence and trust.

Malka Greenberg-Nathanson has described Isser's first day in the Old City:<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with Malka Nathanson.

On the morning of that day, I was sent by my mother to buy something in the store. As I left the house, I saw a man standing at the end of the alley - blond, blue-eyed, dressed in a suit and with a short, British-army haircut. I was sure he was an Englishman in civilian clothing, who had come to spy on the armed forces in the Quarter. I hastened to carry out my errand and ran to the Irgun headquarters to warn my friends about the 'Englishman' who was wandering around. To my amazement, I saw him sitting in the command room, and before I could say anything, one of the comrades introduced him: 'This is our new commanding officer'.

In the Old City, Gideon met Avraham Halperin, who had been appointed Haganah commander of the Jewish Quarter, having been district commander several years before. Halperin succeeded, by force of his personality, in winning the trust of all those around him. He introduced order and discipline into the Haganah units and even succeeded in organizing the somewhat problematic civilian population. After re-organizing the Haganah units, Halperin recruited a reserve force from the civilian population, and prepared the remainder for the imminent emergency situation. Displeased by his activities, the British expelled him from the Old City on March 3. Before leaving, he handed over command to Moshe Rosnak.

In the first months of 1948, there was friction in Palestine between the Irgun and the Haganah. It will be recalled that on the initiative of the Irgun, the two movements had negotiated possible collaboration. The discussions were drawn out, and only in April did the Zionist Executive ratify the agreement.

Even before ratification of the agreement on the national level, Gideon had done much to improve relations with the Haganah in the Old City. He realized that in order for the Quarter to withstand Arab attack, the full co-operation of all the Jewish forces there was vital. Initiating contact with Avraham Halperin,

and afterwards with Moshe Rosnak, Gideon proposed an arrangement based on full collaboration between the two organizations – a collaboration that was put to the test very soon afterwards.

On January 25, five days after the murder of Amnon, the Arabs blew up the home of Yitzhak Orenstein, the rabbi of the Western Wall, who had been appointed by the Haganah to head the civilian sector of the Old City.

The Haganah fighters wanted to retaliate, but had no explosives. The Lehi, on the other hand, which had joined up with the Irgun, had an arsenal of several hundred kilograms. In addition, the Irgun used to nighttime forays into British army positions to dismantle mines, which had been laid in the area, removed the explosives from the mines and replaced them - empty.

On February 16, Haganah and Irgun fighters set out to blow up one of the Arab posts. Although not successful, the event signaled the first instance of co-operation between the Haganah and the Irgun.

## THE TUNNEL

The Irgun proposed that they work together to blow up the Arab market at the end of Rehov ha-Yehudim (The Street of the Jews) in the Old City.

Irgun headquarters had discovered a narrow sewage conduit leading from the Street of the Jews to the Arab market. The plan was to send one of the fighters to lay explosives at the end of the conduit under the market.

The scheme was agreed on by the Haganah command, and Irgun fighters began to dig under one of the stores to reach the sewage channel. "Yehuda" (Yitzhak Aharonov) then climbed down into the conduit and crawled to the spot where it connected with the Arab market. Returning from his

reconnaissance tour, he was forcibly stripped and sent to shower, and then happily reported that it was possible to reach the target and to lay the explosive charges. The next day, armed with a bomb, he climbed down again. Unfortunately the sewage level had risen since the previous day, and the excrement filling the conduit prevented him from proceeding. He returned hastily and the scheme was called off.

A short while later, the sewage conduit was mined by sappers to prevent it being utilized by the Arabs.

## PREPARING FOR THE BRITISH WITHDRAWAL

April, a relatively quiet month, was exploited for training and briefings before the British departure from Jerusalem. That month several convoys entered the Old City, bringing food supplies, clothes and small quantities of light weapons and explosives. At the end of the month a new transmitter was brought in, enabling the Quarter to maintain contact with the New City throughout the fighting. In addition to the weapons smuggled in, the Quarter's residents bought submachine-guns and ammunition from the Arabs via Armenian agents, though insufficient to meet their needs.

Throughout April, negotiations were held between the Irgun and the Haganah in the Old City on a formal agreement between the two organisations. The Irgun agreed that its men would accept the authority of the Quarter HQ and serve under a Haganah commanding officer.

After the signing of the agreement, the 44 Irgun and Lehi fighters joined the 70 Haganah fighters to form the joint fighting force of the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The force was augmented during the fighting by both young and adult residents of the Quarter, who contributed significantly to its defence.

Once fighting broke out, the distinctions between the Haganah and Irgun were blurred. Gideon's authority as Irgun commander stemmed from his inspiring personality and courage.

## THE CEASEFIRE IN THE OLD CITY

In the second half of April 1948, discussions were held at the United Nations on a ceasefire in Jerusalem.

On April 28, Moshe Sharett (Shertok) sent a cable to Ben-Gurion from the United States, stating that a ceasefire agreement for the Old City had been agreed on at the UN.

On May 2, 1948, the Haganah ordered a ceasefire in the Old City, so as to enable the continuation of the negotiations at Lake Success, where the UN session was being held. The ceasefire lasted until the last British soldier had left the city.

In May, the population of the Jewish Quarter was some 1,700, comprising mostly the old, women and children. There were 110 fighters (some 40% of them from the Irgun and the rest from the Haganah) and some 50 service personnel recruited from the residents of the Quarter.

Weapons in the Old City on May 13, 1948<sup>30</sup>

Rifles	Stengun	Machingun	2" Morter	Total
<b>17</b>	42	2	1	62

There were 300 bullets for each rifle, and 500 for each machine-gun. In addition, there were 374 hand-grenades, 126 assault grenades, and 200 kilograms of explosives (donated by the Lehi).

There were only enough weapons for about 60% of the fighters. Graver still was the shortage of heavy weapons, such

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<sup>30</sup>A. Liron, *The Battle of Old City*, p.141

as heavy machine-guns or a 3" mortar. There was also a total absence of anti-tank weapons. Before the British withdrawal, the Haganah commander of the Quarter appealed urgently for the immediate despatch of 50 trained, armed fighters. The request was turned down.

In addition to the shortage of fighters, weapons and ammunition, the presence of the civilian population was also a problem. In normal circumstances, the civilian population was evacuated when fighting became imminent – firstly to prevent non-combatant casualties and secondly to allow the fighters to concentrate solely on the task at hand.

However, whilst for example women and children were evacuated from the Etzion Bloc, no effort was made to evacuate them from the Old City. Indeed, they were actively prevented from leaving on their own initiative. As early as January, when the siege first began, Ben-Gurion instructed David Shaltiel to prevent the exodus of Jews from the Old City at all costs. Each time a convoy reached the Old City, the Haganah imposed a curfew on the Jewish Quarter, thus preventing residents from leaving for the New City. Despite these stringent precautions, several hundred Jews nonetheless succeeded in leaving the Old City by various means.

### OPERATION "SHEFIFON" (VIPER)

Operation Viper was planned for the day the Mandate ended in Jerusalem. Its main objective was to extend the area of the Jewish Quarter and to expand its defensive capabilities by seizing positions of strategic importance. It was planned under the stringent constraint of a ban on occupation of Arab-populated areas.

There were three stages to Operation Viper:

1. The seizing of British army positions evacuated when the British left Jerusalem (most of these positions had been in Jewish hands before the army entered the Old City).
2. The capture of key defense positions on the borders of the Jewish Quarter.
3. The blowing up of houses around the Quarter to create an open terrain, thus hampering enemy efforts to occupy the Quarter.

When the British left the Old City, Shaltiel sent the following cable to the commanding officer of the Jewish Quarter:<sup>31</sup>

Occupy the army positions, but do not shoot and do not be the first to open fire. The army positions, which are in the Jewish area, are undoubtedly ours by right. Observe the ceasefire rules since the continuation of convoys under Red Cross protection depends on this. For the time being you cannot have reinforcements of weapons and manpower. In all your actions, take the size of your strength into consideration.

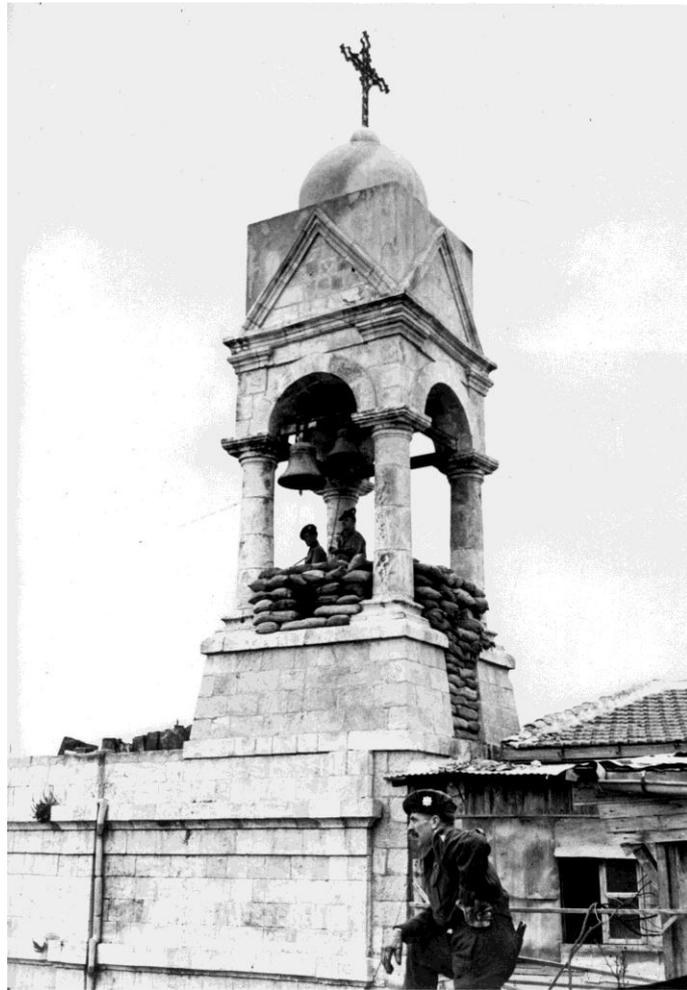
How could the commander of the Quarter execute the various stages of the operation when his hands were tied? He was not only banned from capturing Arab-populated areas, but also from opening fire. This in effect meant that Shaltiel sanctioned only the occupation of positions evacuated by the British.

On May 13, the British forces left the Old City. Before withdrawing, they handed over the internal key to Zion Gate to Weingarten. That afternoon, after the last British soldier had left the area, Jewish forces rallied for action and Operation Viper commenced. Initially, all the positions, which had been held by the British, were occupied without resistance. Then the Jewish forces took over Zion Gate and the Greek Church, known as the

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<sup>31</sup> Izhak Levi, Jerusalem in the War of 1948, p.42

'Crucifix Post', in the Armenian Quarter. The spire of this Greek Church rises above the buildings of the Armenian Quarter and overlooks most of the Jewish Quarter, Zion Gate and the road between the Quarter and Zion Gate. Whoever controlled the 'Crucifix post' thus also controlled the Jewish Quarter.



**The Greek Church**

The first stage of Operation Viper was executed swiftly and without any clashes with Arab forces. (When the Arabs noticed unusual Jewish activity, they opened fire, but only in limited fashion, since the ceasefire was still in force).

The shooting stopped altogether at nightfall, when two representatives of the Truce Commission – one Jewish and the other Arab – entered the city. They had come to check the Arab complaint that the Jews had violated the ceasefire agreement.

The Jewish representative took advantage of his meeting with the Quarter commander to inform him that the Jewish Agency did not think there would be any fighting in the Old City and was hoping to organize a convoy to the Quarter within a day or two.

While the two representatives were in the Old City, lengthy discussions were going on between the Jewish Quarter HQ and the Armenian Patriarch, who was demanding the evacuation of the forces occupying the Crucifix Post. He claimed that it was a holy place, and that he had guaranteed to preserve its neutral status. The Haganah Commander, Moshe Rosnak, objected strongly, since the Post was vital to the defence of the Quarter. The Patriarch then telephoned Shaltiel, who insisted that Rosnak evacuate the Post forthwith. Two days later, Rosnak's fears were confirmed when it was taken over by Arab forces.

On Friday, May 14, 1948, when the last British soldier had left Jerusalem, Operation Kilshon (Pitchfork) began. That same day, in the Tel Aviv Museum, Ben-Gurion proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel, and Arab armies invaded the country.

In the Armenian Quarter of the Old City, the Arabs fortified their positions and then opened fire on Zion Gate. The Jewish fighters were forced to abandon the gate, but managed to recapture it during the night.

Aside from this incident, May 14 was relatively quiet, with both sides occupied in organization and fortification.

The following day started out quietly, but within a few hours the Zion Gate position was attacked again, and abandoned for a second time. That afternoon, district headquarters sent word of the resumption of the ceasefire from 17:00 onwards, but the Arabs ignored the order.

Towards evening there was a change of direction in the fighting in the Old City. The Arabs launched a heavy bombardment on positions in the Quarter and blew up the Warsaw Buildings post. In retaliation, the defenders planned to

blow up an Arab post, but district headquarters withheld permission. When the Arab bombardment grew more intense, Rosnak asked headquarters for assistance in the form of 3" mortar fire and received the following cable:<sup>32</sup>

In reply to the request for auxiliary fire for the Old City, in light of the negotiations now being conducted, your request cannot be granted for political reasons. Take action yourselves with what you have at your disposal.

From the evening of May 15, the ceasefire in the Old City ceased to exist.

On May 16 an all-out attack commenced on the Jewish Quarter. The fighters in the Quarter adopted a defensive stance as Arab forces occupied the entire Armenian Quarter and dug in at the Crucifix post. They were also forced to abandon their positions at Zion Gate and at the northwest Warsaw Post.

The Arabs then broke through the Armenian Quarter to Habad Street and from there tried to attack the Street of the Jews. Amidst an atmosphere of panic, civilians were evacuated to the subterranean Yohannan Ben Zakkai synagogue, where the rabbis, fearing a massacre like the one at the Etzion Bloc a few days earlier, demanded a surrender.

Amidst this commotion, the defenders prepared for action with two principle jails: to check the Arab advance and to stem the general panic among the civilians. The situation was tense for Quarter command, and desperate cables ensued from Rosnak to headquarters. One of them even made reference to the possibility of surrender. In order to reassure the defenders, Shaltiel announced that reinforcements for the Quarter were on their way.

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<sup>32</sup> IDF Archive, David Shaltiel archive.

When night fell, the shooting died down. The Arabs were busy looting and setting fire to the positions they had seized. During the night they abandoned the area they had occupied and withdrew to recuperate. The defenders exploited this strange behaviour to recapture most of the positions they had been forced to abandon.

The defenders suffered heavy losses on May 16: 3 dead and 18 wounded. There were also 21 civilian casualties.

The fiercest fighting, however, took place on May 17. In the morning hours, the Arabs warned residents that if they did not surrender by 10 am, the Quarter would be destroyed. At precisely that hour, a heavy bombardment began, followed by automatic weapon fire. The Arabs recaptured Habad Street, and continued to advance, but were checked at the Street of the Jews. They renewed their attack in the afternoon and by night all the original positions in the western sector had fallen into enemy hands.

There was panic in the Jewish Quarter and within the civilian population there was a growing demand for surrender. More calls for help were despatched to the district headquarters, and assistance was promised.

When night fell, the shooting stopped, and the scenario of the previous day was repeated: after looting and burning positions, the Arabs withdrew from the area they had captured.

The defenders incurred 3 dead and 13 wounded that day. Among the wounded was Gideon, who had been shot in the arm while leading a counter-attack.

The number of defenders dwindled, and those who remained were exhausted and tense. That night they were able to recapture only a few of the positions abandoned by the Arabs.

At 05:30, the Quarter command received word by wireless that the Palmach had seized Mount Zion and that reinforcements would arrive shortly. The news spread like wildfire and the defenders prepared for the coming day.

May 18 was surprisingly quiet, with no attacks on Jewish positions. The Arabs had sustained heavy losses, particularly from the heavy mortar shelling from the New City. In addition to that, Arab Legion forces, commanded by Abdullah el-Tel, had entered the Old City that day and instead of than entering the fray immediately, were busy undergoing reorganization and discussing tactics. They contented themselves with sporadic bursts of gunfire and sniping, and made no attempt to attack Jewish positions.

The Jewish total number of casualties was very high. More than half the fighters were hit and many of the wounded returned to their posts before recovering. The ammunition situation was equally bad. The 2" mortar shells had been used up on the first day of fighting and light ammunition was scarce – about 10 bullets for each rifle.

The only way of saving the Jewish Quarter was to break into the Old City.

As the supply of grenades dwindled, Gideon had the idea of manufacturing them in the Quarter itself. With the help of Lea Woltz and a group of teachers, under the expert guidance of "Yehuda" (Yitzhak Aharonov), this they only did. The teachers, 20 men and women, had arrived in the Quarter on the last convoy. A group of boys were dispatched to go from house to house collecting tin cans, which the teachers filled with nails and explosives to be detonated when needed. During the fighting in the Old City, the improvised arms factory produced more than two thousand five hundred grenades, thanks to which the defenders managed to hold out for considerably longer than anticipated.

## ATTEMPTS TO SAVE THE JEWISH QUARTER

On May 16, David Shaltiel finally realized that political efforts to achieve a ceasefire in the Old City were not going to work. The

unshakeable conviction of the political leadership that there would be no fighting in the Old City had fostered complacency and proven manifestly wrong. Shaltiel's strict orders to the commander of the Quarter on the day of the British withdrawal not to shoot and not to be the first to open fire had prevented the fighters from improving their positions. His adamant refusal to send reinforcements to the Lehi in their attempt to break into the Old City through New Gate on May 14th further hampered the defence effort.

On May 17, Shaltiel asked the Commander of the Palmach Harel Brigade, Yitzhak Rabin, for aid in the assault on the Old City planned for that night. According to the plan, the main effort was to be concentrated in the direction of Jaffa Gate. The sappers would blow up the iron grid at the base of David's Tower, allowing the attackers to enter through that aperture. The task of the Palmach unit was to carry out diversionary action at Mount Zion, ideally leading to its capture.

The Palmach objected to Shaltiel's plan, arguing that a frontal attack on Jaffa Gate was doomed to failure. Instead, the Palmach proposed an outflanking movement from the north (similar to that carried out twenty years later in the Six Day War), but Shaltiel dismissed these suggestions.

After midnight, the main force set out from Tanus House towards Jaffa Gate. Four platoons were taking part – three from the Haganah and one from the Irgun. The three Haganah units were conveyed in three armored cars, and the Irgun unit remained behind as cover and in reserve. Two armored cars approached the Wall and opened fire, while the armored car carrying the sappers tried to approach its target. Arabs started firing at the vehicles and their bullets ripped through the tyres and penetrated the armor. They used mortars and machine-guns and the battlefield was transformed into a slaughterhouse. The attack had failed before it had begun. With the number of

casualties at 30 (6 dead and 24 wounded), the operation was abandoned and withdrawal commenced.

Meanwhile, the Palmach carried out its mission to divert attention from the main action. Ironically enough, this action was successful and Mount Zion was captured.

## THE PALMACH BREAKS INTO THE OLD CITY

On May 18, it was decided to take advantage of the Palmach's success and to try to break into the Old City through Zion Gate. Word was conveyed by wireless to the Quarter command, and the defenders began to make preparations to direct the Palmach fighters into the Quarter.

One section was concentrated near Zion Gate at Bader House from which a strip of cloth was flown to indicate to the attackers that this was a Jewish post. A Bren gun was aimed at the Crucifix Post to silence it during the attack.

According to the eyewitness testimony of Palmach fighters, agreement had been reached with Shaltiel that immediately after the onslaught, the district headquarters would bring an infantry company into the Old City, and another unit would replace the Palmach fighters on Mount Zion. Correspondingly a unit of 80 fighters reached Yemin Moshe that afternoon under the command of Mordechai Gazit. (According to Gazit, the unit was made up almost entirely of inexperienced fighters).

Early that night a Palmach force, together with Gazit's unit, went up to Mount Zion loaded with military and medical equipment for the Quarter. After midnight, the Palmachniks launched a heavy mortar bombardment and fired automatic weapons into the Zion Gate area. Sappers then blew up the gate and the Palmach unit moved into the Old City.

After an emotional greeting, the defenders of the Quarter explained to Raanana (Eliyahu Sela), commander of the Palmach attacking force, that it was vital to capture the

strategically located Crucifix Post. Raanana sent six fighters on this mission, but they encountered fierce gunfire and retreated. The fact that the Crucifix Post remained in Arab hands meant that it was very difficult to hold on to Zion Gate. Immediately after the assault, Raanana told Gazit to enter the Old City so that the Palmach forces could move out. Gazit objected on two counts: firstly, he had received orders to hold on to Mount Zion; secondly, his men were not trained for the kind of fighting going on in the Jewish Quarter. In the end, Gazit agreed that his men would carry supplies into the Quarter, and would then return to Mount Zion. After successfully completing the mission, Gazit went to Quarter HQ and was ordered by Shaltiel to take over command of the whole force. The following morning he was severely wounded when shots were fired at him as he toured the positions, and command of the Quarter reverted to Moshe Rosnak.

On the morning of May 19, Uzi Narkis (commander of the Palmach force at Mount Zion) informed Shaltiel that the Palmach intended to withdraw from Zion Gate, and that Shaltiel should immediately despatch a unit to replace them. Shaltiel forbade Narkis to leave and the two men broke off all contact.

Narkis ignored Shaltiel's order and the Palmach unit abandoned Zion Gate and withdrew from Mount Zion. The Arabs promptly took over the gate, and lay siege to the Jewish Quarter once again.

## WHY WAS ZION GATE ABANDONED?

The abandonment of Zion Gate can only be understood in light of the troubled relations between the Palmach and Shaltiel. The Palmach command was responsible for security along the road to Tel Aviv, and was not under the direct command of the Jerusalem District HQ. Moreover, the Palmach did not have a high opinion of Shaltiel's military acumen or strategy. Shaltiel,

for his part, complained of the lack of discipline in the Palmach and the slapdash way in which it conducted its operation. This mutual lack of respect bordered on outright hostility.

Examination of the events from the assault to the withdrawal from Zion Gate clearly demonstrates that both the Palmach and Shaltiel acted with astounding irresponsibility. Exhausted as the Palmach fighters may have been, the decision of their Commanding Officer to withdraw from the gate, effectively abandoning the Jewish Quarter, was inexcusable. The fact that Shaltiel reneged on his commitment to send a replacement force clearly did not help matters, but in no way does it justify the Palmach response.

Nor did the Palmach's action justify Shaltiel's conduct. As Commander of Jerusalem District, responsible for the welfare of the residents of the Jewish Quarter, it was his duty to ensure that Zion Gate remained in Jewish hands. That he chose to play power games with the Palmach instead of despatching a company of fighters to Mount Zion to maintain contact with the Jewish Quarter is inexcusable. His claim that there was no force available has been widely refuted. First, there was an Irgun platoon at Yemin Moshe, which had been brought in to reinforce the Palmach in the battle for the Old City. Zion Eldad, District Operations Officer, later stated that if Shaltiel had approached him, he would have had no problem in sending a unit of fighters to Mount Zion. Eldad claims he knew nothing of the argument between Narkis and Shaltiel, and had been unaware of the need for a unit to take over from the Palmach at Zion Gate.<sup>33</sup>

After the Palmach attack, did Leon Cohen (of the Jewish Agency Political Department) send the Chairman of the Truce Commission the following message:<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Izhak Levi, Jerusalem in the War of 1948, p.56

<sup>34</sup> Central Zionist Archive, S 25/5176

Last night our forces entered the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. The objective was to alleviate the situation of the Jews in the Quarter and establish contact with them.

The Jewish forces have no intention of continuing their attack within the Old City and we therefore request the resumption of the ceasefire in the Old City.

The same day Cohen sent the following cable to Ben-Gurion:<sup>35</sup>

This morning we met with the Belgian Consul [Chairman of the Truce Commission]...and conveyed to him a proposal in writing originating from the district commander [Shaltiel] saying that once our forces had achieved their military objective in the Old City – to make contact with the Jewish Quarter – we were renewing our offer of a ceasefire there, on condition that the Arabs did not try to disrupt our communications line with the Old City and did not attack us from the Arab neighborhoods.

The request for a ceasefire was conveyed to the Arab commander in the Old City, who rejected it outright. His sole offer to the Jews was unconditional surrender on their part.

Shaltiel did everything in his power to prevent the occupation of the Old City. All his efforts were directed at achieving a ceasefire by diplomatic means – efforts which were doomed to failure from the outset.

## THE JEWISH QUARTER COMES UNDER SIEGE AGAIN

Zion Gate was open for three hours: it was smashed open on May 19th at 3:30 am and abandoned at 6:30 am. During those three hours, a unit was brought in, consisting of 80 fighters equipped with 60 rifles and 20 Sten-guns.

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<sup>35</sup> Political and Diplomatic Documents, Volume I, p.34

Before the Palmach smashed through Zion Gate, two Arab Legion companies had entered through Lion's Gate, bringing the Legion force in the Old City up to battalion strength. That day, the situation in the Old City developed from skirmishes against irregular forces into a battle against a well-trained and equipped regular army force.

The reinforcements sent to the Jewish Quarter in no way matched the Arab reinforcements. The number of Arab fighters was fivefold that of defenders of the Jewish Quarter, and their equipment was far superior to that of the Jews. Against the rifles and Sten-guns of the Jewish reinforcements, the Arab Legion brought in mortars, cannons and heavy machine-guns, a large quantity of ammunition and even armor. Once Zion Gate was abandoned, the Jewish Quarter was left without a hinterland and without reserves of manpower or military supplies. The Legion troops, on the other hand, maintained continuous contact with Legion camps in Jordan and their emergency stores.

When the Palmach withdrew from Mount Zion, heavy shelling of the Jewish Quarter commenced. The Arab Legion positioned its guns and mortars on the Mount of Olives, from which vantage point they could pinpoint their attack on the Jewish Quarter. At noon that day, the Legion forces recaptured Zion Gate, and the attack on the Quarter commenced immediately thereafter.

On May 19, the defenders used up a considerable part of the ammunition brought into the Quarter by the reserve force, and in the evening an appeal for more ammunition was despatched to the district command. The casualties that day were two killed and eight wounded.

Malka Natanson, an Irgun fighter, described the events of the day:<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Malka Nathanson.

Word of the break-in through Zion Gate passed like wildfire among the posts. When the first Palmachniks entered the Old City, the defenders gazed at them and did not believe their eyes. The joy and enthusiasm were boundless. At last, the longed-for reinforcements had arrived. Dozens of young men were coming in through Zion Gate with crates of ammunition on their shoulders. We would no longer have to count each bullet fired from a rifle or Sten-gun. We could rain down bullets on the enemy and silence their positions. We could evacuate the wounded to proper hospitals in town and operate on them in modern operating theaters. And the civilian population could be evacuated and all efforts would be directed against the enemy. The Palmach instilled renewed hope in the hearts of the defenders and the feeling was that after the reinforcements rallied, massive counter-attacks could be launched, and we would no longer have to confine ourselves to defensive action from our positions.

Only a few hours lapsed and everything was turned upside down. Zion Gate was closed again, and the stifling sense of siege returned to plague us. The terrible shelling, the worst since the fighting had begun enhanced this feeling. The great hopes gradually dispelled, gave way to despair. Who knew if the Palmach would succeed in breaking in again? Was the Jewish Quarter to suffer the same fate as the Etzion Bloc?

When the Arab Legion entered the city, enemy tactics changed. Abdullah el-Tel, Commander of the Arab battalion which fought in the Old City, refrained from attacking the Jewish positions in the Quarter. He preferred to take advantage of the heavy weapons at his disposal and to shell the Quarter day and night. This greatly hampered the movement of the defenders and had a highly detrimental psychological impact on civilian. After the shelling by cannon and mortar, the Legion sappers crept up

close to Jewish positions, laid explosive charges and detonated them. They then attacked the positions and captured them. Thus they blew up house after house and post after post. Their progress was slow, but the method greatly reduced the number of Legion casualties.

On May 20, the Arabs totally destroyed several positions as well as the Nissan Beck synagogue.

The losses among the defenders that day were 5 dead and 10 injured.

May 21 and 22 were relatively quiet. The Legion was occupied with reorganization after two days of fighting, and Abdullah el Tel decided to bring an armored car equipped with a cannon into the Old City. The narrow alleys and many flights of stairs made this a complicated logistical operation. The Legion managed to overcome all these obstacles, and stationed their armored car in the Armenian Quarter, facing Zion Gate, to forestall any attempt on the defenders' part to break in again.

The heavy shelling, the number of casualties and the gradual advancement of the Legion disheartened both defenders and civilians in the Quarter. As the Legion continued its attack, the Quarter's rabbis, Rabbi Minzberg and Rabbi Hazan, sent despairing cables to Chief Rabbi Yitzhak Herzog and to Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, Chairman of the Vaad Leumi (Israeli division of the Jewish Agency):<sup>37</sup>

The community is about to be massacred. On behalf of the population we send a desperate appeal for aid. Synagogues have been destroyed and Torah scrolls burned... Rouse the authorities and the entire world and save us.

May 23 began, like previous days, with heavy bombardment. The Quarter was shrinking, the number of fighters dwindling and

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<sup>37</sup> David Ben-Gurion, Military Dairy, p.451

ammunition running out. Four fighters were killed and four injured in the shelling that day.

The Legion attacks intensified the following day. Their sappers blew up building after building, advancing under cover of machine-gun fire, which paralyzed the defensive positions. In reply to calls for help from the Quarter command, the district command planned an assault for that same night. The gate remained closed, however, and the attempted assault ended in failure.

Dawn arrived, heralding further death and destruction. The Legion continued its slow and steady advance, blowing up positions and causing many casualties. There was now a shortage of fighters, and the wounded were leaving hospital prematurely to return to their posts. As the situation grew more desperate, civilian pressure for surrender increased.

On May 26, the Arabs introduced a new strategy: loudspeaker appeals to the residents of the Quarter in which the Jews were given seven hours to surrender, before the entire Jewish Quarter was destroyed. The civilians besieged the Quarter command post demanding that Rosnak accept the Arab offer and surrender at once. Rosnak informed the city command at midnight that if help did not arrive that night, the Quarter would surrender at 5:00 am. He demanded that the Red Cross be brought in to arrange for the evacuation of civilians.

Dawn broke on May 27, but reinforcements still had not arrived. It was clear to all that the end was approaching. The enemy launched an onslaught on the Street of the Jews, and the Hurva synagogue of Rabbi Yehuda Hassid was captured and blown up by the Arabs. This dramatic act symbolized the end of the battle for the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

On May 28, the two rabbis of the Quarter, Minzberg and Hazan, went out to negotiate with the Arab Legion representatives on surrender conditions. The Legion officers demanded that the rabbis bring a Haganah representative and

Weingarten as well. After several hours of discussions, in the presence of UN representative Dr. Azcarate, the surrender agreement was signed. The Jewish signatories were the Quarter Commander Moshe Rosnak and Weingarten; the Arabs were represented by Abdullah el-Tel, with Dr. Azcarate signing on behalf of the UN. The document was written in English and Arabic.

There were 180 wounded fighters in hospital when the Legion captured the Jewish Quarter. Abdullah el-Tel gave orders for the healthy fighters to be concentrated and separated from the civilians. Just thirty-five fighters lined up. The Legion commander could not believe his eyes. "You have deceived me," he said. "If I had known your true size, I would have fought you with sticks."

That evening, the residents of the Jewish Quarter, together with the severely wounded fighters, were taken through Zion Gate to the New City. The prisoners of war were conveyed to the Kishle prison, and the following day transported to Jordan.

This marked the end of the heroic struggle of the defenders of the Jewish Quarter.

## POLITICAL MOVES

One cannot understand the military struggle for Jerusalem without analyzing the underlying political moves. The debate about Jerusalem began not in 1947, but ten years previously. In 1936 the British Government appointed a Royal Commission, headed by Lord Peel, to investigate the Palestine problem and recommend ways of solving it. After the Commission had listened to numerous testimonies in Palestine and Great Britain, it submitted its recommendations to the Cabinet on July 7, 1937. It advocated the partition of Palestine into two states: Jewish and Arab, with Jerusalem remaining under British Mandatory rule. The Zionist leadership, headed by David Ben-Gurion (then Chairman of the Jewish Agency Executive in Jerusalem) and Moshe Sharett (Shertok, Head of the Political Department), basically accepted the Peel Commission's partition plan. As regards Jerusalem, a plan was devised, whereby the city will be divided: western Jerusalem would be part of the future Jewish state and only east Jerusalem with the Holy Places will be controlled by the British. In 1938, a map was specifying the borders of western and eastern Jerusalem.

Ten years later, in 1947, a UN Commission (UNSCOP) visited Jerusalem to assess the country's problems at first hand.

In his testimony before the Commission, Ben-Gurion explained that the issue of the Holy Places was inapplicable to West Jerusalem, and hence international rule should be imposed only on East Jerusalem, which contained sites holy to all three western religions. The Commission did not concur with his argument and recommended, in addition to the partition of Palestine into a Jewish and an Arab state, the establishment of international rule in greater Jerusalem under UN supervision.

The UN Assembly at its historic meeting of November 29, 1947, decided that Greater Jerusalem would come under international rule under UN protection. Ben-Gurion was of the

opinion that this resolution should be accepted per se, since he regarded it as an organic whole, and thought that rejection of the internationalization of Jerusalem might jeopardize the establishment of the Jewish state. He believed that Jerusalem would, in fact, come under international rule, and planned all military action in the city accordingly.

In November 1947, Golda Meir (Meyerson), then acting head of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency, met with King Abdullah. The secret meeting was held at Naharayim, at the home of Avraham Rotenberg. After a long and friendly discussion, they agreed that Abdullah would invade Palestine and take control of the Arab part of the country. In exchange, Abdullah promised not to attack the State of Israel.

In February 1948, a meeting took place between Eliyahu Sasson of the Political Department of the Jewish Agency and Omar Dajani, a Palestinian Arab who served as King Abdullah's personal representative at the United Nations. At that meeting, Dajani told Sasson that the King was uneasy about the UN resolution imposing international rule on Jerusalem. Abdullah, he said, would prefer a partition of the city, according to which West Jerusalem would become part of the Jewish state, and East Jerusalem part of the Kingdom of Jordan. Although this plan was entirely in line with Ben-Gurion way of thinking, Sasson replied that this was not the suitable time to breach UN resolutions.<sup>38</sup>

In the first few months of the war, the Arabs held the initiative. Jerusalem was under siege, and the city leaders issued a desperate appeal for aid. At the end of March, the Jewish Agency proposed that the UN deploy the Scandinavian force to police Jerusalem, but the proposal was rejected. It should be recalled that the Cold War was just starting between the United States and its allies, and the Soviet Union and its satellites,

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<sup>38</sup> Archives of the Zionist Organisation, S 25/3569'8, and Avi Shlein, *Collusion Across The Jordan*, p. 152

situation which preclude agreement between the Great Powers on the despatch of a military force to Jerusalem.

At the beginning of April 1948, Ben-Gurion realized that the United Nations was incapable of enforcing its decision to impose international rule, and reverted to his old plan, namely the partition of the city. He gave orders for the siege of Jerusalem to be broken and the military initiative seized. April 6 marked the beginning of Operation Nachshon, during the course of which the siege of Jerusalem was broken and convoys of arms and ammunition, food and supplies entered the city. On April 9, Irgun and Lehi forces captured the Arab village of Deir Yassin, an event which had a considerable impact on the course of the war. Elsewhere in the country, Haganah forces captured the town of Tiberias and liberated Haifa. On April 25, Irgun forces attacked the Arab town of Jaffa. After several days of fighting, the Manshiye quarter was occupied, and as a result the entire town capitulated.

The Jewish onslaught led to the mass flight of Arabs, who believed that the Jews would ultimately suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of the Arab armies and that they would then be able to return to their homes.

On May 2 an extraordinary meeting was held at Naharayim between the British officers of the Arab Legion and senior Haganah officers. It took place on the initiative of the British and was attended by Colonel Desmond Goldie and Major Charles Cocker of the Arab Legion. The Haganah was represented by Shlomo Shamir (Rabinovitch), member of the general staff, and Nahum Spiegel, operations officer of the Golani Brigade. The following are excerpts from the minutes of the meeting.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> State of ISRAEL Archive, 130.11/2513/2

Colonel Goldie started by saying that they represented Glubb Pasha, Commanding Officer of the Arab Legion, and wished to establish direct contact with the Jews.

Goldie: We want contact with you in order to prevent a clash with you. Is that possible?

Shlomo (Shamir): If the Legion does not fight against us... and is where it is supposed to be, I see no reason for a clash.

Goldie: We are concerned about the situation in Jerusalem. How can we prevent a clash there?

Shlomo: Our views on the subject are known. To the extent that Jewish Jerusalem is secure, the road to the city is open and the Jewish settlements around it are secure, I believe there is no pretext for a clash.

Cocker: Is your occupation of Jaffa an indication of your plans for expansion?

Shlomo: No. The Jaffa story is well known. As you know, Jaffa severely harassed Tel Aviv, and that was unendurable.

Shlomo Shamir summed up his impressions of the meeting, which lasted an hour and a quarter:

- a. The British officers want direct contact with us, particularly with regard to future operations.
- b. They want to feel out our plans for the entire country, and to know what our response would be if the Arab Legion defended the area allotted for an Arab state.
- c. The Jerusalem issue worries them, and they are wondering whether it is possible to arrive at some kind of settlement.

At the Naharayim meeting, both parties reiterated what had been agreed in the past: that the Arab Legion would take over the area assigned to the Arab state and refrain from clashing with the Jews. The statements by the British officers confirmed Ben-Gurion's own feeling that, despite Abdullah's threats, he had not broken faith with the principles to which he had agreed in the past. The innovation in the Naharayim meeting was that,

for the first time in discussions of Jerusalem, it had been stated that both the Legion and the Jews wanted to prevent hostilities in the city. Moreover, it was the first time that it had been said explicitly that the Jews were interested in the Jewish section of Jerusalem. Shamir's reply "To the extent that Jewish Jerusalem is secure ... I think that there is no need for hostilities" was made on the instructions of Ben-Gurion, and it contained a clear message to the British and Abdullah that the Jewish Agency (which now felt that the plan for internationalization was non-implementable) was reverting to the Jerusalem partition plan: West Jerusalem for the Jews, and East Jerusalem (including the Old City) for the Arabs.

A report on the Naharayim meeting can be found in a cable sent by Kirkbride from Amman to the Foreign Office in London. It stated that negotiations had recently been held between British officers in the Arab Legion and the Haganah. In these secret negotiations, the aim was to define the areas, which would be under the rule of both sides.

Concomitantly, Moshe Sharett met with the U.S Secretary of State in Washington. Sharett told the Secretary that the British Colonial Secretary had recently informed him that Abdullah intended to invade Palestine, but would content himself with occupying the area assigned to the Arab state. He added that, in light of the recent military successes of the Jews and the behind the scenes agreement with Abdullah, he estimated that it would be possible to establish the Jewish state on schedule, without additional postponements.<sup>40</sup>

Throughout the last days of April and the beginning of May, the British High Commissioner made every effort to achieve a ceasefire in Jerusalem. He thus wanted to postpone the hostilities between the Jews and the Arabs until after the completion of the evacuation of British forces from Jerusalem.

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<sup>40</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States, vol V, Part 2, p.973

The High Commissioner met with a deputation from the Jewish Agency, which included Golda Meir (Meyerson) and Eliezer Kaplan, later Israel's Finance Minister. In a discussion concerning the armistice in Old and New Jerusalem, the Jewish Agency representatives stipulated several conditions, such as free access to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, the opening up of the road to Jerusalem etc. These conditions were not acceptable to the Arabs and hence were not applicable.

On May 7, the High Commissioner met with the Secretary of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, and they agreed on a ceasefire in the Jerusalem area, without accepting the conditions stipulated by the Jewish Agency representatives. On the following day, the British Mandatory government announced that a ceasefire in Jerusalem would come into effect at noon on the same day. The announcement was made without prior consultation with the Jewish Agency representatives, but was approved retrospectively, and the Haganah command instructed all its units in Jerusalem to cease-fire at the time specified. The ceasefire in Jerusalem lasted from that day until the British evacuation of the city.

On the same day, Colonel Norman (British Intelligence officer in Jerusalem) revealed that Abdullah was ready to meet with a representative of the Jews. Ben-Gurion decided to despatch Golda Meir to meet with the King, who asked that the meeting be held this time at his palace in Amman.

After meeting with Ben-Gurion, Golda traveled to Naharayim together with Ezra Danin, who served as interpreter. At Naharayim, she stayed in the home of Avraham Daskal; at nightfall Muhammad Zubati, Abdullah's personal secretary and confidant, arrived. The group crossed the Jordan River in Zubati's car, Golda disguised as an Arab woman to allay the suspicions of the Arab Legion guards.

Abdullah received the guests in his Amman palace. The conversation was friendly and towards midnight Zubati drove his

guests back to Naharayim. Golda returned immediately to Tel Aviv to report to Ben-Gurion.

When she reached Tel Aviv, she discovered that Ben-Gurion was briefing members of the Mapai Central Committee on the security situation.<sup>41</sup>

"In the middle of the meeting," Ben-Gurion wrote in his diary, "Golda arrived from the meeting with Abdullah, and in reply to my question, gave me a note, which read as follows: ' We met in a friendly spirit. He is very worried and looks bad. Did not deny that there had been discussions and an understanding between us on a desirable settlement, that is to say that he would take the Arab section, but now he is only one amongst five. This is the plan he proposes – a single state with autonomy for the Jewish sections, and a year later one country under his rule.

I immediately summoned Yigael Yadin, Yohanan Ratner and Yisrael Galili. I demanded that they make our forces mobile, expedite the capture of the road to Jerusalem and the Arab enclaves among the settlements - and plan a campaign against the general Arab invasion.

Yigael Yadin raised certain questions: would we fight Abdullah immediately after he crossed the Mandatory border - or the border of the Jewish state? I replied that only the 13 (members of the provisional government) could decide that.

David Shaltiel arrived from Jerusalem – he wants to launch an attack in Jerusalem after the mandate ends. This too is a political question. It is clear that we must attack along the front at the zero hour – but Jerusalem is different. This could anger the Christian world.

Despite Abdullah's volte-face, Ben-Gurion still hoped that it would be possible to prevent a clash with the Jordanian army.

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<sup>41</sup> Ben-Gurion Diary, The War of Independence, p. 409

As regards Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion weighed his moves very cautiously. He wanted to forestall widespread hostilities there, so as not to disrupt his partition plan.

At a meeting of the Minhelet ha-Am (the provisional government) held on May 12, Golda Meir gave a detailed report on her meeting with King Abdullah. She related that:<sup>42</sup>

The King greeted us cordially, but this was a different man, very depressed, troubled, and nervous. She went on to describe the King's proposal to establish one state in which the Jews would be granted autonomy for one year, and subsequently the country would be annexed to Transjordan.

In response Golda said to him: but we had an oral agreement. We relied on that agreement, on this friendship... we proposed returning to the plan, which already existed, and on which there was mutual understanding and agreement.

The King did not deny that this had been his wish, but time had brought change in the country.

Golda concluded by saying that she felt the King did not want this war, but seemed afraid of his partners.

After Golda's report to the Minhelet ha-Am, a general debate was held on policy regarding Jerusalem. As noted, a ceasefire had been declared in Jerusalem on May 8, and the question was whether to continue it after the British evacuation of the city, or to deploy forces so as to expand Jewish jurisdiction in Jerusalem. It should be recalled that a UN proposal for a general armistice, which would undoubtedly apply to Jerusalem as well, was then in the offing.

Excerpts from the minutes of that meeting vividly convey the prevailing atmosphere. Ben-Gurion opened the debate thus:

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<sup>42</sup> Protocol of the meeting of Minhelet ha-Am from May 12, 1948. State of ISRAEL Archives.

I see no advantage to an armistice (throughout the country). On the other hand, I do see the advantage of a ceasefire in Jerusalem, because it is convenient for us. If Sheikh Jarrah is not occupied by Arab forces and if Katamon is in our hands and we have access to Mekor Hayim – then we can accept the fact that Talpiot has not yet been annexed and I do not care if the commercial center is not yet in our hands. ***Since, in practice, the whole of Jerusalem is in our hands...*** (Italics mine, Y.L.)

This was the first time that Ben-Gurion had presented to the government the plan for the partition of Jerusalem. For him, the fact that Jewish Jerusalem was in our hands meant that "in practice, the whole of Jerusalem is in our hands". Henceforth, whenever Ben-Gurion spoke of Jerusalem, he was referring to the western part of the city, deliberately ignoring the Old City. Golda Meir was the only person who objected to Ben-Gurion's policy. She favored continuing the armistice in Jerusalem, but on certain clear conditions, and for the first time she refers to the situation in the Jewish quarter of the Old City:

I say that an armistice can prevail on condition that there is free access to the Old City; that the route is secure, at least for food, water, unarmed travelers, medical supplies; that the entrances to Jerusalem are guarded...

David Remez, later Minister of Transport, was pessimistic about our ability to withstand an Arab attack, and was therefore ready to grant far-reaching concessions.

In my view, Golda is too inflexible about the conditions. If she wants an armistice, she should forgo the condition, which states that we will not restore the Arab quarters to the Arabs. The Arabs lived in Katamon. How can we refuse to allow them to

return there? Will those houses become Jewish property? I cannot envisage that. I think it is an unfeasible condition...

In his reply, Ben-Gurion tried to sum up the points of agreement.

Golda wants an armistice in Jerusalem and wants the road from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem to be safeguarded and routes going through Arab territory to be safeguarded and no movements of armed forces there. This cannot be done by words alone. It can be done only by wielding physical force. If we do not use force to guard the route from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem – It will not be open...

If we want a situation where there is no shooting in Jerusalem on the basis of the status quo – we will agree to that... even if we do not open up the way to the Western Wall... and I say that it will not be such a terrible thing if we cannot go to the Wall for three months. We are not in control of all of Jerusalem, but our situation is good...

Several weeks later, Moshe Sharett wrote to Nachum Goldmann in London describing Christian world's demand for the internationalization of Jerusalem as morally invalid, since it had not succeeded in preventing warfare in the city and had abandoned the Jews. **Hence, there was only one option, namely - the partition of Jerusalem.** According to Sharett, this idea would also be acceptable to the Arabs, including Abdullah.<sup>43</sup> (Italics mine, Y.L.)

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<sup>43</sup> Political and Diplomatic Documents, vol I, p.163

## THE ARAB LEGION ATTACKS JERUSALEM

The Arab Legion, established by the British Army in 1920, was an inseparable part of that army. In 1922, when Transjordan was separated from Palestine and became an emirate, the Arab Legion became its security force. During World War Two, it was strengthened and together with other British army units, was active in suppressing the uprising headed by Rashid Ali el Kiliani in Iraq. After the War, the Legion helped to guard British army camps and installations. The British trained the Legion, supplied all its logistical needs and equipment, and provided most of its senior officers. The budget of the Legion came from the British Government, even after Jordan became an independent state with the Legion as its official armed force. Formally speaking, King Abdullah was the Supreme Commander of the Jordanian army, but the British Commanding Officer of the Legion, John B. Glubb, took British regional policy into account and tried to manoeuvre between the wishes of the King and of the British.

The mission assigned to the Arab Legion when the British left was to seize those areas of Judea and Samaria earmarked for the Arab state. In order to carry out this mission, the Legion had to cross the Jordan to Jericho, the transition point between the two parts of Palestine, east and west. The only road linking Jericho with Ramallah and Nablus, on the one hand, and Bethlehem and Hebron on the other, passed through Jerusalem. Jerusalem, however, was due to become an international zone under UN protection, and for the Legion to pass through the city would have been interpreted as a threat to occupy it. Moreover, there had been fighting in Jerusalem between Jews and Arabs in April, and Glubb, Commander of the Legion, wanted to avoid taking unnecessary risks while

transferring his army to Judea and Samaria. In order to bypass Jerusalem en route from Jericho to Samaria, Glubb prepared an alternative route.

It transpired that during the First World War, the Turks had laid a dirt track linking the Jiftlik (Ottoman building used as a police fort during the Mandate period) in the Jordan Valley with Nablus and Ramallah. The track was narrow and could be traversed by only one vehicle at a time. Consequently, Glubb decided to widen it and use it for transporting his army. But he found himself confronted with a political problem. In 1946 Transjordan had become the independent state of Jordan, and its army was not authorized to pave roads in Palestine, which was a separate political entity. It soon became evident, however, that Glubb did not perceive this as an obstacle and, while the Mandatory Government turned a blind eye, he widened the road using Palestinian Arab workers.

In the early morning of May 15, 1948, the Arab Legion crossed the Jordan by the Allenby Bridge and reached Jericho. From there the main force made its way up the Jordan Valley to the Jiftlik and from there turned west along the dirt road traversing Wadi Badran leading to Nablus and Ramallah. One battalion, under the command of Abdullah el Tel, remained in reserve in Jericho to guard the contact area with Transjordan.

After the Arab Legion crossed the Jordan on May 15 and invaded Palestine, its forces were deployed along the Nablus-Jenin-Tulkarem triangle and in Ramallah. The Legion's general staff had no offensive plans at this stage. They were assigned a relatively small force to defend the occupied territory, to await the outcome of the fighting in Palestine and to keep an eye on Israel's military moves.

At the same time, there were dramatic developments in Jerusalem. On May 13, the British Army evacuated the Old City and the small Jewish force launched Operation Viper. As previously noted, the abandoned British positions were

occupied without a fight, as was the Crucifix Post, the Greek Church in the Armenian Quarter which overlooked the entire Jewish Quarter.

On May 14, the British withdrew from the New City of Jerusalem as well, and Operation Pitchfork commenced. Haganah and Irgun forces seized the 'security zones' (most of them in Jewish-owned buildings) without a fight and succeeded in establishing territorial contiguity with previously isolated Jewish neighborhoods. The battle plan for Operation Pitchfork did not include occupation of the Jewish Quarter and Shaltiel had no intention of taking the Old City. In order to make clear their policy, representatives of the Jewish Agency (with the approval of Shaltiel) informed the Chairman of the Truce Commission that they would consent to an immediate ceasefire.

The Arab Legion was a small army without manpower reserves. In May 1948 there were only 5,000 Legion troops in Palestine, of whom 3,500 were in the Jerusalem district. Glubb feared that if the Legion became involved in street fighting in Jerusalem, this would affect its ability to control Judea and Samaria and endanger the prospect of annexing this area to Jordan. In addition, Glubb was not confident that he could defeat the Jews in Jerusalem. On the other hand, he understood the need to create territorial contiguity to safeguard the road from Jericho to Jerusalem and from there to Ramallah and Samaria, thereby ensuring the safe passage of military supplies from Jordan. Glubb still hoped that capture of the Jewish Quarter and control of the entire Old City could be affected by the irregular forces, without the intervention of the Legion.

On May 17, King Abdullah approached Abdullah el-Tel, commander of the battalion remaining in the Jericho area, and ordered him to send a company to the Old City and prepare for an offensive against the Jewish Quarter.

It would appear that Abdullah initially refrained from intervening in the fighting in Jerusalem because he hoped that the irregular Arab forces in the Old City would have no trouble occupying the Jewish Quarter – there were more than 700 well-equipped Arab fighters there as against about 100 ill-equipped Jewish ones. When it became clear, due to a lack of leadership and discipline, that this was not going to happen, King Abdullah decided to dispatch his army to the Old City.

The Legion entered the Old City not to save the Arabs from the Jews, but to help them capture the Jewish Quarter and thus complete the partition of Jerusalem. After Abdullah el-Tel's entry into the Old City, Glubb decided on May 18 to attack Jerusalem from the north, with the aim of occupying Sheikh Jarrah and linking up with el-Tel's forces.

## THE BATTLE FOR THE POLICE ACADEMY

Shaltiel requested that the Irgun continue to occupy the Police Academy and Upper Sheikh Jarrah captured in Operation Pitchfork. He guaranteed to supply all the equipment needed, including a unit equipped with a Piat, an anti-tank weapon. Roadblocks were placed on the Jerusalem-Ramallah road, and sappers scattered anti-vehicle mines.

It was no easy transition for Irgun fighters to find themselves in a British army camp, where not long previously they had been brought handcuffed and captive. Their freedom within these camps, more than anything else, symbolized the victory of the Jewish underground over the British. The situation created an atmosphere of euphoria, and the fighters became temporarily lax about security and protocol. Contact with Shaltiel's headquarters was not always maintained, and Raanan, the District Commander, remained unaware that Atarot and Neve Yaakov (between Jerusalem and Ramallah) had been

evacuated. Thus the Legion's advance from Ramallah went unchecked.

On the morning of May 19, the Legion launched a heavy bombardment against the Police Academy and Irgun positions at Sheikh Jarrah. After initial shelling, an armored column directed heavy fire at the ill-equipped Irgun positions. (The only anti-tank weapon at the Police Academy had been removed on orders of Shaltiel the previous day). Legion shells hit the furthestmost positions in the Police Academy, and successfully prevented the Irgun from detonating the electrical mines. The road blocks did not halt the armored cars, which proceeded along the field instead.

At the beginning of the battle, camp commander Eliyahu Meridor gave orders to evacuate the area of all unarmed personnel, and all the armed fighters were summoned to their posts. Irgun Operations Officer, Gal, was killed by a shell whilst organising the defence of the site. As the armored cars approached the positions at Sheikh Jarrah, the defenders, unable to respond to the heavy gunfire directed against them, were forced to retreat first to the Police Academy, and from there to the secondary defensive line at the Pagi buildings, near the Sanhedria quarter in northern Jerusalem.

In the battle for the Police Academy, six fighters were killed and fifteen wounded (including Eliyahu Meridor and Raanan).

While the battle for the Police Academy was raging, I was at the Etz Hayim base in reserve with my unit. At noon we were summoned to the aid of the defenders, but by the time we arrived, the Police Academy was in the hands of the Arab Legion. We helped in the construction of the secondary defence line near the Pagi buildings, and I was appointed District Commander. When the Legion started its advance towards the Pagi buildings, it was halted not far from our positions.

Meanwhile, the Arab Legion armored column continued its way towards Damascus Gate and linked up with the Arab forces fighting inside the Old City.

The Legion armored cars were parked near the British Consulate in East Jerusalem, prompting the British Consul to telephone Haganah headquarters to ask them not to shell the area. When darkness fell, Glubb returned his armored cars to Ramallah and the attack on Jewish Jerusalem was resumed only on the following day.

I spent the night in one of the apartments in the Pagi buildings, which had been turned into the unit headquarters. Most of the residents had fled their homes, but the few who remained helped by cooking for us and bringing mattresses for us to sleep on. To our great delight, one of the residents had a cowshed, and since he could no longer sell his dairy in Jerusalem, he happily distributed it amongst the fighters, who had not drunk fresh milk in months. Thus, while water was strictly rationed, milk flowed freely...

The night passed quietly, enabling us to recover from the defeat of the previous day and to rally our forces. Morning began with a heavy bombardment, accompanied by automatic weapon fire. While we were trying to guess the enemy's next move, one of the fighters, Yosef Zelniker, came running into headquarters, and related that a Legion tank had begun to advance towards our positions. I immediately sent word of this by wireless and asked for anti-tank weapons. Against my advice and despite the fact that shells were flying, Zelniker set off for his post. Suddenly we heard a heavy explosion and saw Zelniker lying wounded on the ground. We were stunned. "Zuria" (Esther Horn), a medic and the only girl at headquarters, ordered the boys to lay him on a bed, but there was nothing we could do to save him.

Meanwhile I had received word of the arrival of one of our armored cars, on which a gun was mounted, and was told that

the officer wanted to talk to the person in charge. I went out to meet him and at the sight of the armored car (which had been delivered to the Haganah by a British soldier who had deserted with his vehicle), I thought to myself: at last we have an armored car and can tackle the Legion on equal terms. My joy was short-lived. Moments later the officer told me that he had only three shells left, and wanted to avoid a clash with the enemy. When I asked him why he had come, he replied that he thought his mere presence would raise the morale of the fighters. We breathed a sigh of relief when the Legion tank retreated of its own accord.

In the noon hours of that day, May 20, an armored column advanced from Sheikh Jarrah towards the Mandelbaum Gate. It then tried to enter Shmuel Hanavi Street, but a unit with a Piat fired a shell, which hit the leading armored car. The following shells scored hits on two armored cars and the entire column and the infantry retreated. Thus the Legion's first attempt to penetrate Jewish Jerusalem had ended in defeat.

Glubb describes this battle in his book, and writes that he had no intention of attacking Jewish Jerusalem that day. He claims that the column had lost its way, and instead of moving towards Damascus Gate, it had mistakenly turned into Shmuel Hanavi Street. Even if this was true, there can be no doubt that had the column succeeded in breaching the lines, it would have continued its advance into the city.

The Legion's main target that day was Notre Dame Monastery located on a hill overlooking Damascus Gate. The Jewish forces occupying the monastery posed a threat to Legion units in the Damascus Gate area, who were guarding the route from the Old City to Sheikh Jarrah and from there to Ramallah. During the Legion's first attempt to capture Notre Dame, a column of armored cars proceeded towards the monastery under cover of heavy shelling. Behind the armored cars the infantry began its onslaught, but a Molotov cocktail hurled from the second floor of

the monastery hit their front car and set it alight, thus halting the entire column. The defenders of the monastery opened fire and the Legion was forced to retreat. Losses included the Legion commander and four armored cars, which were impossible to replace since access to the British army depots was blocked.

The repulsion of the Legion attack in Shmuel Hanavi Street and Notre Dame did much to raise the spirits of the Jewish defenders.

The next day the Legion was active along the northern front. After artillery shelling, the infantry advanced from the Police Academy towards the Pagi buildings. The Legionnaires succeeded in reaching the fence of the Sanhedria cemetery, but were repelled by heavy gunfire. Ben-Zion Rothenstein, an American, was assigned to one of the posts. As a veteran of the US forces in World War Two, he had received a study grant, which he was using to attend the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. When the fighting broke out, all American nationals were advised to leave the country, but Ben-Zion, together with several of his friends (including Moshe Brodetzky and Gershon Kremer) chose to join the Irgun instead and to take part in the defence of Jerusalem.

That day, Ben-Zion was sent from his post to bring information on the enemy's advance to headquarters. While he was making his way back to his post in the cemetery, heavy gunfire was directed at him. Fortunately he was able to take refuge in one of the open graves prepared in advance and was saved, though he later sustained an injury to his arm.

On the day the Legion attacked our positions at Sanhedria, the second onslaught was launched against Notre Dame. This time an infantry company, under cover of artillery and armor, succeeded in penetrating the courtyard of the monastery. There they encountered heavy fire from the defenders and, after suffering heavy losses, once again retreated.

The Legion made several more attempts to capture Notre Dame but, after recurrent failure, finally gave up. On May 24, the front stretching from the Pagi buildings in the north through Shmuel Hanavi Street to Notre Dame was stabilized. The halting of the Legion at this point prevented it from entering western Jerusalem.



**Notere Dame Monastery**

At this juncture the Legion abandoned the idea of frontal attacks on our positions and adopted attrition tactics. They intensified their bombardments of the city, by day and night, and tightened the siege of the city. The Legion troops defended Latrun ferociously, thereby barring the road from the coastal plain to Jerusalem. Our attempts to capture Latrun proved fruitless, and the siege of the city grew increasingly fierce. Instead of taking Jerusalem by storm, the Legion tried to starve the citizens out. They hung on heroically, withstanding not only the heavy bombardments and protracted siege, but hunger and thirst too.

## THE BATTLE FOR RAMAT RACHEL

East of the road which links Bethlehem to Jerusalem, a hill is overlooking the road. Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, located atop this hill, has a bird's eye view of the Bethlehem – Jerusalem road and had the potential to prevent the free movement of military forces and supplies along this route. To attack Jerusalem from the south, the Arabs would first have to occupy Ramat Rachel.

The kibbutz was founded in 1926. Destroyed by Arabs in the riots of 1929, and rehabilitated shortly afterwards. At the beginning of the War of Independence in 1948, the kibbutz was cut off from the city, and only after the British had left Jerusalem were links with Ramat Rachel re-established during Operation Pitchfork.

The kibbutz was located on a remote, windswept hilltop, surrounded on three sides by enemy forces and linked by a narrow strip to the Jewish Arnona and Talpiot quarters. To its south was the town of Bethlehem, to its east the Arab village of Zur Baher and to the west the Mar Elias monastery, the forward position of the Egyptian army.

After the British departure, an Egyptian column moved up from the Suez Canal northward to the Arab town of Ashdod. A branch of the column, under the command of Abd el Aziz, turned towards Beer-Sheva, and continued from there to Hebron, halting at Bethlehem. At that time, a unit of the Arab Legion, which had guarded the British withdrawal from Jerusalem, was stationed in the area, awaiting orders to return to its base in Jordan. In addition to the Egyptian and Legion units, there were irregular Palestinian forces in the area, which had been trained and armed by Arab Legion officers. The Arab forces in the Hebron-Bethlehem region were equipped not only with individual weapons, but also with heavy weapons including 3" mortars, guns, armored cars and even a few tanks.

The Jordanian unit, of company strength, was attached to brigade headquarters, which had been transferred to Ramallah. According to the testimony of Abdullah el-Tel, the brigade HQ ordered the company, then in the Hebron area, not to take part in any military operation with the Egyptian forces.<sup>44</sup> Despite this ban, the Legion forces collaborated with the Egyptians and placed themselves under the command of Abed el Aziz, who had been appointed commander of the entire Arab force in the area south of Jerusalem. Aziz, without co-ordinating with headquarters in Ramallah, decided to attack Jerusalem from the south, with the two-fold purpose of taking the city from the Jews and preventing Abdullah from proclaiming himself king of Jerusalem. The Egyptians, it should be understood, were opposed to Abdullah's occupying the area earmarked for an Arab state and hastened to occupy Hebron and Bethlehem before the Legion could do so.

On May 21, Ramat Rachel came under heavy bombardment. Many of the kibbutz buildings were hit and a number of cattle killed. It was the first shelling and the many direct hits greatly shook the 80 defenders.

The attackers doubled their effort the following day, forcing the defenders to flee to Talpiot. The Arabs, mostly villagers from nearby Zur Baher, started looting the kibbutz. They removed everything they could carry, concentrating particularly on livestock (cows and poultry) and foodstuffs.

Towards evening, two Haganah platoons arrived at Talpiot and immediately set out to liberate Ramat Rachel. They stormed the kibbutz, put the Arabs to flight, and conquered the site without a battle.

The next day, May 23, the story was repeated. After heavy bombardment and automatic weapon fire, the kibbutzniks again retreated. The Arabs entered the kibbutz and continued their

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<sup>44</sup> Memmoirs of Abdullal el-Tal, p.134-135.

looting. In the evening, reinforcements arrived, stormed the area and recaptured it. Ramat Rachel was liberated again.

While the kibbutz was passing from hand to hand, my unit at the Etz Hayim base was recuperating from prolonged fighting. When reinforcements reached Talpiot and prepared for a renewed onslaught on Ramat Rachel, I was informed that a wide-scale military operation was planned for that night in the south, with the participation of six platoons (two of the Irgun). I was ordered to bring my unit to the departure base in the Talbieh quarter and to await further instructions.

When we arrived at the base, we discovered that the assembly-point was in the building, which under the Mandate had housed a military tribunal, where some of our members had been given long prison sentences. The poignant irony of the situation symbolized for me the triumph of the underground over the British rulers of Palestine and the liberation of Jerusalem from the foreign yoke.

We waited in the military court room until I was finally informed that the operation had been cancelled, and that we were to defend Ramat Rachel instead. This decision greatly disappointed the fighters, who had been eager to take part in a military offensive and to breach the Egyptian enemy lines. We clambered aboard the two large Leyland trucks and drove to Talpiot. At southern HQ I was briefed on the situation, and at midnight we moved off on foot towards Ramat Rachel. It was a clear, starry night of such pastoral tranquility that it was difficult for me to imagine that a fierce and bloody war was raging. On reaching the kibbutz, I was briefed by the commander of the liberating unit and the reinforcements made their way back to base.

As we entered Ramat Rachel, a scene of unmitigated horror greeted us. Dozens of Arab bodies, some still grasping dead chickens, were sprawled on the ground. The stench of the rotting flesh of dead cows and chickens was overpowering. I

could understand why the Haganah fighters had been impatient for our arrival.

The fighters were assigned to various posts, while the officers and the reserve force were assigned to the kibbutz-dining hall. It was a relatively quiet night. From time to time a stray shell exploded in the distance or a burst of automatic gunfire was heard.

The next day, May 24, witnessed the large-scale military offensive against Ramat Rachel. Abed el Aziz, commander of the Egyptian column, had been planning the onslaught since he was stationed at Bethlehem, when he had at his disposal, in addition to the Egyptian force, a unit of the Arab Legion and irregular Arab forces. This was the only battle in the War of Independence in which a unit of the Arab Legion operated in full co-ordination with the Egyptians. Abdullah el-Tel relates in his memoirs that it was he who initiated this joint operation, without the approval of the brigade headquarters at Ramallah. As soon as Glubb learned of the co-operation, he ordered that it cease immediately. The order was obeyed only after the battle for Ramat Rachel.

At about 9:00 am, the scout on the roof of the dining hall reported that an armored car was approaching from the Mar Elias monastery. Orders were given to open fire, and the Lewis (a machine-gun used by the British in the First World War) succeeded in hitting the tyres of the armored car, stranding it in the open field. It was neither safe for the attackers to remain inside the vehicle, nor to leave it, since this would expose them to gunfire from the roof of the dining hall.

Several minutes later, two Egyptian soldiers clambered out of the vehicle holding a white flag. We thought naively that they wanted to surrender, and the order was given to hold fire. But it soon transpired that instead of surrendering to our forces, the Egyptians were merely changing tack, and under cover of the white flag, the two of them started running towards their

positions. To our dismay, we then discovered that the spring of the Lewis was broken and that we could no longer use it. From one moment to the next, we had lost half the machine guns at our disposal – having started out with 2, we now had just the Bren-gun left.

After the armored car incident, the kibbutz received heavy mortar and cannon shelling. One of the shells scored a hit on the guard post on top of the dining hall and injured the fighters who were on look-out. Contact with the other posts scattered throughout the kibbutz was gradually disrupted.

The attack had been well planned and was being carried out in a pincer movement. While the Egyptian army, with its armor, was attacking from the west (from the direction of the Mar Elias monastery), the Legion surged forward from the east (Zur Baher). More than 500 hundred enemy troops took part in the assault: three regular companies of the Egyptian army, one company of the Arab Legion and an unspecified number of irregular troops. 65 Irgun members and a unit of 20 members of the Haganah were defending the kibbutz. We had two machine-guns (one of them put out of action before the battle began) rifles and submachine-guns. Our only anti-tank weapon was a crate of Molotov cocktails.

In the early afternoon, an armored column, consisting of nine armored cars and a tank, advanced from Mar Elias, followed by Egyptian infantry. At the same time, the Arab Legion commenced their offensive from the opposite direction (Zur Baher). The Legion succeeded in capturing the extreme eastern post after most of the fighters there had been wounded. As soon as word was received in the dining-hall, a unit was sent to recapture it under the command of "Yifrah" (Yosef Ronen-Frankenthal). Several minutes later, one of the members of the unit returned and asked for reinforcements to rescue Yifrah. I assembled several of the fighters and set out across the open terrain between the dining-hall and the occupied post. Suddenly

there was a loud explosion, and I found myself alone in front of one of the kibbutz buildings. A shell had exploded in the rear, hitting some of the fighters and separating me from them. As I stood there stunned, an armed Legionnaire came towards me from behind the building. For an instant we gazed at one another, frozen. Then I leapt behind a wall and fired an entire magazine from my Sten-gun. I peeped round the corner to see what had happened and saw the armed Legionnaire peeping back at me from behind another wall. I was alone with him, and the path back to the dining-hall passed through Legion fire. I was cut off inside Ramat Rachel, which was itself isolated. I tried my luck for the last time, and under cover of two grenades, which I lobbed over the wall, ran as fast as possible back to the dining-hall, shells bursting around me and bullets whistling over my head.

I reached the dining-hall safely and discovered that no one knew what had happened to Yifrah and his comrades. Meanwhile, the tank which had advanced from Mar Elias was moving forward and had blocked the road to Arnona. This completed the siege of Ramat Rachel.

I sized up the situation, and discovered that the Arab Legion had captured half the kibbutz territory. We started setting up a new defense line with the aim of preventing the Legion from occupying the dining-hall, which was our last post. As I stood in the door of the dining-hall handing out orders to the fighters, I suddenly saw a group of dozen armed Arabs approaching. They were moving forward in unorganized fashion, shouting and screaming. Some even had their hands up. My first thought was that they had captured Yifrah and his comrades, and were bringing them to prevent us from opening fire. I immediately gave the ceasefire order, at which they appeared even happier. (It later transpired that the Legionnaires had assumed that the Egyptians had captured the dining hall, and the fact that we did not fire at them merely confirmed this). The cheerful group

came closer and we still could not discern whether Yifrah and his group were amongst them. I faced a difficult choice: if we fired at them, we could hit our own comrades. But if we did not, they could conquer our last stronghold. Suddenly their commander turned to us and asked:

"Who are you?"

I asked my comrades "who of you speaks Arabic?" Nisim Albeg said: "I do", and to my request he shouted in Arabic:

"We are brothers and we have been waiting for you".

When we could wait no longer, I shouted out as loudly as I could:

"Yifrah, hit the ground. We're going to shoot"

And then gave the order to fire. The fighters fired all their weapons, a hail of bullets, which took the enemy by surprise. Most of them were hit and the remainder fled in panic, leaving the wounded where they were. After the battle, we discovered that the commander of the Arab unit had been killed in our attack, and that this was the cause of general demoralization among his forces.

While we were busy checking the Legion advance, word reached us of the advance of the Egyptian armored force, which was firing directly at our positions. The post, which suffered most, was the observation post on the roof of the dining-hall. The wounded came down one by one, but we could not do without a lookout point. The number of wounded lying on the floor of the dining-hall grew steadily, and the only medic had also been wounded. To make matters worse, our ammunition was running out. When it seemed to me that the Egyptians were

about to break into the kibbutz, I sent one of the fighters to the gate, equipped with Molotov cocktails. As I awaited a report from him, I was informed that a shell had burst beside him as he made his way to the gate, igniting the Molotov cocktails and inflicting burns to his entire body.

The Egyptians halted their advance, and the Legion also paused to take stock of their situation. I exploited the relative quiet to visit the wounded, which were lying on the floor of the dining-hall. The room was quiet, and only a stifled groan was heard here and there. I went over to one of the injured and asked how he was. In reply, he asked for a little water. I hastened to the jug in the corner, but was disappointed to find that it was empty and that there was no water even for the wounded.

The many casualties sustained vastly reduced our numbers. One of the injured officers appealed to his wounded comrades, explaining that if the Arabs reached the dining hall, he would give them weapons and they had to fight to the last bullet. It was "Daniel" (Moshe Brodetzky), who had been an officer in the US army in World War Two. Daniel had come to study in Jerusalem at the Hebrew University, and when fighting broke out, had joined the Irgun. He was wounded while on look out on the roof of the dining-hall, and stayed in the dining-hall with the other wounded men.

After visiting the wounded, I went out to the small clump of trees near the entrance gate. It was late afternoon, and the Egyptians suddenly launched a heavy bombardment. We fell to the ground, and each time a shell exploded, there was a deafening noise and a hail of stones and dust rained down on us. After each explosion, we would anxiously look around to make sure that none of the others had been injured. Suddenly one of the fighters came over to me, too excited to talk. After he had calmed down a little, he told me that the tank, followed by the armored cars, had begun to advance towards the kibbutz. I

went to the edge of the wood and was surprised by the sight of an approaching steel monster spitting fire. In light of this new situation, we decided to save our much-needed ammunition, and not shoot until the infantry started its offensive. The order was to aim accurately, so that each bullet would meet its target. When the infantry launched its attack, we fired all the weapons at our disposal, forcing the enemy to halt its attack.

We waged psychological warfare against the Egyptians. We made them believe that we had a Piat (an anti tank weapon) and were waiting till they came close enough before launching our attack. They fell for the bluff and stopped some way away from us. I urged the fighters to hold fast, knowing that reinforcements would arrive after nightfall. As the sun went down, there was still no sign of help on the horizon; only at about 10:00 pm did we hear sounds from the direction of Arnona. Convinced that the reinforcements had finally arrived, I was unpleasantly surprised when we were attacked by heavy fire. I gave orders not to return fire, since I believed that our comrades had made a mistake – I later learned that it was generally believed that Ramat Rachel had fallen, and that the unit thought we were Arabs.

I stood by the gate of the kibbutz, and shouted to the advancing force to hold their fire. It was not clear if they could hear my shouts, but the firing ceased. The force, composed of Palmach fighters and a Haganah unit, approached the kibbutz cautiously. Only when they were within hailing distance did they realize that we were Jews. There were celebrations all round as we were united with our fellow fighters.

After sending the wounded for treatment, I received instructions from southern HQ to move my force to Talpiot. As we passed the last house in neighboring Arnona, we were greatly surprised to meet Yifrah and his comrades. We learned that when they had reached the outlying post captured by the Arab Legion, fierce fire was opened at them, preventing them

from returning to the dining-hall. They had to crawl through open fields to reach Arnona. They joined us and together we marched towards Talpiot, where we were warmly greeted.

When I counted heads, I discovered that about fifty percent of the force had been injured. We had 35 casualties, 3 of them severe. "Hillel" (Meir Silver), who was missing from the parade, was found dead the following day. Hillel was born in South Africa, an only child, who had left home and volunteered for service in the Irgun in Jerusalem. He had trained as a pilot in South Africa, but in Jerusalem was assigned to the infantry. He was generally loved and had a unique sense of humor. The terrible shock of his death destroyed his parents – his mother died shortly after hearing the news.

In Talpiot, two Leyland trucks were waiting to take us to the Etz Hayim base. I felt a great need to unburden myself of the tension, which had been my constant companion for so long. The next day I went to the district HQ in town to report to Raanan on what had happened at Ramat Rachel. The streets were empty after the constant noise of shelling I had grown used to at the kibbutz.

The meeting with Raanan was highly emotional; he told me that there had been an announcement on the radio from the Haganah command to the effect that Ramat Rachel had fallen into the hands of the enemy. Raanan said he had not believed the report, and had pressed Shaltiel to send help. Shaltiel had responded that it was impossible to reach Ramat Rachel in daylight and that reinforcements would arrive when night fell.

After the meeting with Raanan, I made my way to Cafe Allenby on King George Street, the only cafe open throughout the siege and a meeting place for fighters in town during their furlough. (The cafe was able to stay open on account of its shared electricity with the Haganah arms factory in the cellar). I chose the furthest table and sat alone with my thoughts. As I was sipping my tea, a young man in civilian clothing came over

to me and asked if I wanted cigarettes – I could have as many as I wanted so long as I had the money. The exchange upset me: this young man was profiting from the war situation while others were sacrificing their lives. I took out my revolver and brought him to the Etz Hayim base, whence I told him that the condition for his release was the confiscation of all his cigarettes. At first he refused, but agreed when he realized that the alternative was considerably less pleasant. We escorted him to his storehouse and returned with a large quantity of cigarettes.

The battle for Ramat Rachel and the emotions felt when the reinforcements arrived, were described by Yosef Uziel in *Be-Terem*, July 15, 1948:

We reached Ramat Rachel. Who said that the Irgun had retreated? Few units had fought as courageous a battle as the Irgun at Ramat Rachel. For a whole day they were isolated and cut off and faced a mass onslaught by Legionaires and the regular Egyptian army even after being forced to abandon the outlying positions of Ramat Rachel and to hole up in the dining hall building. After the Irgun's rapid withdrawal from Sheikh Jarrah, we had doubted the fighting skills of its troops – but their stand at Ramat Rachel healed the rift: heart spoke out to heart and the handshakes of the besieged Irgun showed us how strong was their sympathy for us. The many wounded men stretched out on the floor took courage: Who are you? Reinforcement? You really came? Long live the Field Units of the Haganah. Many eyes were damp at the sight of the many wounded men who had continued to fight though on the verge of despair! 'It's all right, guys. You are coming back!



### The dining-hall of Ramat-Rachel

After all the details of the fighting became known, I was commended for our stand and for our victory against a superior enemy force. "Daniel" (Moshe Brodetsky) was commended for his courage and exemplary conduct after being wounded.

The historian Izhak Levi (Levitza) wrote the following:<sup>45</sup>

The Irgun unit, with Yehuda Lapidot as their commander, fought bravely in spite of the high number of casualties.

After the battle of Ramat Rachel, the Jerusalem front was stabilized. The Legion abandoned the idea of attacking the city from the north, and ordered its units in the south not to co-

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<sup>45</sup> Izhak Levi, Jerusalem in the War of 1948, p.238.

operate with the Egyptian army. Apart from local initiatives, the battle for Jerusalem became a battle between fortified positions. Irgun units fought at most strongholds around the city. In addition, Irgun units took part in several Haganah attempts to recapture Sheikh Jarrah, which were unsuccessful. The participation of Irgun fighters in the battle for Jerusalem was out of proportion to their numerical size. Unfortunately, the same may be said for the number of casualties the Irgun sustained.

## City Under Siege

After the British departure, the water supply to homes was cut off. Jerusalem had always received its water from the Rosh Ha'ayin wells (near Petah Tikva) and the water was brought into the city by pipe through three pumping stations (one near Latrun and the others on the road to Jerusalem). During the Mandate, the British army guarded the pumping stations, but the day the British left, the Arabs disconnected the pumps.

Jerusalem had suffered from a water shortage since ancient times, and under the Turks each house had been equipped with a water cistern in the courtyard, where rainwater collected. Only after the British occupation of Palestine, when the pipeline from the Rosh Ha'ayin wells was completed, did houses get running water. In the first few months of 1948, all the cisterns were secretly cleaned and filled with fresh water, which was brought in to the city. On May 14, when the Arabs disconnected the pipeline, the city had a reserve of 115,000 cubic meters of water in the cisterns and in the large water reservoir in Romema: a quantity sufficient for four months, with rations of 10 liters per day per capita. All the cisterns were sealed, and only an authorized person was allowed to open them for water distribution. Since not every building had a cistern, water was distributed in special containers loaded onto trucks and horse-drawn carts. Every day these containers were taken through the city streets and the inhabitants lined up to receive their daily ration.

Distributing of Water



### Delivering Water

Food was also rationed, and every inhabitant was given a book of coupons for rationed goods. The electricity supply to homes was cut off to save fuel, and kerosene was portioned out for cooking and baking purposes. Sometimes Jerusalemites went out into the fields to chop wood for cooking. In the absence of electricity, radios could not be used and instead, 26 loudspeakers were installed throughout the city to relay broadcasts. All bus services were suspended, and the use of private cars was banned. A small number of taxis were permitted, and ambulances were used in emergencies. To keep order during the distribution of rations, men and women who were not liable for military service were recruited by the Mishmar Ha'am (Peoples Guard). By June they numbered 3,200 and made an important contribution to maintaining the daily routine of civilian life in Jerusalem.

As the siege stretched on and reserves dwindled, the local committee grew more nervous. In his cables to Ben-Gurion, Dov

Joseph gave a gloomy description of the situation. On May 16, he wrote:<sup>46</sup>

I have been told that the road is open; but nonetheless no order has been given to send the convoy. This is not feasible: the fuel situation is very grave. It is essential to send food. For three weeks we have received nothing. Please give the appropriate orders as long as the road is open.

Several days later he added:

After careful examination we have discovered that the flour reserve in the city will suffice for curtailed rations for seventeen days... In two weeks time the population will have nothing to eat. You must act accordingly... I do not wish to add to your difficulties, and I am trying to reassure the people of the city, but we have food left for only a few days, and any further delay would be dangerous...

On June 7, tension at its height, Dov Joseph wrote to Ben-Gurion:<sup>47</sup>

Must we make do with hopes and promises? For weeks I have been cautioning and warning of the need to send us supplies. Nothing has reached us... You have succeeded in sending other things, such as ammunition, so why not food?... I repeat my warning that if we do not receive flour by Monday, there will be famine in Jerusalem with its self-evident consequences.

The news from Jerusalem spurred Ben-Gurion to concentrate forces to make an effort to break into the city. He was not afraid that the Arab Legion would capture Jerusalem, but was greatly

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<sup>46</sup> Dov Yosef, Kirya Neemana, p. 160

<sup>47</sup> Dov Yosef, Kirya Neemana, p.161

concerned at the growing shortage of food and fuel and the impact of the siege on the population. In those early June days, there were growing rumors in the city that Jewish forces had succeeded in bypassing Latrun and in renewing contact between the city and the coastal plain. I recall that on one of my night-time visits to my company guarding the Pagi buildings, the fighters all asked me the same question: 'Has the siege really been breached? Is it true that the convoy has arrived?' I found it hard to disappoint these weary fighters and so I confirmed the rumors, although I had no authorized information to that effect.

We returned from Pagi after midnight, and made our way to the Etz Hayim base in a truck. We had to cross an open field, which linked Sanhedria with Romema. Since the field was exposed to enemy fire, we drove without lights. Suddenly there was a bump, which threw the five of us in the driver's cabin in all directions. I was thrown up to the ceiling and hit my head hard. Our first thought was that we had hit a mine, but after careful examination, we found that a rock had shaken the vehicle. After we had recovered, the driver (unhurt, since he had been gripping the steering wheel) climbed down and worked on removing the rock from beneath the truck.

We drove on, stopping at the hospital to receive first-aid. A doctor's examination revealed that none of us had been seriously hurt, and we were allowed to continue our journey. We reached base at 3:00 am and tried to rest from our nocturnal adventure. Two hours later, however, I was awoken by a great commotion. Entering the courtyard, I saw an amazing sight – five jeeps loaded with weapons and men had somehow managed to arrive from the coastal plain. The group was headed by "Gidi" (Amichai Paglin) whom I knew of old from the fighting units in Ramat Gan. After our initial excitement, they told us about the Burma Road which went around Latrun and which at this stage was traversable only by jeep. Gidi introduced

me to "Chunky" (David Brisk), an expert in mortars from his British army days.

It was June 9, two days before the commencement of the ceasefire decided on by the Security Council. The energetic Chunky related that he had brought with him in his jeep a 3" mortar and shells. He wanted it installed in a suitable place to enable us to shell the enemy positions before the ceasefire came into effect. We were so excited that we forgot our exhaustion, and excitedly began to unload the precious supplies. After we had calmed down, Gidi asked for a meeting with Raanan before renewing our activities in Jerusalem. First I sent Chunky with the mortar to our base in the Feingold buildings, in Nahlat Shiva in central Jerusalem, and the Old City received its first shelling from there by Irgun mortar.

At the meeting held at HQ between Gidi, Raanan and myself, it was agreed that the same evening our five jeeps would join the Haganah convoy setting out for Bet Susin (several kilometers south of present-day Sha'ar Hagai) and there would meet the trucks coming from the coastal plain. "Porters" would transfer the load from the trucks to the jeeps, and the loaded jeeps would return to Jerusalem. Gidi was to return with the convoy to Tel Aviv and I was appointed commander of the Irgun jeeps.

At the appointed time, I met Yitzhak Levi (Levitze), who was in charge of the entire convoy on behalf of the Haganah, and received instructions on the journey. We drove to Givat Shaul and from there along the Roman road leading to Motza (thereby bypassing the section of road which was exposed to Legion gunfire from Nebi Samuel). We reached Bab el Wad safely. There we turned left (south) on the road leading to Hartuv (Bet Shemesh), and after one and a half kilometers turned right (west) onto a dirt track. The road started out straight, and we encountered no problems. But we soon reached a sand-hill impassable even for jeeps. The boys were obliged to push the

vehicles up the hill. There we met the trucks with their load, which we transferred to the jeeps for transportation to Jerusalem. Despite the seeming disorganization, the task was completed efficiently and in orderly fashion. However, we soon discovered that we would be unable to convey both the load and all the people back to Jerusalem. Many were Jerusalemites who had been released from prison or detention and were eager to return to their families. We had a difficult choice to make and Gidi put the responsibility for making that choice on me. I responded by packing the jeeps beyond capacity; only after one of them overturned did we decide to unload some of the packages and return them to Tel Aviv. The boys were adamant about not returning to the coastal plain and at one point I counted 10 passengers hanging onto the jeep. The fighters who had driven from Jerusalem with us continued on to Tel Aviv and I looked on them enviously. I very much wanted to visit my family and friends in Ramat Gan, whom I had not seen for about five months and would willingly have handed over command to someone else, and joined them. We drove very slowly along the path leading to the Hartuv – Bab el Wad road. As we drove, we met dozens of soldiers, each of them carrying military equipment. They were new immigrants, who knew no Hebrew and had no idea how close we were to the unmarked border. Mules were also proceeding along the path with heavy loads on their backs. From time to time shots were fired, and an isolated shell would explode. The night-sky was clear and the trek of armed motley of soldiers across the open fields reminded me of something out of a Western movie.

We reached the road safely, and I ordered the drivers to increase their speed, since I wanted to reach Jerusalem before dawn.

The dirt road, which bypasses the main Jerusalem – Tel Aviv road in the Latrun area, had been discovered during the fierce battles there. On May 17, the Arab Legion entered Latrun, thus

tightening the siege of Jerusalem. In response to the deteriorating situation in Jerusalem, Ben-Gurion deployed the Seventh Brigade to attack Latrun a week after the Arab Legion had established itself there. The fierce battle ended in defeat for the Jewish forces and claimed numerous victims. Other attacks followed, as a result of which a narrow corridor was established under our control, which bypassed Latrun. A unit of scouts from the Harel Brigade (Palmach) marched from Bab el Wad by night and reached Hulda safely, via the route later known as the Burma Road. (The name was taken from the trail blazed during the Second World War by British forces in the mountainous and impassable area of Burma).

The Israel Defence Forces invested great efforts in improving the Burma Road and preparing it for the passage of trucks. Iron grid was placed on the steep slope and a heavy tractor stood permanently at the top of the hill to tow those vehicles whose engines could not make it. At first arms and ammunition were transported along this road, later the transportation of food to the besieged city began. While flour and other foodstuffs could be carried by truck, water was a grave problem. At the beginning of the siege, the Jews had succeeded in storing enough for four months, but there was no certainty that this water would last till the rainy season (which would refill the cisterns). Supply of water in containers was not practical, since the Burma Road was not yet ready for such large-scale transportation. The planning of a pipeline from Hulda to the old pumps near Bab el Wad had begun, but this complex project required a great deal of time. Thus, when the State of Israel agreed to a truce, it made it conditional on the supply of water, food and fuel via the old Jerusalem road, near Latrun, which was under the control of the Arab Legion.

## FIRST TRUCE

From the day the British left and the Arab armies invaded the country tremendous efforts were invested by the Truce Committee in achieving a ceasefire, but with singular lack of success. On May 22, the Security Council decided on an immediate ceasefire in all the combat areas in Palestine. Israel undertook to respect the Security Council resolution, but the Arabs rejected it and the fighting continued in full force. On May 29, the Council decided again on an immediate ceasefire, but again the Arabs refused to observe it. As long as the Arabs believed themselves able to defeat the young Jewish state, they rejected all proposals to lay down their arms. It was only when victory eluded them and the Jews seemed likely to inflict a defeat on them, that they agreed to the Security Council proposal to observe a truce for a period of four weeks. The negotiations between the parties were conducted by the Swedish statesman, Count Folke Bernadotte, who had been appointed by the UN as mediator between the Jews and the Arabs.

In the wake of his talks with Arab representatives, Bernadotte formulated a plan, and on June 8 he conveyed a memorandum to the Israel Government specifying the conditions for observance of the truce, which was fixed for June 11, 1948. As regards supply arrangements to Jerusalem, Bernadotte wrote:<sup>48</sup>

Aid to the populations on both sides in areas which have suffered severely from the clashes, such as Jerusalem and Jaffa, will be provided by the International Red Cross Committee in such a manner as to guarantee that the reserves of vital supplies will not be considerably larger or smaller at the end of the truce than they were before the truce.

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<sup>48</sup> Political and Diplomatic Documents, vol I, p.135

The people of Jerusalem, both civilians and soldiers, welcomed the truce, fixed for June 11th, with relief. The soldiers, particularly those serving in combat units, were exhausted and emotionally traumatized by the sight of so many wounded and killed comrades. Tension was heightened by the sense of frustration and impotence stemming from the constant shortage of weapons and fighters. Even though I had remained optimistic throughout the battles, and had believed implicitly that we would win the war, I was nevertheless haunted by the question: Why hadn't we been ready for the big battle? Was the severe shortage of weapons really unavoidable?



**Jafa Road, Jerusalem June 1948**

Civilians, who had been in a state of severe anxiety throughout the fighting, emerged from the dark shelters and joyfully greeted the convoys of jeeps loaded with food. The shelling, which had

exacted a heavy price from civilians as they stood in line for water and other necessities, had finally ceased. It was possible to go out into the fresh air, to take the children for a stroll and to visit friends and relatives, without fear of a stray shell. There was great hope that the truce and renewed contact with the coastal plain would herald a return to normal life in Jerusalem. There would be water in the taps, electricity at the flick of a switch, and a varied, substantial diet.

Immediately after the truce began, Count Bernadotte placed his men in key positions to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire. The opening of the main road to Jerusalem for the transportation of foodstuffs was under the control of the Truce Commission, and it encountered considerable difficulties. The Arabs employed delay tactics and prevented the passage of the convoys. The main problem, however, was their demand to supervise the convoys passing along the Burma Road, and until this matter was settled, they did not permit the passage of vehicles along the main road. The IDF had anticipated this problem and, well in advance, a UN representative had been driven along the Burma Road to see for himself that it had been completed before the truce and was therefore not under UN supervision. The Arabs then raised another objection, claiming that the main road had been sabotaged during the fighting and was not traversable. Dov Joseph sent workers from Jerusalem to Bab el Wad to mend the road. But the main road was opened to traffic only on June 19 – eight days after the truce began – and two supply convoys set out for Jerusalem under UN supervision. UN observers examined the convoys during loading and the entire load was meticulously recorded. They were examined again superficially at the Bab el Wad check post.

While the convoys were proceeding along the main road, lengthy discussions were taking place between Dov Joseph and the mediator regarding the amount of food, which it was

permitted to bring into Jerusalem. As mentioned, Bernadotte's guideline was that:

“The reserve of vital supplies should not be considerably larger or smaller at the end of the truce than they were before the truce”.

This meant that the Jews of Jerusalem had to continue to make do with the meager rations they had received during the siege. Dov Joseph argued that the inhabitants should be supplied with rations commensurate with Western standards. A petty discussion ensued on the number of daily calories the Jews of Jerusalem were entitled to receive, with Dov Joseph arguing in favor of increasing the daily calory intake, while Bernadotte argued for reducing it. When Dov Joseph argued that the average daily intake in the US was 3,900 calories, Macdonald (Bernadotte's representative) replied that in China millions of people lived at a much lower number of calories. To which Dov Joseph retorted:

[We prefer to live according to the US not the Chinese model.](#)

The number of Jews in Jerusalem was also the subject of debate – the Truce Commission giving a low estimate so as to reduce the quantity of food to be brought into the city. Finally, a compromise was reached whereby each of the 108,000 Jews in western Jerusalem would receive 3,100 calories daily. Supply of fuel to Jerusalem was also permitted.

Once the road was opened and traffic to the coastal plain renewed, many Jerusalemites wanted to leave the city – some to visit relatives, others to escape the suffering and danger. Thus, as soon as the truce began, special measures were adopted to prevent a mass exodus. Anyone who wanted to travel to Tel Aviv required a special permit from the Jerusalem

Committee, and such permits were very hard to obtain. Despite these difficulties, a considerable number of Jerusalem residents managed to leave the city.

The Arabs were displeased at the free flow of traffic on the Burma Road and demanded once again that UN supervision be imposed. They harassed convoys on the main road so as to force the Jews and the UN to extend supervision to the Burma Road. Finally, the Israeli government succumbed and announced that the Burma Road would be used only for transferring military supplies to the strongholds in the vicinity, while food supplies to Jerusalem would be transported along the main road under UN observation.

It will be recalled that the British had laid a pipeline to convey water from the Rosh Ha'ayin wells to Jerusalem through three pumps. After they left the city the Arabs, who controlled Rosh Ha'ayin and the pumps at Latrun, stopped the flow of water to Jerusalem. Although they were supposed to resume the supply through the pipeline, they refrained from doing so. On June 25, about two weeks after the truce began; the Israeli Government submitted a memorandum of protest to Count Bernadotte, stating that:<sup>49</sup>

On June 7 you agreed that, in accordance with the truce conditions, the operation of the water supply to Jerusalem was to be guaranteed as part of the resumption of the supply of vital goods to the city. However, by means of a complex method of stoppages and postponements, the Arabs have succeeded in practice in preventing the implementation of this part of the truce conditions. First they claimed that the [pumping] machinery at Rosh Ha'ayin had been irreparably damaged. When we insisted that our experts be given the opportunity to examine them, they finally agreed that British engineers, serving

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<sup>49</sup> Dov Yosef, Kirya Neemana, p.234

in the Arab Legion, could carry out the check. After an additional postponement, they announced that the machines themselves were in working order, but were lacking several small parts. They also objected to us mending the sections of the water pipeline which had been damaged, saying that they themselves would do the job. Several days passed and nothing was done. At the same time, Jewish engineers were barred from checking the pumps at Latrun.

The Arabs, well aware of the importance of water for Jerusalem, did not renew the supply. (The pumping station at Latrun was blown up in August by Legion forces, shortly after Jewish engineers had mended it). In parallel to the discussions with Count Bernadotte, the Mekorot Company began to lay a pipeline along the Burma Road. It linked the wells in the Rehovot area with the pumping station at Sha'ar Hagai, which was controlled by our forces. After two months of work, on August 11, water began to flow through the new pipeline and Jerusalem was saved.

Despite the supervision of UN observers, reinforcements of equipment and troops flowed constantly into Jerusalem, above and beyond what had been agreed with the mediator. The forces fighting in Jerusalem and on the way to the city exploited the truce in order to recuperate and to replenish their ranks.

The Irgun in Jerusalem also received reinforcements of weapons and manpower. When I asked Raanan for a short furlough to visit my family in Ramat Gan, I was informed that my presence in Jerusalem was vital, because of Irgun reorganization in the city. It had been decided to concentrate all the bases scattered throughout the city, and to set up one large camp for the new battalion. I was assigned the task of finding a suitable location and, after a lengthy search; I chose the abandoned Katamon neighborhood, where several streets could easily be blocked off. In addition to the Jerusalem force which

had fought in the city, the battalion was augmented by forces from the coastal plain.

It should be recalled that when the State of Israel was proclaimed, the Irgun announced its disbandment as an independent organization. The Irgun fighters joined the Israel Defence Forces, some as individuals and others in organized fashion. The formal enlistment process was slow, and the Irgun units, which the IDF had not yet had time to absorb, fought under orders from the general staff. Thus Irgun units were sent to capture the Arab village of Yahudia (near Petah Tikva), and to attack the town of Ramle. When the truce commenced, many of the fighters had not yet enlisted in the IDF and preferred to join the Irgun forces in Jerusalem which had maintained their organisational independence.

While the IDF was using the Burma Road to transfer military equipment to Jerusalem, the main road was being used to convey food supplies under the protection of the UN observers. This was not the case with the Irgun, which had to employ various stratagems in order to despatch weapons by the main road, since the Burma Road was closed to them. I recall that one day, Yosef Bajaio, driver of a truck carrying food supplies from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, arrived at the Katamon base. The truck, ostensibly loaded with sacks of onions, contained weapons of various kinds hidden beneath the onions. Yosef had passed smoothly through the UN observers' checks and we hastened to unload the weapons, so that the onions would reach their destination as soon as possible.

## THE TEN-DAY BATTLE

The six-week truce ended on July 8, 1948. When the fighting resumed, there was a marked shift in the mood of the Jews of Jerusalem, both civilian and soldier. Throughout the truce, large quantities of food and supplies had poured into the city and a pipe carrying much-needed water to the capital had been installed. The stifling atmosphere of the siege was eased as people no longer lived with the specter of hunger and thirst, or the fear of imminent shelling. The renewal of contact with the coastal plain had restored confidence and faith in Jewish solidarity.

The dispatch of weapons and military equipment to Jerusalem via the Burma Road reversed the balance of power in the city. Military units underwent reorganization, and new volunteers from the coastal plain swelled the dwindled ranks. The weary fighters were able to regain strength and underwent intensive training with the newly arrived weapons.

To grasp fully the significant improvement in the equipment situation, it is useful to compare weapons strength before and after the first truce. The number of rifles doubled and the number of machine-guns increased from 28 to 150. But the addition of heavy weapons made the most dramatic impact: from 6 medium machine-guns (on May 15) to 16 (on July 8); four 3" mortars in May as against 13 in July; and 2 Piats on May 15 compared to 17 on July 8.

## JERUSALEM WEAPON STRENGTH<sup>50</sup>

	<b>15.5.1948</b>	<b>8.7.1948</b>
<b>Rifles</b>	1011	1800
<b>Sub-Machineguns</b>	302	1020
<b>Light Machineguns</b>	28	150
<b>Medium Machineguns</b>	6	16
<b>2" Mortars</b>	24	25
<b>3" Mortars</b>	4	13
<b>Davidka</b>	2	7
<b>Piat</b>	2	17

While the Jewish forces were being reinforced, the reverse was going on in the Arab Legion. Heavy losses had led to a significant reduction in trained fighters and new recruits were being brought in. Moreover, the Legion was suffering from a grave shortage of ammunition for its heavy weapons. When the hostilities began, the British had sent a ship to Aqaba with military equipment intended for the Arab Legion. However, when the ship passed through the Suez Canal, its cargo was confiscated by the Egyptians and never reached its destination. The many shells, which fired at Jerusalem, had severely depleted the Legion's reserve. Since Britain had guaranteed to observe the UN resolution, it had no choice but to join the arms embargo on the area of fighting in Palestine.

In his reports of June and July, Nahum Goldman (Jewish Agency representative in Great Britain) noted that senior Legion officers had arrived in London to persuade the Government to send shells to the Legion. The British Government remained adamant, and no shells were dispatched. In a cable to the State

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<sup>50</sup> Izhak Levy, Jerusalem in the War of Independence, p.473

Department in Washington, the US Ambassador to London reported that according to information, which had reached him, Abdullah had stated that the Legion had sufficient supplies and ammunition for only a few days of fighting.<sup>51</sup>

When fighting broke out on July 8, 1948, the Legion in Jerusalem had no plans to attack. They adopted defensive tactics and toned down the shelling of the city. But David Shaltiel, despite clear military advantage, considered his main task to be the passive defense of the city. With the exception of limited local initiative in the Arab villages of Malha and Ein Karem, Shaltiel's primary concern was to maintain the status quo. He rejected any proposal for all-out military action in the north and east of the city, and thereby helped to realize Ben-Gurion's plan for the partition of Jerusalem. In his testimony to the History Section of the IDF, Zion Eldar, Operations Officer for the Jerusalem District, said:

I know of no operational orders to our sector, handed down by the general staff. I for my part received no instructions of this type from the district command, and hence no all-out operational plan was drawn up in Jerusalem in anticipation of the renewal of the fighting.

The Irgun's plans were very different. The organization wanted to prevent the partition of Jerusalem, and aspired to capture the Old City, and thus to reunify the city. Before the end of the truce, Irgun leaders consulted with Shaltiel in order to draw up a joint plan for the conquest of the Old City. At their meeting he explained that the Old City was of no strategic importance, and was not a major priority. More immediately pressing operations needed to be carried out in the south of the city and only afterwards would he find the time for the Old City.

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<sup>51</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States Vol V, Part 2, p.1204

In light of Shaltiel's hesitation, the Irgun discussed the idea of capturing the Old City by itself, without the co-operation of the Haganah forces.

I was subsequently summoned to battalion headquarters, together with the other company commanders, to discuss the possibility of occupying the Old City. "Shimshon" (Nathan-Niko Germant), the battalion CO, presented the problem, and "Zeev" (Menahem Shiff), the battalion's Operations Officer, described the meetings with Shaltiel and his refusal to give a clear answer regarding a joint all-out offensive against the Old City. Although our battalion was at full strength and well equipped, the danger of independent action was too great. We could launch a daring surprise attack on the Old City, but there was no way of anticipating how the fighting would develop. We lacked the necessary reserves for an all-out battle, and hence felt it too much of a risk to attack the Old City without Shaltiel's help. We were very eager to capture the Old City from the Arab Legion, and did not easily give up the idea of going into battle alone. However, we were loathe to give up the idea entirely and decided to convene again before arriving at a definitive decision.

Word of our discussions reached Shaltiel, who feared that we would carry out the attack on the Old City by ourselves. He suddenly changed his tone at our meetings and explained that he had decided on the joint occupation of the Old City. He requested that we first conquer the Arab village of Malha, to the south of the city, and then attack the Old City in a concerted effort. He also asked us to hold on to the fortified positions at Mount Zion and the Pagi buildings in the north of the city. This effectively immobilized one of our companies and prevented us from attacking the Old City on our own.

Raanan agreed to Shaltiel's requests, albeit unenthusiastically in the hope that after we had carried out the missions assigned to us, we would finally be allowed to tackle the large-scale

operation which we had so long anticipated: the occupation of the Old City. On this matter Shaltiel commented: <sup>52</sup>

The Irgun and the Lehi were assigned to the southern sector (Malha and Bet Mazmil)... they still constituted a fighting force and I was obliged to honor the agreement with the 'dissidents'. If I had sufficient forces, I would have put them in a concentration camp; but I was ordered by the general staff to make them part of the operation. The Irgun had not carried out an independent action since Deir Yassin. It seemed preferable to use them in the framework of our own plans than to allow them to carry out independent operations at their own discretion.

When fighting resumed, my company was assigned the task of defending Mount Zion, and I was obliged to dispatch two platoons to the Mount. Contact with Mount Zion was maintained under cover of darkness, since the Legion controlled the approach to the Mount during the day from their positions on the walls of the Old City. At nightfall I ascended the Mount with my men, and we toured the area. After visiting the positions, I climbed up to the minaret of the mosque, with its panorama over the whole of the Old City, and gazed sadly at the Jewish Quarter, which had been totally destroyed by the Arab Legion.

Heavy losses were incurred during the fighting on Mount Zion since both sides were easily within the range of hand-grenades. One day I was holding discussions at headquarters, in the underground room where David's tomb was located, when one of the soldiers suddenly came in, white as a sheet and too upset to speak. I tried to calm him, but he stammered just one word: "Arab." I guessed that Arabs had infiltrated the position he was guarding, and I immediately ran with "Yifrah" (Yosef Ronen-Frankenthal) to see what had happened. When we reached the

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<sup>52</sup>Izhak Levi, Jerusalem in the War of Independence, p.313

post, we learned that the men on guard duty had been drinking coffee when an Arab Legion soldier suddenly appeared. He had lost his way and, realizing his mistake, had turned back. We went over to the firing position, and were in time to see the Legionnaire climbing a stone fence to reach his own post. Yifrah, who was the first to see him, turned to me and I knew what I had to do. I aimed my rifle, but found myself unable to pull the trigger. I suddenly forgot the terrible war and saw before me a man who had lost his way and stumbled onto our positions without violent intent. I continued to gaze at him until he had disappeared from sight. Yifrah fixed his gaze on me but said nothing.

The Irgun was exerting increasing pressure on Shaltiel to open the offensive, but only on July 13, about a week after the fighting began, was the order given to capture Malha. Participating were an Irgun company, reinforced with two platoons of the Haganah, and a mortar unit stationed at Bayit Vagan. The attack began early on July 14, starting with heavy mortar and gun barrage. The force then stormed the village and by dawn the village was in our hands.

That morning a unit was sent to capture the El Ras position just south of the village, opposite the railway line linking Jerusalem to the coastal plain. Before the unit had time to dig in, the Arabs had launched a counter-attack, accompanied by a heavy shelling. The commander gathered the casualties in a nearby cave, but they were discovered and the Arabs stabbed them to death. One man, shielded by a heap of bodies and taken for dead, survived. At nightfall he crawled towards the center of the village, and was found by his comrades lying in a field. He told them of the cruel fate of his fellow-fighters.

The Arab attackers advanced towards the village, but were checked by fire from the defenders. As word of the Arab counter-offensive spread, reinforcements were sent to Malha from the battalion in Katamon, together with a mortar unit

headed by Chunky. After a brief exchange of fire, the Arab force retreated and the village was again in our hands.

The cost of the battle was heavy: 18 dead and many wounded.

## OPERATION KEDEM

Even after the occupation of Malha, Shaltiel did not hasten to attack the Old City. Only when it was clear that the truce would come into effect within less than forty-eight hours, did preparations begin in Jerusalem for the operation aimed at liberating the Old City.

On Thursday July 15, 1948, Shaltiel convened the senior district officers and informed them for the first time of Operation Kedem. That same day, the Security Council decided on a ceasefire in Israel, and on July 16, Shaltiel received the following cable from Ben-Gurion:<sup>53</sup>

The Security Council has decided that tomorrow morning at quarter to six shooting will cease in Jerusalem, and, on Monday morning at the same time, throughout the country. The Consular Committee in Jerusalem has been made responsible for supervising the ceasefire. On receipt of this cable, contact them at once and inform them that by order of the Israel Government you are ceasing fire in accordance with the resolution, on condition that the Committee reports by midnight – or later at your discretion – that the Arabs have accepted the truce and have held their fire since quarter to six Israel time.

In another cable to Shaltiel, Yadin wrote:<sup>54</sup>

Following on the cable from the Minister of Defense concerning the truce, you should consider what can be done tonight. The likely possibilities: Sheikh Jarrah or a bridgehead in the Old City. In the event that only one of the possibilities is feasible before the truce, implement the Sheikh Jarrah plan.

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<sup>53</sup> David Shaltiel, Jerusalem 1948, p.203

<sup>54</sup> Head Operation Division of the General Staff, IDF.

In an intelligence report on the mood in the Old City, we read that:<sup>55</sup>

Fear has gripped the Arabs and many are leaving since they fear Jewish shells...The resentment is great. There is no prospect of livelihood... There is no shortage of water, but no way of paying for bread... The Arabs are in despair fear a Jewish invasion. The military situation is not good. Scattered guards around the Old City and nothing else. According to this neutral observer, the Arabs cannot hold fast if there is a serious attack.

The next day, Friday morning, I was summoned to battalion headquarters, where I was told of the decision to attack the Old City. The Bet Horon battalion of the IDF, commanded by Meir Zorea, would attack from Mount Zion and the Irgun battalion would attack the New Gate. A Lehi force would try to breach the wall between the New Gate and Jaffa Gate.

We immediately set out for the Notre Dame monastery, our chosen assembly point, where we were to receive briefing on the action from "Gidi" (Amihai Paglin), who had been sent from Tel Aviv, accompanied by two senior Irgun officers "Hayim Toit" (Shraga Alis) and "Yerahmiel" (Yitzhak Segal), for this specific purpose. We went up to the observation point on the top floor, from where one can see the Old City displayed in its time-honored glory and beauty. The Armenian Quarter concealed the Jewish Quarter, but behind it the Temple Mount could be seen as clearly as ever. I gazed at the sight, imagining that the following day the whole thing would be in our hands. After the briefing, someone raised the question of the Security Council resolution to cease-fire on Saturday at 5:45. We were informed

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<sup>55</sup> IDF Archives, 54,500/48.

explicitly that it had been agreed with Shaltiel that were hostilities to continue, we would not hold fire at the appointed hour.

It was decided that I was to head the spearhead unit (some 45 men), whose task was to break into the Old City and to hold the bridgehead to enable the remaining forces to enter. I would be followed by "Yishai" (Zvi Koenig) and his company, whilst "Kabtzan" (Eliezer Sudit), whose company had suffered heavy losses during the occupation of Malha, would remain in Notre Dame in reserve.

After the briefing, I hastened to the Katamon base to organize my men. It will be recalled that at the beginning of the fighting, two platoons from my company had been assigned to Mount Zion and one company had been sent to the Pagi buildings, but that Friday morning one of the units had come down from Mount Zion for a brief furlough. I held a parade, and told my men that at night we were going to liberate the Old City. I explained to them that they were entitled to go on furlough and that only volunteers would be attached to the attacking force. There was a hush, and then a cheer as the boys volunteered in unison to go in with the spearhead unit to establish the bridgehead in the Old City. They considered it a great privilege.

After a short rest, another meeting was held for briefing and allocation of weapons. Since we were to breach the walls in a row of shops behind New Gate, it was decided that we would take a Piat, generally used as an anti-tank weapon. I recall that after the distribution of the individual weapons, I asked for a volunteer to carry the Piat, which was heavy. "Jackson" (Yona Davidovitch) came forward. He was a tall, broad, young man, armed with a Bren gun. I explained to him that it would be difficult to carry two relatively heavy weapons. But he insisted that he could manage. We boarded the vehicles and, singing at the tops of our voices, set out for Notre Dame. Raanan wished

me success and we bade farewell with the traditional Irgun blessing 'Abi Gezunt' (stay healthy).

We reached Notre Dame towards evening and settled into the cellar of the building. The artillery bombardment was due to start at 20.00 and two hours later we were scheduled to breach New Gate. However, to our surprise, the shelling did not begin at the scheduled hour, and shortly afterwards I received word by wireless that the zero hour had been postponed from 22:00 to 24:00. This news came as a great disappointment, since it left us less time to fight under cover of darkness and reduced the prospect of our creating a bridgehead inside the Old City before dawn. There was, however, nothing we could do and we waited patiently for the deadline. At 23:00 our guns began to bombard the Old City, but the shelling petered out very quickly. When I radioed and asked why, I was told that the zero hour had again been postponed, this time indefinitely. The exhilaration we had felt earlier gave way to disappointment and despair. It seemed as if we were about to miss an historic opportunity to liberate Jerusalem.

We remained on the floor of the monastery cellar, some of us napping and others chatting. Suddenly, at 02:30, I received orders to set out. At the same time, heavy bombardment began aimed at silencing the enemy fire and enabling us to breach the gate. We trod cautiously among the debris of buildings, until we were close to the wall. But the barrage did not cease, and shells fell not far from us. I radioed a request that the shelling be suspended to enable us to carry out our mission. I was informed that the Lehi and the Bet Horon battalion had already broken in and that I was to follow their example.

Close to 03:00, the sappers, led by "Avni" (Yosef Avni-Danoch), approached the gate and laid the explosives. Shortly afterwards there was a mighty explosion as the gate was blown open. Avni approached the gate and found a stone fence behind it, which he also proceeded to blow up. I radioed that the

gate had been breached and asked how far the other force had advanced inside the Old City. This information was vital since, according to the plan, the Lehi was to seize the Freres College building, which overlooked the New Gate. If we did not occupy this building, the enemy could fire at the gate and prevent us from bringing forces into the Old City. I was asked to wait for a reply and several minutes later was informed that Lehi had not in fact succeeded in breaking in and that the Bet Horon battalion was still at Mount Zion. It transpired that we were the sole force to have breached the wall. I ordered my men to try and enter the Old City through the open gate.

The enemy had recovered in the meantime and heavy fire were now hitting the fighters I had sent in. I informed Irgun headquarters that in the short time remaining to us before dawn, we had no chance of establishing a bridgehead inside the Old City. The reply was that I had to continue at all costs. I asked to speak to "Gidi", the Senior Commander at Irgun headquarters, and explained to him that if we broke into the Old City, it would be a death trap. "Gidi" I said over the wireless "if we carry out your order, none of us will return alive and there will be nobody to report our conversation. I leave our fate to your conscience." Gidi asked me to wait, and after a brief consultation at headquarters, informed me that the decision was in my hands – an unfair response from a senior command that should have been able to accept responsibility.

Meanwhile, Avni had appeared and, in great excitement, said: "the gate is open! Why don't you give the order to move in?" I related my wireless conversation. I assembled the unit in a ruined building near the wall, and waited. The decision was difficult and painful. I did not want to retreat, and could not give the order to advance, since I wanted to spare the lives of the young fighters. Thus we sat until dawn. At 5:45 in the morning I received the order to retreat because the ceasefire had come into effect.

Later I learned what had been happening elsewhere. The Bet Horon battalion was ready at Yemin Moshe and when darkness fell it had gone up to Mount Zion. The battalion was equipped with a special cone bomb supposed to breach the wall. It was very heavy and the sappers could not carry it up Mount Zion in its entirety. They were forced to dismantle it and transport it in two parts. The result was that the bomb reached Mount Zion only at 3:00 AM. There were also problems transporting the cone to the wall, and in the end it was detonated only at five in the morning. The explosion was loud but left only a scorch mark on the wall.

This failure raises several grave queries. The weight and dimensions of the cone were no secret. Why, then, was it not brought to Mount Zion the night before the attack? How could an entire action be based on a bomb, which had never been tried out? Or was it all done so that the Bet Horon battalion would not be able to break into the Old City?

The Lehi forces were also equipped with a cone bomb but a shell near the Anglo-Palestine Bank, not far from the wall, hit the vehicle conveying it. A fire broke out which also damaged other vehicles nearby. The ammunition exploded and the bullets flew in all directions. The Lehi received another cone and the sappers succeeded in carrying it on foot and attaching it to the wall. But in this case too, the explosion was loud but the bomb merely scorched the wall.

When the operation began, Shaltiel's operations officer ordered the Irgun to position its mortars in the Russian Compound and to shell the Old City from there. Chunky vigorously objected to this, arguing that the Russian Compound was too close to the front, and that his men might be injured. His protests were ignored and his fears were borne out when an enemy shell hit the mortar battery in the Russian Compound, killing two of the personnel, Joe (Yosef) Cohen and Zvi Krinsky. Shrapnel seriously injured Chunky himself.



The New Gate (July 1948)

Dov Joseph casts light on the question of the ceasefire at 5:45 that morning. He writes: <sup>56</sup>

Another question arises when we examine our failure to recapture the Old City. From a memo I wrote then it appears that we had the legal right to continue the onslaught, which was proceeding to our advantage, even after 5:45 on Saturday morning. At six in the evening Colonel Shaltiel and I met with the chairman of the Truce Committee and informed him that Shaltiel had received orders from our government to cease fire at 5:45 next morning, on condition that by midnight we received word from the Truce Committee that the Arabs also agreed to a ceasefire... In practice, the Truce Committee received no official answer from the Arabs... It is clear that if we had continued fighting that morning, the Security Council could not have justifiably blamed us... When I asked Shaltiel why our forces had held their fire at 5:45, he replied that these were the orders he had received.

The planning of Operation Kedem was clearly aimed at preventing the occupation of the Old City. Firstly, the operation was postponed to the last night of the fighting. Then the zero hour was postponed from 22:00 to midnight, and from midnight indefinitely; finally the order to go into battle was given at 2:30 in the morning. Then there were the delays in transferring the cone bomb to Mount Zion, so that it was used only at 5:00 am. Then the two cones (one at Mount Zion operated by the Bet Horon battalion sappers and the other by the Lehi) malfunctioned, and merely scorched the wall instead of breaching it. And finally, when it transpired that the Irgun had succeeded in breaching New Gate, and Shaltiel had the impression that a bridgehead had been established in the Old

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<sup>56</sup> Dov Yosef, Kirya Neemana, p. 254

City, he ordered a general retreat and even threatened to leave the spearhead unit in the Old City (thereby sealing their fate) if the Irgun dared to continue fighting.

Dan Shiftan sums up the operation in his book "The Jordanian Option" as follows: <sup>57</sup>

[...] That day [July 15, 1948] the possibility of capturing the Old City was first suggested to Ben-Gurion and his attitude was cool. He himself did not initiate a discussion.

Only when it was already clear that the truce would come into force within less than forty-eight hours did preparations begin in Jerusalem for an operation for the liberation of the Old City. Only a few hours were allocated for the operation, on the night between July 16 and 17, when the truce was due to come into effect in Jerusalem at 05:45 on July 17. Instead of the indirect approach, which characterized the original planning (a three or four day operation) a frontal attack was undertaken, because of pressure of time.

Even this improvised action, whose prospects of success were minimal because of time constraints, was not undertaken, as far as we know, on the initiative of the supreme political or military leadership. Even when it was clear that only forty-eight hours were left till the truce, the Chief of Staff preferred immediate execution of another plan (Sheikh Jarrah).

Ben-Gurion's personal involvement was limited this time to warnings, to imposing restrictions on the action and to expressing doubts as to its outcome, rather than urging implementation or guaranteeing the political and strategic conditions for success, as he had done in other cases.

After Ben-Gurion received the report on the failure of the operation, he wrote in his diary: <sup>58</sup> 'Why did he flout our order to

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<sup>57</sup> Dan Shiftan, The Jordanian Option, p.142

<sup>58</sup> Ben-Gurion's Diary, The War of Independence, p. 597

leave the Old City and capture Sheikh Jarrah?'. Did Shaltiel in fact flout Ben-Gurion's order? It seems strange that not only did Ben-Gurion not admonish Shaltiel, but even sent him a letter of praise for his actions as commander of the Jerusalem district.

Operation Kedem did not fail, since there was never any intention of conquering the Old City anyway. The operation was a brilliantly conceived and orchestrated ploy to lure the Irgun into a joint operation, as it were, and thereby preventing it from launching an independent operation for the occupation of the Old City.

The fate of the Old City was in fact politically, not militarily, determined. Ben-Gurion was set on partitioning the city and was not going to let Irgun military strength stand in his way.

Years later (November 1956), before Operation "Kadesh" (Suez), the following conversation took place between David Ben-Gurion, then Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, and Moshe Dayan, the Chief of Staff of the IDF:<sup>59</sup>

Ben-Gurion: Our catastrophe is that we cannot permit ourself a defeat, since then it would be all over for us: they (the Arabs) can afford a defeat, once or twice. If we defeat Egypt ten times – that's nothing: if they defeat us once – it is over. We cannot equal them in weapon strength; there is no possibility of that. We must enhance the skills of each and every soldier. I don't know to what extent our skills are improving. Why are you looking at me like that, Moshe?

Chief of Staff: Do you think that's the problem?

BG: That's the problem.

Chief of Staff: All the places we did not occupy during the War of Liberation - could have been taken. Latrun, Gaza, Faluja and Jerusalem could have been taken.

BG: Why didn't they?

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<sup>59</sup> Moshe Dayan, Story of My Life, p.213

Chief of Staff: We were not resolute enough. In better armies than ours – a battalion goes in and if it has fifty percent casualties – they send another in its place! We didn't do that.

BG: As for Faluja, I insisted that the artillery force be concentrated there come what may, and they were afraid to do it. I'm not talking about Jerusalem - **I know why we didn't take Jerusalem, not because we didn't have the strength...** (Italics mine. Y.L.)

Over the years it has become clear that the policy known today as "territorial compromise" with the "Jordanian option" is not realistic and that even the partition of Jerusalem was not enough for the Jordanian ruler. In 1967, the IDF set out to vindicate the Arab Legion attack on Jewish Jerusalem, and what we had not been permitted to do in the War of Independence (1948), we finally did nineteen years later. During the Six Day War, Menahem Begin was a minister in the National Unity Government under Levi Eshkol. It was he who initiated the cabinet discussion on the liberation of Jerusalem, and the decision to order the IDF to attack the Old City was finally taken in the cabinet by a majority of one. Menahem Begin, and the entire Jewish people, had to wait nineteen years until the Israeli government was convinced by his policy on the liberation of the City of David.

## CONCLUSION

The day after our ineffectual attempt to breach the walls of the Old City, I felt very depressed. I went with Nurit to the Valley of the Cross and told her what had happened during the attack on New Gate. As I spoke, I could not help feeling that we had forfeited an historic opportunity to liberate the City of David. My instincts told me that the failure had not stemmed from military weakness, but at that point I had no idea what had been going on behind the scenes. The course of the fighting suggested some guiding force had prevented us from entering the Old City and advancing according to plan. Regrettably, it was impossible to turn the clock back.

With the beginning of the 'second truce', the war in Jerusalem came to an end. There was sporadic shelling and shooting, even fatalities and casualties, but fighting was not renewed. Life in the Irgun battalion became a routine of inactivity and a sense of the purposelessness of our independent existence crept in. I had a strange sense of injustice – whereas during the siege days we had suffered a shortage of weapons and been forced to confine ourselves to defensive action, now, when we had a large amount of modern weapons, we were sitting idle.

Physical and emotional exhaustion had also taken their toll, and I decided that the time had come to take a short furlough. My request to journey to the coastal plain was approved and, in accordance with the arrangement with the IDF authorities in Jerusalem, I received a permit allowing me to join a military convoy setting out for Tel Aviv. (It should be recalled that in those days residents of Jerusalem were not permitted to leave the city except by special permit from the office of the Military Governor).

We traveled by military bus via the Burma Road, now improved beyond recognition. The steep sandy hill, which had been impassable even by jeeps, was now covered with an iron

grid, and the bus passed over it without difficulty. The stones had been removed and the journey was smooth. The Engineering Corps had worked day and night to prepare the road for vehicular traffic and deserved every commendation for their hard and efficient work.

As the bus headed for Tel Aviv, I tried to imagine the meeting with my family in Ramat Gan: who would open the door, who would I meet, how would my father and mother look after five long months? Before long we reached the Latrun-Masmiyeh road and proceeded towards Kibbutz Hulda. We halted by the check post and a soldier boarded the bus to check our furlough passes. Finally the trials of the journey were over and we reached Tel Aviv, covered with a fine white dust thrown up from the untarred road. From Bet Hadar (where the army offices were located) I made my way to Ramat Gan.

My mother, unaware that I was coming, opened the door and embraced me with tears of joy in her eyes. My father arrived later – he had volunteered to transport officers and soldiers on duty. My older sister Rivka was serving in the Transport Corps and my brother Aryeh in the Givati Brigade. That evening I stayed home and tried to answer all their questions. On Saturday I accompanied my father to synagogue and with great emotion we recited the Benediction on Deliverance together.

The next day I visited Tel Aviv, lively and refreshingly untainted by the travails of war. The streets were busy, cafes and restaurants crammed with people and the shops filled with produce. Apart from the presence of uniformed soldiers, the signs of war were entirely absent from the city. Jerusalem, hungry and attacked, lacking light and running water, seemed unreal and remote.

Whenever I said that I had come from Jerusalem, I was greeted royally. Everyone tried to help, even financially. The Government had just exchanged the Mandatory banknotes for Israeli currency. The public, doubting the value of paper money,

was hoarding coins in the event that the value of the metal would rise above the currency value. Coins had virtually disappeared from circulation and sales-people in shops were refusing to give change in small coins. I was in an embarrassing situation, since I had only paper money. However, the moment I said that I had just arrived from Jerusalem, people's attitude changed. In one case, a cafe-owner refused to take any money, saying that this was his way of acknowledging the debt he owed to those who had suffered in Jerusalem. In another case, the salesman took some silver coins out of a hiding place and gave them to me in case I needed them.

One of the cafes on the promenade had been converted into a club for Irgun fighters. There, in an atmosphere of great excitement, I met friends from my Ramat Gan days. While I was chatting, Shmulik Krushinevsky, who had just returned from the Gilgil detention camp in Kenya, suddenly appeared. He had gained weight and told us that because of the balanced diet and abundant rest, he had succeeded in recovering from the malaria he had caught while in hiding. I also met my friend and comrade Yosef Kinderlerer (Yaldor) in the beach cafe. He had belonged to an Irgun battalion sent by the IDF command to Ashdod to check the advance of the Egyptian army towards Tel Aviv. (This battalion was later attached to the Givati brigade). Yosef had been wounded in battle and our meeting took place several days after he was released from hospital.

The most emotional meeting, however, was with Menahem Begin, Commander of the Irgun. Begin, who had just emerged from the underground, headed a new party: the Herut Movement, and was busy preparing for the first general elections. The offices of the movement were located in Yehuda Halevi Street, in rooms, which had been the Irgun HQ before the organization was disbanded. Begin's office was on the top floor and the entrance to his room was from a side room leading

to a balcony. The office itself was modestly furnished – a simple writing desk, a few chairs and shelves crowded with books.

This was the first time that I had met the Irgun Commander face to face. When I entered the room, Begin was leaning over his table, writing. He was wearing spectacles, had grown a thick moustache and was smoking. He rose to greet me, shook my hand warmly, embraced me and invited me to sit down. He warmly praised our stand in the bitter fighting in Jerusalem and asked me to tell him about the battle of Ramat Rachel. Then we talked about the future of the Jerusalem battalion. Begin asserted that as long as there was danger of the internationalization of Jerusalem, the battalion should be maintained. He believed that the presence of Irgun forces in the city would deter the UN from turning Jerusalem into an international zone. I explained that the men were now idle and that it would be difficult to prolong this situation. I added that it was worth considering the disbanding of the battalion and arranging for it to join the IDF. At the end of the meeting, as I was about to leave the room, Begin told me that he had been deeply impressed by the orderliness of my company during his visit to Jerusalem (the visit had taken place while I was on vacation in Tel Aviv). I was happy to accept the compliment, although was rather surprised. Only on my return to Jerusalem did I discover that the company clerk had organized the office in my absence – and then I too was deeply impressed.

During my absence there had been personnel changes in the senior command in Jerusalem, both in the IDF and in the Irgun. Moshe Dayan had been appointed commander of the Etzioni Brigade in place of David Shaltiel; and in the Irgun, Raanan had asked to be released from his post and been replaced as District Commander by "Avinoam" (Yitzhak Avinoam-Yagnes), who had returned from lengthy detention in Africa. (Avinoam had been Commander of the Jerusalem district in the

underground days and was arrested by the British together with his deputy, Shmuel Tamir).

In the battalion, and particularly among the officers, the atmosphere was gloomy. Inactivity and uncertainty as to the future caused great frustration. The difficult economic situation of the married men among us also left its mark. It was clear that we could not remain idle for long. Shmuel (Muki) Katz, the senior officer in Jerusalem, argued that we should disband the battalion, and divert the limited financial resources to preparations for the general elections. Negotiations were then underway with Yitzhak Greenboim (Minister of the Interior) for the integration of the Irgun in Jerusalem into the IDF framework. However, concomitantly with these negotiations, Ben-Gurion was holding secret discussions with Moshe Dayan on the disbanding of the Irgun by force and the enlistment of the battalion fighters into the IDF as individuals. From his discussions with Dayan, Ben-Gurion discovered that:<sup>60</sup>

[...] Among our soldiers in the city there are 15% who support them (i.e. the Irgun) – namely, would not obey any order to fire at them. Some might even support them in practice. There are also suspects in the military police. Moshe Dayan believes that it would be advisable to send military policemen here from Tel Aviv...Moshe thinks that the Jerusalem forces would not act against the Irgun. Not only because there are numerous relatives, but also because up to now they have operated together as a result of the agreement... Even the senior command does not understand why we should not operate together with the Irgun. I asked Moshe what kind of force would be required – would it be necessary to use force? Moshe thinks that two battalions would be needed (from outside Jerusalem,

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<sup>60</sup> Ben-Gurion's Diary, The War of Independence, p.644

with an armored force in the two battalions, with their commanding officers).

I summed up: the Intelligence Service will examine the staff officers and the commanders. No one under suspicion will remain in a key position, at the center of information or in a unit, which deals with the Irgun. The military police will be replaced; the police will be checked to exclude anyone who takes bribes as well as Irgun supporters. Someone will be sent from the general staff to draw up a plan of action and assess the force and equipment required.

At the height of the negotiations with Greenboim, when settlement seemed close, we heard about military preparations to attack the battalion and disband the Irgun by force. I was summoned to an emergency meeting at battalion HQ, where it was decided to fortify the camp area and make all the necessary preparations to repel the attack. According to Shmuel Katz, these preparations were made for deterrent purposes, and everything possible would be done to avoid fraternal strife. I was not in favor of these developments and feared that if shooting began, the senior command would lose control of the situation. After the meeting I stayed behind for a tete a tete with "Shimshon" (Natan Germant), battalion Commanding Officer, and asked to be released from the imminent clash with the IDF. Shimshon understood my feelings, and we agreed that after preparing the fortified positions, I would be granted furlough and could go to Tel Aviv again.

In the end, the battalion was not attacked (perhaps the preparations did in fact serve as a deterrent), and the negotiations with Greenboim were concluded. The final document was satisfactory to the provisional government, which had demanded the disbanding of the Irgun as an independent body, and was in line with the principles underlying the Irgun's

continued existence in Jerusalem. The main clauses were as follows:<sup>61</sup>

The Irgun was to disband and its fighters would enlist in the IDF. Irgun units were to remain intact within the IDF.

Irgun units would not be sent outside Jerusalem.

The oath of allegiance taken by each soldier would require him to serve in Jerusalem and nowhere else.

These conditions were to remain valid as long as Jerusalem was under Jewish rule.

Yitzhak Greenboim submitted these points to the government for discussion, but did not succeed in winning a majority for his proposals. The Prime Minister objected to agreement with the Irgun and demanded that it disband and its members enlist in the IDF unconditionally. He did not rule out the use of force to disband the Irgun. Greenboim, who feared a civil war, threatened to resign from the government if it decided to use force against the Irgun. When several ministers came out in support of him, the Prime Minister proposed postponing further discussion and decision-making to another meeting.<sup>62</sup> In the interim, however, several Lehi members (calling themselves the "Homeland Front") assassinated the UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte, seen as a pawn of the British, and the situation changed dramatically. With hindsight it can be said that the assassination led to the liquidation of the Irgun in Jerusalem.

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<sup>61</sup> Shmuel Katz, Day of Fire, p.446

<sup>62</sup> Shlomo Nakdimon, Altalena, p.404-413

## COUNT BERNADOTTE

Count Folke Bernadotte, a Swedish statesman, was the nephew of Gustav V, King of Sweden. Bernadotte dedicated his life to humanitarian activities, particularly in the Swedish Red Cross, and in 1946 was elected its President. In the last few months of the Second World War, he undertook the task of mediating the ceasefire between Britain and Germany. He negotiated with Heinrich Himmler, Chief of the Gestapo and Hitler's deputy, who empowered him to act as mediator. Bernadotte then approached the British government and proposed that Churchill meet with Himmler, and conduct negotiations with him to end the hostilities.

The very suggestion that the Allies and Nazi Germany should meet on an equal footing betrays a deep lack of sensitivity on Bernadotte's part, in that he appears to overlook the fact that the Nazis were responsible for initiating the war in the first place and for the slaughter of millions in the death camps. The sum total of Bernadotte's achievements in his contacts with Himmler was the release of 20,000 Scandinavians from concentration camps – In return for the release of German nationals detained in Sweden.

With the end of the British Mandate over Palestine and the invasion by the Arab armies, the UN Secretary General asked Bernadotte to serve as mediator between the Jews and the Arabs. After the establishment of the UN observers' team, whose task was to maintain the truce in accordance with the Security Council resolution, Bernadotte concentrated on the attempt to find a solution to the Jewish-Arab dispute.

Bernadotte did not regard himself bound by the UN resolution of November 29, which had not succeeded in solving the Palestine problem, and he based his widely divergent proposals on the powers conferred on him when appointed "To

encourage by peaceful methods, adjustments regarding the future of Palestine".<sup>63</sup>

At numerous meetings in London before his arrival in Palestine, Bernadotte had met with leaders of the British government to discuss the situation in Palestine. This may account for the great similarity between his proposals and British policy in the Middle East.

Bernadotte's plan was based on the partition of Mandatory Palestine of 1922 (including Transjordan) into two states: Jewish and Arab. Rejecting the idea of establishing a Palestinian state in Palestine, he saw the two states as Jordan and Israel. The two states were to establish a joint council, which would deal with all joint economic and political problems.

After presentation of the general concept, on which there was some prospect of agreement, Bernadotte went on to outline the individual clauses, each of which was entirely unacceptable and rendered the whole proposal untenable. Firstly, the mediator proposed that all nationals who had abandoned their homes as a result of acts of hostility should be permitted to return. This meant the repatriation of Arab refugees to their homes. On top of this, he proposed the restriction of immigration. Immigration was to be unlimited for only two years, after which each side could demand the restriction of immigration of the other party, with consideration for the economic situation of the allies. In the event that the parties could not arrive at agreement, the problem would be brought before the UN. The practical implication of this proposal was the cessation of immigration to Israel after the first two years. Here again, Bernadotte displayed astounding insensitivity: he did not grasp that the establishment of State of Israel was based on the right of every Jew to live there if desired. In addition to these clauses, Bernadotte proposed several border amendments, including:<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Political and Diplomatic Documents, vol I, p.230

<sup>64</sup> Count Folke Bernadotte, To Jerusalem.

1. Inclusion of all or part of the Negev in the Arab state.
2. Inclusion of all or part of Western Galilee within the Jewish state.
3. Inclusion of Jerusalem in the Arab state, with municipal autonomy for the Jews, and special arrangements for the protection of the Holy Places.
4. Reconsideration of the status of Jaffa.
5. Founding of a free port at Haifa, to include the refineries.
6. Founding of a free airport at Lyda.

Count Bernadotte's proposals contained many items to Israel's disadvantage, and took no account of the outcome of the war. The Israeli Government flatly rejected the mediator's proposals, arguing that they were not an acceptable solution to the problem of achieving peace in Palestine. However, in appreciation of the mediator's efforts, the Government was willing to continue negotiations. The reaction of the press was more extreme. Ha'aretz, considered a moderate newspaper, wrote in an editorial that:

It seems that Count Bernadotte's luck, which held when he achieved the ceasefire, will run out in his second assignment – namely, to arrive at a settlement of the Palestine dispute by peaceful means.... we cannot agree to curtailing of the sovereignty of the State of Israel, and any restriction of immigration by an external body, is a curtailing of our sovereignty. Another important stumbling block is Jerusalem. The Jews of Palestine will never agree to Jerusalem being included in an Arab state...

And another article in the same paper, by Jon Kimchi, stated:

For the second time in his career, Count Bernadotte is playing the role of 'mediator' and it appears that he is making the same

fatal mistake for the second time... the neutrality of his view of the relations between the Nazis and the Allies was of the same kind, which perceives accord and peace as balanced against all the rest. The Count thereby revealed his inability to grasp the depth of emotion of the Allies and their firm resolves to inflict a crushing defeat on the Nazis.

The same impression is now gained in the context of the Count's proposals regarding the future of Jerusalem... now again – perhaps even with the best possible intentions – the Count has permitted this neutrality to blind him to the political and military realities of the situation in Jerusalem...

And elsewhere:

We did not fight for ten years against the British White Paper, in order to agree to the restriction of immigration to our state on the decision of some other extraneous body... we did not capture most of Jerusalem, did not hold fast for six months of siege, and one thousand of the city's defenders and citizens were not killed by British shells fired from British guns in the possession of the Arab Legion, in order for us to abandon Jerusalem to the owners of those guns and their allies...

Count Bernadotte was aware of the angry reactions his scheme provoked, but nevertheless continued to push for its implementation. The Irgun observed Bernadotte's activities with great concern. Despite our strong objections to his plans and proposals, none of us deemed his conduct so dangerous as to necessitate his removal. Not so the Lehi.

## THE ASSASSINATION

After the first truce ended, Bernadotte left for a Security Council session where he presented his plan for Palestine. On his return

in September, he decided to move his headquarters from Haifa to Jerusalem. When it became known that he intended to house his staff in the High Commissioner's Residence in Jerusalem, Dov Joseph warned him of the dangers inherent in this plan.

Bernadotte ignored Joseph's advice, and on September 19 he arrived in Jerusalem to discuss, among other things, the technical details of the transfer of the UN headquarters. His plane landed in the morning hours at the Kalandia airfield (near Atarot) and from there he was driven to Jerusalem. As he was passing Arab-controlled Sheikh Jarrah, shots were fired at his car from an automatic weapon, but the Count continued towards the Mandelbaum Gate, where Captain Moshe Hilman of the IDF Liaison Unit was waiting for him. When Hilman introduced himself, Bernadotte said: "when you drive with me, I don't want you to carry a revolver. We are UN personnel and the UN flag is our protection". Hilman left his revolver at the gate and joined Bernadotte's car. The convoy drove to the YMCA building for a meeting with UN observers, and from there set out for the High Commissioner's Residence.

At around 5:00 pm Bernadotte left the Residence in a three-car convoy. An hour previously, a jeep had set out from the Lehi camp in Talbieh with four men aboard. They had driven to Katamon, stopped by a barrier close to the curve in the road between Kiryat Shmuel and Katamon (now Palmach Street) and had parked by the side of the road. When the men in the jeep spotted the convoy approaching, the driver started up his engine and placed his vehicle diagonally across the road. The convoy halted by the jeep and the Lehi fighters jumped out and went over to Bernadotte's car. They aimed their weapons at the back seat and fired several bursts of machine-gun fire. Colonel Serot, who was sitting beside Bernadotte, was killed instantly; the Count himself died after being brought to hospital.

Word of the assassination reached Ben-Gurion while he was holding discussions with the IDF general staff:<sup>65</sup>

Suddenly, at six, a cable arrived from Moshe Dayan and then from Dov Joseph that Jews had murdered Bernadotte and Colonel Serot in Katamon in a jeep traveling in front of them. I summoned Isser Harel (head of the civil Intelligence Service) and the head of the Military Police to arrest all the Lehi people here; the Harel (Palmach) battalion is to be sent up to Jerusalem and orders are to be given to Dov Joseph and Moshe Dayan to act firmly and mercilessly...

At seven Moshe Dayan telephoned to say that dissidents had killed Bernadotte and Serot, and that it was not known whether it was the Irgun or Lehi...

At eight thirty Isser Harel arrived. He had clarified from the highest possible source that it was not the Irgun...

The next morning, Saturday, an IDF force raided the Lehi camp in the city, but found it deserted. The security forces arrested a large number of Lehi members.

On Sunday, September 17, two days after the assassination of Bernadette, the Cabinet held a lengthy discussion on the deed and on relations with the Irgun and Lehi. Yitzhak Greenboim tried to moderate the discussion and repeated his proposal that Irgun fighters be permitted to join the IDF and to take an oath of allegiance which would apply only to Jerusalem. He explained that as long as the fate of Jerusalem was in the balance, the presence of Irgun fighters in the city was acceptable. He said that if it were decided to transfer the IDF from Jerusalem and if Israeli law did not apply to the city, then the Irgun would be free to act there as it chose.

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<sup>65</sup> Ben-Gurion's Diary, The War of Independence, p.698

The Prime Minister rejected the idea of granting any kind of privilege to the 'dissidents' in the event of a change in the status of Jerusalem and made two proposals of his own: the first – 'to inform the Irgun in Jerusalem that all state laws regarding the army, enlistment and weapons apply to the citizens of Jerusalem and those presently there as they do to the residents of any other place in the country and that they must obey those laws without further negotiations.' The second – 'to empower the army to maintain these laws within the territory of Jerusalem and, when required, the army will be authorized to use the necessary force; the Irgun in Jerusalem were warned of this. Ben-Gurion, Zisling and Sharett will determine the arrangements for implementing this decision.'<sup>66</sup>

The two decisions were passed by a majority and a special ministerial committee hastened to implement them. On Ben-Gurion's instructions, the following ultimatum was handed to the Irgun in Jerusalem:

To the Irgun Command in Jerusalem,

I have been ordered by the Chief of the General Staff of the IDF to inform you as follows:

1. The Irgun in Jerusalem must accept the law of the state concerning the army, enlistment and weapons.
2. All Irgun members who are eligible for military service must join the IDF.
3. All weapons must be handed over to the IDF.
4. All those joining the IDF must take the oath of allegiance, which is binding on each and every soldier.
5. Irgun members will be treated like all other Jews.

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<sup>66</sup> Ben-Gurion's Diary, The War of Independence, p.652

6. If, within the twenty-four hours commencing today, Monday, September 20, 1948, at 12.00, you accept this dictate; disband the Irgun and its special battalions, hand over your weapons and join the ranks of the IDF – none of you will be held accountable for your flouting of Israeli law, and you will be treated like all other Jews.
7. If, during this specified time, you do not respond in theory and in practice to the Government's demands, the army will act with all the means at its disposal.

Yigael Yadin – General  
Head Operations Division of the General Staff, IDF.

This ultimatum was strange since it had been known for several months that the Irgun was ready to disband and to join the IDF. Already in August, one month before the assassination of Bernadotte, Isser Harel had told the Prime Minister of the Irgun's willingness to capitulate. Since then negotiations had been underway with Yitzhak Greenboim and an agreement had been arrived at whereby Irgun members would enlist in the ranks of the IDF.

The Irgun leaders in Jerusalem were firmly resolved to avoid fraternal strife, and the following day they informed Moshe Dayan of their consent to disband the organisation:

In reply to the ultimatum submitted to us yesterday, we hereby inform you that, taking into consideration the threat of use of force, and our desire to avoid shedding Jewish blood which would result from the implementation of this threat – we accept the ultimatum.

The Irgun Zvai Leumi will disband in accordance with the demands of the provisional government in a manner and fashion to be determined between us and the command of the IDF brigade in Jerusalem.

Thus Ben-Gurion successfully exploited the assassination of Count Bernadotte to liquidate the Irgun in Jerusalem, despite knowing that the organisation had nothing to do with the deed.

I had been following the proceedings from my home in Ramat Gan. Although relieved that the Irgun command in Jerusalem had succeeded in preventing civil war and had agreed to the conditions of the ultimatum, I was angered at the way in which the organisation had ended its mission. The ultimatum was an insult to the courage and honor of the many people who had placed their lives at risk in defence of Jerusalem, who had served their country beyond the call of duty. I felt that we deserved to join the IDF in a more dignified fashion.

The following day I presented myself at the IDF Enlistment Office in Tel Aviv.