

# **The Israeli War of Independence: A South African soldier in Israel**

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**1950**

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## Complications in Cairo

After hurried, secretive and unobtrusive preparations we slipped away from South Africa, by aeroplane, early one morning in April, 1948, bound for Palestine. Even our closest friends were unaware of our destination or even of our departure.

Sitting in the lounge at the aerodrome, while waiting for the 'plane to take off, I tried to look "touristy" and non-committal. It had been difficult to keep the secret and to explain all one's preparatory actions. My excuse had been an intention to make a trip to South West Africa for the purpose of attempting some articles on "Trusteeship".

Outside on the tarmac the 'plane's engines were warming up and inviting to flight but inside the lounge the atmosphere was somnolent and deceptive. Huddled in coats the passengers and a few visitors were drinking coffee and playing a game of make-believe.

Amongst them eight others were on a similar venture to mine and I was aware of and also knew who they were, but neither by look or by word did I convey my knowledge: with deliberate bad manners I cold-shouldered some of my good friends. Everything was working according to plan. The venture had just begun, however, and there was a long way to go and a wary game to play.

At the briefing the previous day we had discussed strategy and procedure and coached one another in acting, amateur psychology and the necessity not to get excited. It was decided to travel openly in groups of two or three and gradually work up and overt acquaintanceship with one another as passengers travelling in the same conveyance normally do in the course of conviviality.

Two of my friends and I were supposedly two farmers and a tourist, two were engineers, two were students and two were merchants. We had to converse mainly on our particular spheres of interest. Five were to land at Rome and four at Paris and to add romantic touch we expatiated on the supposed glories of sunny Italy and gay France.

We had decreed relatives taboo at our departure but allowed a concession to two parents who wished to bid their son farewell provided the mother guaranteed that she would not sob. Few mothers would sob if their son were going to Italy on vacation although they might justifiably do so if their son's destination were Palestine were things were not too peaceful at the time and the most bloody holocaust was forecast for May 15<sup>th</sup> when the British were due to relinquish the mandate.

Civilian aeroplanes, bound for Europe, leave Palmietfontein, South Africa at the most unearthly times with special partiality for the small ours of the morning. We were due to leave at four. Nobly she withheld her tears and our departure, being eminently legal for our declared destinations, was uneventful.

So too was the first day's flight to Nairobi where we made an overnight stop. The nine of us slowly and politely worked up an acquaintanceship with one another as we

did too with the remaining passengers and some of the crew. No suspicions appear to have been aroused although the departure of several passengers at one stage of the trip, which reduced the complement to eleven of whom nine were our party, made things seem a bit queer. Especially so when the air-hostess read out the passenger-list at one of the refuelling stops and the abundance of Jewish-sounding names caused a very British businessman, bound for Cairo, to prick up his ears. Fortunately this gentleman was on very friendly terms with us and our artless conversation served to dispel any potential suspicions.

The following day a new batch of pukka, British colonial personnel, apparently ex-army, going "Home," helped to augment the passenger-list and correct the disparity of groups. They too proved most friendly.

At Nairobi the rest-house was pleasant consisting of a collection of bungalows. As arranged previously, I met a contact from the other group of the Italian party, (for which I was responsible) to discuss the situation. We met in the darkness (in Africa verging on pitch black at this time of the year) between two bangalows. He was somewhat apprehensive. The fellows were talking too much on forbidden topics and might easily be overheard. They should be advised to talk more on business and farming and Italian blondes and so forth. Then we discussed the weighty topic of Lydda airport, Palestine, where we were due to refuel the following day. What was to be our reactions? In our Zionist fervour we might err by extravagant emotional behaviour. Completer indifference on the other hand would be equally inadvisable for we were Jews and could not be honestly indifferent to Israel. A happy mean was necessary.

In the midst of this discussion a noise caused us to turn around. A shape in the darkness, a few feet away, turned out to be a native servant who had apparently been listening to us for some time. Our questions evoked no reply. He knew no English or else was feigning ignorance. We immediately imagined the worst. Having woven such a web of romance around our venture we were susceptible to the most far-fetched interpretations. It was no secret that the British were doing their best to stop illegal immigration to Israel and had been keeping a watchful eye on all routes. Had we been thwarted at this early stage? Some reflection led me realise that we had been unduly alarmed. In parts of Africa there is such an abundance of cheap labour that hotels and rest houses employ many Africans to wait on guests and not only to perform numerous services for them but also to be constantly in the vicinity in case such services may be required. That was the task of our intruder. Nothing untoward happened in the future to dispute this interpretation.

The following day we continued our journey which proved to be more eventful and even mildly exiting. From Nairobi we flew over one of the expansive African lakes, Victoria, to the pretty little village of Entebe where we enjoyed a tea consisting of liquid refreshments and an abundance of tropical fruits. Normally 'planes fly over the Sudan and refuel there but a strike on the Sudanese railways had led to a petrol shortage and our next scheduled stop was to be Asmara and then Lydda, followed by Cairo. Headwinds at Asmara forced a change in the itinerary and after a brief stop at Malakal on the banks of the Nile (best described as an inferno somewhat redeemed by the availability of iced drinks) we flew on to Khartoum.

Here discussions of several hours duration were necessary before petrol could be obtained. Consequently we were unable to reach Lydda that day and landed instead at Cairo towards midnight. We had no tourist visas for Egypt, but having been given repeated and authoritative assurances that these were not necessary for a transit stop, were not unduly concerned.

Carrying out night-baggage we queued up at the customs and immigration counter where two officials were present to attend to us. Advisedly the nine of us did not bunch together but mingled with the other passengers. The queue crawled forward as all queues generally do. Suddenly I noticed the officer direct one of our group to a nearby room at the door of which an armed policeman took up attendance. This member was followed by others of the group although two of the party were spared this procedure.

By the time my turn arrived to be interviewed I was considerably alarmed and perturbed. What would they ask me and what would I say?

The officer was bitingly polite in tone:  
“What is your nationality? He asked.

“South African,” I replied.  
“That is not what I want to know. What is your religion?”  
“Is that important to you?”  
“Yes. Are you a Hebrew?”

There was no way that he could prove my religion but I did not hesitate to enlighten him on the subject. My friends were already in the room and I wished to be together with them whatever happened.

“Yes, I am,” I replied, “but frankly I don’t see what concern that is of yours.”  
“Will you please wait in the room?” he asked.

I went to the room. It was the office of an air-company containing some furniture in the form of tables and chairs. My friends were sitting or standing and waiting. If we had wished we could have spoken our South African language, Afrikaans, which the Egyptians would not have understood. It might have made them suspicious, however, and we were eager not to give them any inkling that anything was amiss. I personally had bigger and more urgent problems in the form of a most incriminating document which I was carrying in one of my pockets. It was a slip of paper containing a note in Hebrew giving our names, the purpose of our trip and our destination. This document was to serve as a contact and identification to the underground network of the Haganah in Europe which was to pass us on to Palestine. In South Africa I had pointed out the danger of such a paper to my comrades but since this had been agreed upon as the form of identification there was little I could do about the matter.

In that office in Cairo I made an immediate decision to destroy that note if possible. I had some experience of Egyptians while on active service abroad in the Second World war and I was not prepared to take any unnecessary risks. On the comparatively deserted aerodrome they could easily subject us to a search and might even be emboldened to try rougher tactics.

With my one hand in my pocket and so as not to be observed I tore the piece of paper into a myriad of minute fragments. After that I tore up some other unwanted papers which I also had in my pocket and jumbled all the pieces together.

In full view of the official, who had now joined us in the room, I blatantly tore odd bits of papers into strips and smaller pieces seemingly doing so absentmindedly and trying to feign nervous, fidgety movements. Soon my immediate surrounding was littered by paper so that the mere presence of torn paper, being so widespread, would pass suspicion.

On behalf of the group and brimming with righteous indignation, I began to harangue the official and lodge complaints. He and another officer expressed their deepest sympathy and conveyed their sincerest apologies but claimed that the matter lay outside their hands and that they were merely acting on instructions. Rarely had I seen such saccharine hypocrisy. They were deriving the utmost enjoyment from our situation. Knowing and triumphant glances flashed between them and sickly smirks wreathed their brown faces. With a grammatically correct, if badly accented English they oozed apologies. Their faces and demeanour invited a blow and I am sure that most of us were itching to deliver it but the armed guards, now augmented to three, were a sufficient deterrent and our detainers were well aware of this not unimportant fact.

Speaking as the spokesmen of the group and claiming to be a lawyer by profession, I lodged the most vehement protest at the illegality of the whole proceedings. The officers replied that we were being detained until the plane left by virtue of the fact that we had no transit visas for a stay in Egypt. I claimed that the other passengers had no transit visas either. I knew for a fact that the two of our group who had been allowed to go to the hotel, after professing another religion, had the identical papers that we had and that several of the other passengers had informed me that they had no transit visas.

The official denied my accusation and refused a request to allow me to see other passports. I dilated on an international travellers convention which I said had been agreed to at Geneva and which had been signed by both South Africa and Egypt and allowed for reciprocal concessions. (I had heard vaguely about such a convention but to this day am not sure if there is or was such a document or agreement.) I protested that they had no right to discriminate against us on the ground of religion and that it would be easy for South Africa to apply similar measures and arrest the numerous Egyptian sailors who touched at South African ports.

They were adamant but my arguments managed to wring the admission that we were held because we were Jewish and that the relevant order had been issued by the Minister of the Interior.

At this stage, feigning severe cramps in the region of my abdomen, I was allowed to go to the W.C. duly escorted by an armed guard. On arrival there, persuading the guard to remain outside. I thankfully deposited the torn scraps of my Hebrew document down the sewerage pipes.

Meanwhile the two officers had started a systematic and thorough barrage of questions at all and sundry.

Were we Zionists? What did we think of Palestine? Did we intend going there? Why were we going to Europe? To all of which we answered satisfactorily, protesting the innocence of our motives and the purely educational and vocational nature of our journey.

We were all in excellent spirits and even somewhat too enthusiastic as one often is in difficult situation. Our good mood appeared to rattle and upset our captors who soon desisted in their inquisition.

I half-heartedly broached the possibility of seeing the South African Consul in Cairo, but did not press the matter for we did not wish to involve the South African government in our schemes. In any event we were denied access to the South African Consul and since the plane was due to leave at ten the following morning we decided to reconcile ourselves to the hours until then and to make the most of them. A request for beds was refused, but we were allowed to obtain blankets from the 'plane and the air-line allocated an Egyptian attendant to provide us with a meal at their expense and to enable us to obtain extras at ours. Being at this individual's tender mercies we paid accordingly. Those who had been in the army in Egypt assured the others that this was nothing unusual.

The officials offered to take our baggage back to the 'plane but we refused this offer, for fear of tampering, and also the offer of a warmer room. Ours was warm enough and we had visions of secret wires hidden everywhere in the other room.

That evening I learnt a new Egyptian word, "saba." Ever so often the guards came and counted us and took the extra precaution of looking behind the door and under the table. They seemed to have little faith in their ability to count and their ejaculation of "saba!" or seven, was accompanied by a glow of triumph.

During the remaining hours of darkness we arranged our own guards so that we should not be caught unawares. The main task of our guards, as it turned out, was to wake the Egyptian guards who regularly fell asleep. We gently shook them awake to prevent them losing their jobs.

Morning took its time in coming. We had little sleep. Tables are not very suitable as beds nor is it easy to doze recumbent in a hard chair. Our friend, the attendant, was soon on hand to take us to breakfast, after we had been allowed to go to the bathroom one by one and escorted. We were not keen to leave our luggage unattended but the chief police officer, who inspired more confidence than the two who had received us on arrival, gave his word of honour, as an officer, that our goods would not be touched. Hoping for the best we removed to some miserable little café where we breakfasted on diminutive eggs and dry chips in surroundings strongly flavoured by that queer oriental smell reminiscent of fish-oil.

Back in the room we awaited the arrival of our fellow passengers. They did not appear. Members of the crew arrived, however, to inform that some fault in the 'plane's radio apparatus would force a sojourn at Cairo until the tomorrow or even for

another two or three days. The news came as a blow. Action was necessary. The thought of spending many more days in that room was unthinkable. We had discussions with the air-hostess and the local representative of the airline. New officials were due to relieve our "hosts" and it was believed that they would be more sympathetic. They were. While waiting for them to arrive we wandered around certain parts of the aerodrome ushered like sheep by guards who, unlike their superiors, were friendly in a simple fashion. I have clear recollections of fat Egyptian senior officials complete with fez carrying and reading copies of the latest Arabic illustrated weeklies, sporting fair and luscious Hollywood cover-girls. It was somewhat bizarre.

The new officials granted a concession by allowing us to go to the main restaurant which was clean, comfortable and almost luxurious and where good food was obtainable. Our attendant was out of a job for there was no opportunity for him to operate.

While we were sipping drinks at one of the wicker tables in walked a bevy of Arab dignitaries, dressed to kill. The majority were in Arab costume and one of our officials of the previous evening was in fawning attendance. According to the local press some Arab dignitaries were on a visit to Cairo from neighbouring states of the Arab League for the purpose of discussing the "successful prosecution of the Holy War in Palestine". Here was irony indeed. Our good humour was not infectious and they glared at us until their 'plane was ready to convey them to desert lands to inspire the crusade.

The representative of the air-line brought more news. The Minister of the Interior, having graciously granted us a temporary visa for twenty-four hours, ordered us to leave Egypt before its expiry that night. The only obstacle was that no 'planes were due to leave Egypt that day or night. So further discussions were held with high government officials. Meanwhile then the day passed pleasantly enough. Later that afternoon something eventuated. A compromise was reached. On payment of a deposit (by the company), we would be allowed to go to a hotel provided we gave our parole not to leave its grounds and were prepared to accept an armed guard. Thankfully we agreed and went to the hotel in taxis. It was one of Cairo's largest and most luxurious. The other passengers were sympathetic. They seemed to think that we had been detained because we had no transit visas. On our arrival they were about to set out for a trip on the Nile. We wanted a bath and amid the inquisitive gaze of everyone who could not appreciate why the noble guardian of the law trailed us, we went to our rooms.

The policeman sat himself on a chair in the passage and waited. A friend and I shared a room and having bathed and dressed we decided to go to the lounge for a drink or two. We had not reckoned with the policeman, however. He halted us and told us to wait till all the others were ready when he would accompany us downstairs. Our protests that this would take some time and that we were thirsty proved to be of no avail. He was, he said, only one man and consequently could not be in seven places at the same time.

When we were not in our rooms, the entrances of which he could watch from the passage, we would have to move together and arrange our plans accordingly. We acquiesced. The policeman was extremely courteous and friendly and, although

conscientious to a marked degree, was possessed with a sense of humour. A short time previously there had been a strike of sections of the Cairo police force and he, having remained loyal to authority and the strike having failed, was due for promotion to commissioned rank. Pleasantly we teased him on his seriousness and devotion to his duties. He too apologised for the inconvenience to which we had been put but, unlike his superiors, I believe that he was sincere in his protestations. Soon all seven of us were ready and we adjourned to the terrace for drinks accompanied by our guardian who accepted an invitation to be our guest. Duty forbade him to imbibe anything stronger than lemonade, he said. An itinerant bootblack being the vicinity we commissioned him to polish the future officer's boots.

Dinner was a sumptuous affair in the large dining-hall with our guardian watching from the door. Although he was willing to accompany us to a cabaret in the building, the hour for its commencement was rather late so we retired early as we were due to leave in the small hours of the morning.

Our happiness knew no bounds when we boarded the plane again. We had passed the customs with no difficulty despite vague fears that attempts might be made to incriminate us by planting articles in our baggage.

Soon we were leaving behind the sea of lights, which was Alexandria, and flying over the Mediterranean. It was raining at Athens when we landed. We made ourselves as inconspicuous as possible. There were so many English-speaking people around the airport that we feared detection. We believed that the Arab network in Greece and Italy had by now been informed to watch out for us and had been provided with our personal details, culled from our passports by the Egyptians, and perhaps even with our photographs. Later we realised that our imaginations were richer than the situation there and in other places warranted.

On the last lap to Rome over the Corinth canal (to avoid the guerrilla fighting) the Aegean sea and territorial Italy, I gave detailed instructions and advice to the other four who were travelling via Italy. On the pretext of explaining the geography of the land I sat next to each one of them in turn and a muffled voice assisted by the throb of aeroplane engines made it difficult for us to be overheard. Having spent many months in Italy before I knew the country and its customs well.

We had decided to take the most elaborate precautions in view of our detention in Egypt and particularly in view of the impending general elections in Italy. There was a considerable communist scare at the time and talk of agents from Russia and other Eastern European countries. It was most likely that all visitors would be given more than the usual scrutiny and attention. We had no fear of being considered communists for we had no special interests in the elections but feared lest our destination be revealed. On arrival at Italy we were to go to separate hotels.

We would operate in one group of two and one group of three. I, in the latter group, would meet a contact from the first group at specified times at a designated spot next to one of the pillars of the Colosseum. There arrangements would be made for travelling to Milan on the next stage of our trip.



Arriving at Rome in the sunniest of weather we completed the customs and other formalities without any trouble. Here our plans went somewhat awry. The air-company suggested talking us all to one hotel where their offices were and we acquiesced. Once arrived there we all decided to remain there since it was a large hotel, but in separate rooms. The necessity for Coliseum meetings was thus obviated. That morning the other four of our main group had flown on to Paris and we had parted with the minimum of ceremony, as planned.

I had been in Rome before as a soldier during and after the Second World War. It was not the same Rome. During the war people had been down and out but had lived strongly in anticipation of better things and improved conditions when peace and prosperity came. Now the majority of them were still down and out, but they hoped for nothing and were disillusioned and cynical and materialistic and grasping because the bubble of post-war dreams had been burst. It was awkward being a tourist. Their “spivs” and “drones” could recognise one immediately and one was never left in peace. They were always following offering to buy currency or sell something or perform diverse services. One had to be wary. I tried to dress more like an Italian and less like a tourist and succeeded in obtaining some peace and even in being stopped by Italian policeman who asked me where such and such a street was.

At the hotel we treated one another as casual acquaintances but met surreptitiously in one another’s rooms to plan our trip to Milan. We were eager to hurry in order to get to Palestine as soon as possible but decided to spread out departure over a few days and to catch separate trains. It was even seriously considered that I go to Milan via Genoa so as to put our opponents, whoever they might be, of the chase.

Looking back now I realise that we considerably overestimated our importance in the eyes of Arab espionage.

I boarded a train to Milan the following day. It so happened that a very good friend of mine getting married in Milan and I wished to attend the wedding. Plans for rendezvous with the group had been made, the meeting place to be the famous gothic cathedral. Buildings like this and the Colosseum, being always populated in their precincts with sundry and numerous citizens made a meeting of two or three people a usual occurrence.

Arriving at the station I was surprised to see two of our group on the platform surrounded by all their baggage and looking at a loss. Apparently they intended to travel on the same train as I. I ignored them and engaged in a friendly conversation with an Italian porter.

Suddenly one of the South Africans interrupted me.

“Excuse me, “he asked “Do you speak English?”

“More or less,” I answered, having considerable difficulty in stifling an incipient laugh.

“Perhaps you would be so kind as to help my friend and I. We want to catch the train to Milan and do not know what to do with our luggage. We would ask a porter but they do not seem to know any English and we do not know any Italian.”

“Certainly.”

I arranged matters with the porter and continued a chatty conversation with my friends. I asked them whether they were going, whence they came, whether they liked Italy or not and random questions about my land of birth, South Africa. We parted on the arrival of the train.

The train journey was fast and comfortable and as we rushed through the Italian countryside I was amazed at the rapid reconstruction that had taken place since the war. Of some of the stations and towns and cities through which we passed I had vivid memories of three or four years back when ruins and gaping chasms of destruction met the eye.

I was happy to be in Milan. It is a city whose pulsing, throbbing vitality I love. I felt as if I had never left.

I attended the wedding and the reception for the bride and groom. There was little austerity in Italy now. In Rome I had already noticed the variety of luxury goods and foods available everywhere and at a price. The women were as pretty and as well dressed as ever, using the fashion of the “new look” to the fullest advantage with attractive wasp-waist dresses.

The general elections were in the air. Posters and banners slashed the hoardings and fluttered in the streets. Handbills littered the pavement and little groups in continual session on the “duomo” square hawked and discussed the merits of their particular parties. Milan on the day of wedding was alive with red banners and red-kerchiefed Milanese.

Togliatti, leader of the Italian communists, was to speak.

When he did an audience estimated at more than a quarter of a million stood in the square for more than two hours to listen. The police were everywhere and in the days that followed one grew accustomed to the sight of lorry-loads of police riding round the city and making raids on various buildings.

The following day all our group had arrived and had contacted me. One of them became acquainted with an Arab in Rome who had come to the station to see him off.

In Milan I was to deliver my “charges” and myself into the safe custody of the Jewish Defence Organisation, the Haganah, who would get us to Palestine. There was one problem. I had destroyed my identity document in Cairo. How could I prove our bona fides?

It was easier than I had expected. While on active service in Italy I had taken an interest in Zionist activities and had contacts who could now identify me. My story was believed. Stage one of our “odyssey” had been complicated.

We were to remain in Italy longer than we had anticipated.

## Chapter Two

### “In an A.P. Camp in Italy”

The Haganah offices were by no means difficult to find. Apparently no attempt had been made to camouflage them. Posters, calling to service in Palestine, decorated the walls and news-bulletins and reports were splattered everywhere. The “rival” Irgun Zvai Leumi had also taken what wall-space it could to advance its policy and to criticise the actions of the Haganah. Nor were these differing opinions confined to pamphlets, for little groups from opposing factions were wont to gather in the lane outside the building and argue. Vehemence was not lacking and once or twice recourse was had to fisticuffs.

In view of the ostentation of purpose exhibited, my asking whether I should bring my comrades one by one evoked merely a friendly laugh and the invitation to come in a bunch for it would make no difference.

So I brought them all over together and our whole intricate web of security seemed to have dissolved from disuse.

We expressed a wish to be off to Palestine immediately or at least as soon as was possible. A boat was due to leave in about a week’s time and we were promised a passage on it. Meanwhile, the contact told us, we could sojourn at the hotels where we were staying and make the most of our days in Milan until summoned. Our expenses would be paid. There was a camp where people were kept in transit but it would be much more comfortable at the hotels. In our idealism we refused the proffered luxury and also the offer of money. We asked to be sent to the camp so that we could meet the others, live with them and get to know them. It was against our principles to accept preferential treatment.

Our Spartan desires were not gainsaid and we were instructed to gather at the offices the following afternoon with all our luggage. A char-a-banc would take us to a refugee transit camp.

There was a mixed collection of passengers on the char-a-banc the following day when it wended its way through the busy streets of Milan, without attracting the least bit of attention, although some of us found it difficult to believe that to the outside world this seemed simply another mundane trip.

A warm reception awaited us at the camp which had once been a beautiful villa set in spacious grounds. Another party with their baggage boarded the vehicle as soon as we had debussed. They were on route to a port and a boat. For a moment, in our wilder hopes, we had thought that perhaps we would be taken directly to the port, but we were not to be so fortunate.

There were touching scenes of farewell and countless expressions of envy for the young men and women who occupied the places we had vacated. After their departure there was a moment for rest and an opportunity to pause and survey the surroundings.

There were about one hundred inmates all told. Five were South African friends who overwhelmed us in their impetuosity to garner recent news and wheedle South African cigarettes. They had dark forebodings, as comparative “old-timers” at an institution always have for newcomers. They had been waiting several weeks and were weary of the delay. A similar fate was forecast for us. Our spirits fell. They laughed when we said that we had been promised that we would only be there a week. It happened that they were correct. We stayed at the camp for more than three weeks and they remained with us.

Those were very interesting, it not very comfortable or pleasant weeks. I saw, in miniature, the problems that I was to see in Israel later. The Nazi policy and its aftermath had left its mark and had produced characteristics, both good and bad. Here was a psychologist’s paradise where it would be inhuman to be merely scientific in ones behaviour and observations for one had to make compensations and try to understand. Those youngsters, our own age, had had no youth in any true sense of the term. They had aged too quickly with no opportunity to acquire many of the refinements of civilisation. Their memories were one-sided and warped. They had no happy past but they hoped to build a happy future in Palestine. They knew that they would have to struggle and fight and perhaps even die. One could not but forgive their failings although these sometimes annoyed and inconvenienced.

Those in our camp had been especially selected as the more idealistic and pioneering of the [Displaced persons] D.P’s of Jewish faith who wanted to go to Palestine. They had a priority passage for they wished to go into the army or to pioneer collective settlements on socialist principles.

Despite the unhappiness of their past they were not morose and dejected but lively and witty and gay and bubbling with practical jokes.

Coming mainly from Poland, Hungary and Romania, they looked up to the South Africans with respect and even gratitude. Not that they humbled themselves or regarded themselves as inferior. It was more a question of appreciation for the generous succour South African Jewry had given them and Palestine over a long period of years and because we had volunteered to come to Palestine to assist in the struggle. They themselves and given up little, they said. Europe held nothing for them. They had left no comfortable life and luxury.

In the English-speaking countries things were different, however, they said. They appreciated our giving up our professions and our homes and our automobiles and coming thousands of miles to risk our lives in upholding a cause in which we believed. At times they seemed somewhat awed by the knowledge that we had had a much higher standard of living than that to which they had been accustomed during the war years.

For this reason perhaps they raised no complaint at the fact that the first group of South Africans had their own kitchen, where they prepared their own food and the food for the Palestinian staff who dined with them. A protest was soon heard, however, from a most unexpected quarter. While the first group of South Africans saw nothing amiss in this arrangement our group did. We thought it wrong for us to have a separate kitchen and consequently, as it turned out, better food. Were we not

all going to the same country and for the same cause? Discussions took place on the subject and at times waxed bitter and heated. Matters came to a head when the Danes arrived. They were nine and had come from Copenhagen.

Without exaggeration I can say that they were some of the finest fellows I have ever met in my life. In the months to come I came to know them very well and appreciated them all the more. The new bone of contention was where would the Danes eat? No aspersions could be cast on their habits, manners and culture which were of the highest. As no further accommodation was available in the little mess for any more people, the Danes could not eat with us, although they were keen to do so. The alternative was for them to eat with the mass of the D.P's. If they ate with the D.P's why should we eat separately? The idealists carried the day. It was decided that except for the staff all should eat together.

It must be admitted that in the future the idealist had moments when they questioned their idealism and the others said: "We told you so." The new arrangement was a come-down, not only in the quality of the food but even more so in the manner in which it was prepared and served and in the lack of cleanliness.

The hygienic conceptions of the D.P's were rudimentary. The first batch of South Africans had been amongst the first group of people to move into the villa and they had had to shoulder the burden of making the place habitable, for until they came others had been satisfied with very primitive spring-cleaning. The latter had little appreciation of the purpose of the flush lavatories and water-closets and did not bother about them at all one they were blocked. Instead of cleaning them they ignored them and preferred to use vacant plots of ground outside. So the South Africans cleaned them.

On our initiative the Palestinian staff gave the D.P's lectures on hygiene and related topics which helped a little.

The Palestine staff, young and friendly, were fine people and we got on well with most of them. One or two, however, were vain, conceited, domineering and boastful. These we had little time for and soon came into conflict with them. There was one in particular, by the name of Amos, who believed in treating everyone like a naughty school-child and was continually shouting, blustering and threatening. His tactics did not work with us and we quite openly gave him our opinion of them. He apologised and said that he was thinking in terms of and acting in that fashion for the sake of the refugees and that it was not meant for us. We took up the cudgels on their behalf although it was difficult to know where to draw the line. Obviously a certain camp discipline was necessary and we obeyed such necessary measure although we were under no obligation to do so and often found them irksome.

At capricious regulations we rebelled, however. Amos laid down a rule that when the table were laid for meals and the food had been served no one was to commence to eating until he had given his permission. He would bellow "Good Appetite!" as a signal and then strut away. Once he tried to force someone, who had eaten without his permission, to leave the table. The fellow, a bulking, clumsy individual refused.

Amos tried to remove him by force and we intervened. Afterwards we sent a delegation to him and criticised his policy. He replied that the people were accustomed to strict Gestapo-like discipline from the concentration camps and that his policy and demeanour were justified. We advanced views to the contrary. Anything savouring of the camps and the gruesome experiences of the past was out of place here. The refugees should be made to forget and be taught to be free. They should be treated as individuals who could think for themselves. To a small degree the victory was ours. Amos repented and reformed as far as it was in his nature to do so.

Another contentious point was that of obtaining permission to leave the camp. Many of us wanted to see a bit of Italy while waiting. Generally, and almost invariably, our requests for leave were refused. There was nothing to do to stop us walking out, of course, but we were reluctant to be absent in case a boat should leave at a few hours notice. We had no definite news about ships and shipping.

Amongst themselves the Danes and South Africans observed a voluntary, self-imposed discipline and rarely absented themselves from the camp. Meanwhile, in the nature of an honour and as a sign of trust, we were asked to undertake the duty of guarding the camp gates during the day or so as to prevent unauthorised persons from entering and the refugees from leaving without a pass. Every effort was made to keep the refugees inside and because of this we bore our restrictions with good grace. Most of the refugees had no money or else very little. None was given them so that if they went outside to a town the less strong-willed were in the habit of taking sundry articles from the camp's equipment, such as blankets, and selling them on the black market to raise funds. The leaders of the camp were perturbed lest they be caught and the police make investigations which might lead to the camp. The obvious solution was to provide the refugees with an allowance when they went out on pass, but either there was not sufficient money available or else this expedient was not considered. Nor were we overflowing with money and many of us had none at all. There was a fruit and nut vendor who came to peddle his wares daily and by purchases one was able to augment the meagre diet. Often it was better to buy nothing at all, if there were many in the vicinity who had no money and one could not afford to buy for them too, although whenever the latter course was possible most of us distributed our purchases amongst the others.

I found the meals an ordeal and I'm not fussy about food. One had to eat for one could obtain sustenance no place else. With regular monotony the diet consist of bread-rolls, oily soup in unclean receptacles and big, massive helping of potatoes and onions, which the refugees devoured in large quantities but to which we could never accustom ourselves. Most unappetising was the greasy and unhygienic way the food was served.

To return to the gate. We also had to keep people out for security reasons. It was difficult to know who was "persona grata" and who was not. In case of doubt one had to summon Amos and he was often a devil of a time in coming. Meanwhile the visitor fussed and fumed. Once Amos was not annoyed with me because I let a husband in to see his wife whom he had not set eyes upon for some time. Apparently Amos had a grudge against him.

Later Amos became very friendly and came and sat at the gate and chatted. Unfortunately we had no common language. He knew no English and we knew little Yiddish or Hebrew. He generally talked about revolvers. There are a surprisingly large variety of makes and calibres and Amos was eager to air his knowledge of these lethal weapons.

Language was a big problem at this camp. The staff spoke a very good English on the whole but the refugees knew no English at all. Yiddish was their medium. Some of us knew Yiddish but many didn't. Not knowing Yiddish well I spoke Italian to such refugees as knew the language.

The Danes each spoke several languages including English so here there was no problem. The big problem was the Hungarian group who knew neither Yiddish nor Hebrew. Fortunately one of their number knew both these languages and acted as an interpreter. It was awkward being in the presence of one's own people, inspired by the same ideals and yet being unable to converse with them. They might as well have come from another planet. There was a barrier. Yet several months later, when we met in Israel, we could converse for we had learnt Hebrew.

The South Africans shared rooms with the Danes with whom we were on very friendly terms and in each of our rooms we had a wireless-set. Every night we tuned in to news broadcasts in a variety of languages and had "open house." There were regular sessions to cater for the demand for a variety of languages, which continued until a late hour. It seemed like a cross between the League of Nations and the tower of Babel. Having little else to do we spent many hours daily listening to the wireless, particularly to the U.N.O. debates on Palestine from Lake Success. We compared the B.B.C. News and that of the American Forces Radio, delighting in the discrepancies between the two. A morse expert in our midst also made unsuccessful attempts to receive the Haganah transmitting station in Palestine.

We grew somewhat tired, bored and impatient at the delay. We were eager to be in Palestine. The taciturn staff gave us no definite information. We hardly saw them. Try as we might we found out nothing. Those of us who knew a little Hebrew never revealed the fact as we hoped that the staff would talk openly in front of us in Hebrew, not expecting us to understand. In this manner information might have been obtained. All to no avail. The days passed lazily and tediously. We gleaned information about the backgrounds of one another; we taught the Roumanians South African songs and dances and learnt theirs in turn. They were very lively and one had to be on one's guard continually for they were always up to god-natured mischief.

Training was limited to learning drill in Hebrew and to lessons in the stave or big stick, to which the Arabs sometimes have recourse. Football was a regular pastime and the more conscientious spent several hours daily learning Hebrew.

We suffered from a dearth of suitable feminine company. Girls there were, but almost all of them were married, despite their youth, to boys not much older than themselves. Early marriage seems to have been the rule for since the couples intended to go to agricultural co-operatives, where they would both be provided for, there were no economic obstacles to matrimony. The South Africans and Danes often had



discussions amongst themselves as to whether the girls in the camp appealed to them and the verdict was generally in the negative.

Perhaps the fact that they were married and the lack of a common language never enabled us to really understand them, but we found them so different from the young women of our countries of origin. They were completely lacking in femininity. They used no make-up and were hefty and thick in build. Their legs and calves were massive and several of them wore boots. In their mannerisms too they were masculine and aggressive.

The accommodation question was not satisfactory at the camp. Most of the inhabitants were billeted in three or four large rooms where men and woman, married and single, all lived with little or no privacy.

Our hopes of being in Palestine by May 15<sup>th</sup>, when the Jewish State was due to be proclaimed, were fast receding when the situation took a new turn. We were prepared for our departure and given instructions. We were issued with new identities and often with new names and data which had to be memorised and we had to mark our baggage accordingly. Our trip had been planned down to the most minute detail.

Early in May we once more boarded a char-a-banc, this time for a lengthier trip to an Italian port. A trailer had been attached and with this load the going was slow, occupying the better part of a day.

Our group boarded the ship, in a party, with the greatest of ease. Some “tourists” from countries of Eastern Europe had come aboard. It was a pleasant little Italian vessel, clean and neat and the food proved to be wholesome and well prepared.

At the camp we had been warned to be cautious and to play our part correctly, not talk English and so forth. That was a difficult demand for we had to struggle to converse in Yiddish. But apparently even this was unnecessary according to the Haganah agent at the port. Everyone knew who we were and did not seem to care. We continued the pretence for a day or two, however, mainly with the waiters with whom we had regular contact. It was awkward. They spoke German to us and we made no reply or else spoke in Italian. Despite the inscrutable look common to waiters we were sure that they knew everything so we began to speak English and felt more at ease.

The ships departure was delayed for a day by some mechanical fault and, on advice, we stayed below as far as possible. Most of the passengers were “attached” to our scheme so we had quite a jolly little company for there were others also en route to Israel, who had not been in the camp.

Thanks to the elements the voyage was pleasant. There was a woman on board who claimed to have something to do with the Haganah. She was forever telling us about Palestine and what a wonderful country it was. She was quite a good dice player and we played this game for amusement but not for money.

A minor uproar was caused on board when we were informed that we were expected to pay a few shillings for deck-chairs, It was a catastrophe for people in our financial standing. Still we managed to hire a few chairs.

One day we were steaming along pleasantly when an Italian destroyer loomed over the horizon and gave chase. It was a menacing situation for she came for us with all her guns manned and forced us to stop. A boarding party came to the ship. Our captain was quite co-operative, but the sailors on the destroyer still manned their guns while all our passengers stood by the rails and awaited developments. Nothing spectacular happened. It seemed as if they were merely looking for arms. Finding none and checking that the ship's papers were in order the boarding party returned to the destroyer. There was another abortive scare. It had been announced that we would call at Alexandria, Egypt. Not a pleasant thought for those of us who had been in Cairo recently. We were warned to keep below deck all the time and to make no transactions with Egyptian hawkers who might come on board, lest they accuse us of some trumped up charge and call in authority. The fact that Italian law applies on an Italian ship was some consolation. Apparently the Egyptians could not force us to leave the boat. These conjectures were never put to the test, however. The boat did not call at Alexandria. Rumour said that the Egyptians had warned the captain not to stop there.

The burning question then was Tel Aviv or Haifa? Both are ports, but it would be easier to get ashore, without closer investigation, at Tel Aviv, the all Jewish city where the port and immigration officials were Jewish, than at Haifa where the majority of such officials were British. The difficulty was that Tel Aviv port facilities were comparatively poor and passengers had to go ashore in lighters. Even this depended on the roughness, or rather calmness, of the sea. If the waves were even somewhat unruly the passengers would have to land at Haifa. One could only wait and see.

On the night of Sunday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, we neared the shores of Palestine. I shall never forget that night. The sea was calm and the air was stirred only by a faint, cooling breeze. The sky was a starry palace. It was quiet and peaceful when some of us gathered on deck and with a portable radio searched the ether for verbal contact with Palestine. The woman who played dice was the mentor. At last. Out of the darkness and the stars came a voice in Hebrew. It was "Kol Yisrael," the "Voice Of Israel," calling from the troubled land. There were reports of clashes and casualties.

And then something followed that deeply impressed me. The football results. And a sports talk. If a nation facing its destiny and preparing for a struggle had time for football and sport all was well.

We retired, most of us to get no sleep and were up early the next morning for a first glimpse of the shores of the holy land.

## Chapter Three

### “Tel Aviv on the threshold of a new state”

Tel Aviv was sighted in the half-light of the early morning. It appeared drab and unimpressive in outline- a cluster of buildings cresting rolling stretches of sand. Not a scene to dazzle the eye. Yet it pleased the heart. We were like pilgrims seeing the promised land. The mere fact of being there was important. Especially at that time for the State had not yet been proclaimed.

The sea was unsteady and murky and the boat rolled from side to side with a gentle swell. The possibility of going ashore seemed remote. Shapes in the gathering light turned out to be other ships lying at anchor in the bay and they rose and fell in vision with the motion of the waves.

Slowly the city's outlines were accentuated as the day broke. The massive and towering Reading power-station on the seafront loomed larger and larger.

The small vessel, bobbing and pitching like a cork, was a lighter on its way from the port and coming towards us. Perhaps it was possible to land after all. The passengers crowded the rails in expectation, watching the progress of the sturdy little craft as it dived and squirmed in the tossing waves. Soon its occupants were visible. A mixed bunch, some tough looking and weather beaten, others clad in suits and holding brief-cases.

They drew nearer and endeavoured to tie up alongside. No easy task and one which took them the better part of ten minutes and was accomplished only after several unsuccessful attempts. A ladder was lowered from our ship and one by one and precariously they came aboard.

Willing and strong hands helped them from the lighter on to the ladder and from the ladder onto the ship. The passengers looked on nervously expecting someone to fall into the sea at any moment. They seemed to be well versed at their task, however. The Hebrew in which their instructions were shouted came as sweet music to our ears.

The passengers were ordered to report in the lounge with all their papers. We were going ashore at Tel Aviv. A queue formed outside the door and whispered discussions were held as to whether the officials were Jewish or not. It was impossible to tell from their features.

My turn arrived soon;

“Where do you come from?” the official asked.

“X”. I said, giving the name of the Eastern European country which my papers said I had come.

“I want the truth.”

“X,” I persisted.

He was getting impatient. "Listen," he said, "I'm one of you, you can tell me the truth."

I remained somewhat suspicious. "X," I replied. He was at his wit's end. "Don't you realise that this is Tel Aviv and that I am Jewish?"

I took a chance. "I come from South Africa."

"That's what I wanted to know all along."

This same individual asked the Danes whether they had come "to shoot" and they were rather taken aback by the abruptness of this question.

Going ashore was a minor adventure in itself and it took some hours to disembark us all for the lighter had to make several trips. No one fell into the water fall although there were several narrow shaves. The trip from the boat to quay was agony - something like riding a bucking bronco. Many people became sea-sick in those few minutes. Touching the shore of Palestine at last was more than adequate compensation for all the discomforts.

Tel Aviv is not a big port and on superficial observation seemed to conduct its stevedoring and other operations very primitively. Port machinery was lacking and many task appeared to be inefficiently manhandled. Uploading cargo from the ships onto lighters was an arduous and slow process.

Some time passed before our luggage arrived and was cleared. A man had been sent to attend to the English speaking volunteers and we were warmly welcomed and given tea and sandwiches.

Then we were put in buses and taken to an hotel in the centre of the city. There were few signs that a war was imminent and that severe fighting was already in progress. Large brick barricades in certain streets, to ward off sniper's bullets from Arabs atop Jaffa's minarets and shooting into Tel Aviv's streets, were the only indications of a state of war. Tel Aviv was alive, the streets were crowded and the shops were busy but the people did stop momentarily to look at the singing busloads of new immigrants. They always do in Palestine, even now.

Several building and blocks of flats were in the course of erection with workmen busy on the scaffoldings. It was a good omen for building is sign of confidence in the future and people don't build if they expect an enemy to drive them out.

The populace, especially the women, were well dressed and brisk and alive. To a Jew a first impression of Tel Aviv is moving and thought provoking. All these people were Jewish, the waiters, taxi drivers, porters, bootblacks, policemen, firemen and even the beggars.

All these large buildings had been built by Jewish labour and all these streets had been laid by Jewish hands. Everywhere signs of a people reborn. Shops, and pharmacies and cafes and cinemas and stationers and street kiosks with signboards in

Hebrew and English. A dream world for the volunteers who felt that what they had come to defend was indeed worth fighting for.

We were billeted in an hotel. There was no full-scale mobilisation yet and while the Haganah had to some extent come out from the underground in Jewish areas, there was no military ostentation as yet and few camps. Our baggage having been deposited we were taken to a tented camp on the outskirts of Tel Aviv, which was the reception depot for all recruits. They were sent here from all corners of Palestine and then assigned to units and turning camps. Youngsters were continually coming and going. Fine fellows, healthy and strong and determined - the pick of Palestine's youth.

The camp was staffed by Jews who had served with the British army in the Second World War and most of them knew English so we had no language difficulty.

We met all types, speaking all languages and speaking English with a variety of accents. Palestinians have a knack for learning languages. A blonde, very Aryan looking, Jew amused us by his Scottish accent. He had never been to Scotland but had been in a Scottish unit. Another spoke a very good Afrikaans, learnt from South African soldiers in Egypt. We were soon made to feel at home.

Our coming was a link with world Jewry, a sign of confidence in the future and a promise of aid to come. The fact that most of us had had several years of active military experience was additionally welcome. We were inundated with questions, an experience to which we were soon to accustom ourselves. How many more are coming was always the question. And arms? Our answers bordered on the optimistic as far as manpower was concerned, but we could offer nothing definite or encouraging on the question of arms.

That day we joined the army and completed numerous forms. Pretty young girls did most of the clerical work and they were extremely friendly and efficient and asked many questions that had nothing to do with the information sought on the forms.

The problem of now arose of what units we were to join. It was difficult to decide since so much information was lacking. Nothing definite was known as to the few existing units or even as to the plans for intended units. If a man had tank experience where should he go? Did the Jews have any tanks? If not were they expecting to obtain any? No answers. Were there any guns? No one knew or if they knew they would not talk. So some joined the air-force (in anticipation of 'planes to come) some the armoured cars and some the infantry.

Jack, Uri and I formed a category on our own. In South Africa a private doctor, applying rigid army standards, had rejected us as unfit for military service. We had come across hoping to find our way into the army and, failing that, we intended to go to a frontier agricultural settlement where manpower was urgently required. Here in Tel Aviv there was no medical examination - no time for that! If a man thought that he was fit and was willing that was sufficient (My first real medical examination was to come ten months later.) Jack, Uri and I had all had combat experience and we were told that our military knowledge would come in very useful and that we were badly needed by the army. We all expressed a willingness and a desire to join the army. A hitch arose, however. The representative of the agricultural settlement claimed us.

The settlement, right on the order of both Syria and the Lebanon, was urgently in need of men who knew how to handle arms. They were expecting an attack at any moment. It was mainly a South African settlement, many of our friends were there and since we had had some affiliations with the group in South Africa we had a moral obligation to be with them. There was considerable justification in some of the representative's arguments. The three of us, having just arrival in the country, were unable to weigh the merits of the two alternatives and left the decision to the representative and the camp commander.

The representative, a skilful debater, carried the day. A compromise was reached. We would go to the kibbutz (settlement), as military personnel, for one month at the end of which the position would be reviewed. By then we should have had an opportunity to see where we could be of most use.

So we were in the army and until our departure to the kibbutz, in a few days time, we were to remain in Tel Aviv at an hotel and have our meals in the camp. We were each issued with a pair of khaki trousers and a khaki shirt. These, together with a few other items, comprised a partial issue of uniform. An identity card was issued and we were informed that the pay would be two pounds (six dollars) per month. Its receipt was dependent on the availability of the money and there was no guarantee of payment.

The uniform was not particularly distinctive for many people in Tel Aviv wear Khaki in summer. That night we saw the town with the help of a guide, one of our recruiting agents. The streets were brightly lit and the colourful and well-stocked shop-windows seemed as remote from war as anything can be. Prices were extremely high, especially for foodstuffs, these costing more than double their price in South Africa.

According to our guide this would be our last night of luxury. Now we could afford to buy and shop anywhere and frequent the most expensive cafes, but once we were soldiers the situation would be different. Then our meagre pay and the high prices would force us to stint ourselves of most things. Not a very comforting thought, especially since it appeared obvious that the civilians could do with a little austerity too.

We went to one of the largest cafes for a beer. An orchestra was playing and the café was crowded with young and middle-aged people.

"There seems to be no war or national emergency," some-one remarked to the guide. "Look, everyone seems oblivious of what is happening in other parts of Palestine. Why aren't they in the army?"

"They are all doing their duty, quietly and secretly," he answered.

"All these pretty girls are in the Haganah and play their part doing guard and convoy duty. People have a hard time in Israel and a dangerous time so that when they can snatch some moments of relaxation and pleasure they make the most of it. Only a few days ago bullets and mortars from Jaffa were killing and maiming in this very area. We cannot afford to live in the past."

I believed him then. Later I realised that this statement should have been qualified. The people rallied magnificently in Palestine but shirkers were not absent and many

did not volunteer for any task if they could avoid them. It was only after the proclamation of the State that compulsory mobilisation was introduced and all, shirkers included, were forced to play their part.

At the camp that afternoon we had been warned to resist the blandishments of the “Irgun Zvai Leumi”, known in Palestine generally by the name “Etzel”, an abbreviation of their full title. According to reports they were making lavish offers to English-speaking ex-servicemen in order to encourage them to join their ranks. Bait included the promise of a commission, thirty pounds a month and the use of a car. So we kept our eyes skinned for suspicious looking characters, but never found any. Thanks to them, however, we were most apprehensive about speaking English in public. As it was, the sound of English in Tel Aviv would cause the surrounding populace to pause, stare and cast looks. The reaction of Etzel members was known to be more drastic. One of my friends, who looks very Aryan and speaks with what might be called an Oxford accent, was surrounded and stopped by some men one day and prodded with a revolver barrel. He was asked for his papers and succeeded in proving that he was Jewish and a member of the Haganah. In view of his experiences and reports of similar cases we were reluctant to talk English in public. There were too few English-speaking volunteers in town for the public to regard the presence of one of them as a normal occurrence.

A little after midnight, having returned from the café, someone asked us for a match. We obliged. He was leaning against a telephone pole and was a Yemenite Jew. The Yemenites come originally from Yemen in Arabia and are brown in colour, cheerful and pleasant. Many of them joined the Etzel. This one claimed to be a member. It emerged from the conversation that we had with him- it is easy to begin a conversation in Palestine - that he had taken part in the fighting for Jaffa. He shifted his position and pointed a several indentations in the wood of the pole. “Sniper’s bullets from Jaffa,” he said. On request he told the story of the attack on Jaffa claiming all praise for his organisation and none for the Haganah who had gone to the assistance of “Etzel”. Then he asked the question we inevitably received. “Will arms be coming from America and South Africa?” As usual we had to reply in the negative.

We counter-questioned. “Have you any heavy stuff in Palestine?”

We had often discussed the matter amongst ourselves. Did the Jewish underground have any heavy armaments? If they had were they keeping them hidden until May 15<sup>th</sup>? Uri, my friend, was very optimistic.

“You wait for May 15<sup>th</sup> and then you will see them bring out several batteries of guns, and half-tracks and many tanks”. My personal expectations were not so sanguine. I was unable to see where they could have got them all from and where they could hide them. Still I expected a few artillery pieces, some anti-aircraft guns and even one or two tanks. Even I was to be disappointed.

The Yemenite was big talk, however. “Leave it to ‘Etzel’,” he boasted. “We haven’t been sleeping like the Haganah. We have guns and tanks - Shermans. You’ll see them all in a few days time when the Mandate ends and we bring them out of hiding.”

“We felt happier. A few Sherman tanks would come in useful.

“Are you sure we have Shermans?”

“Are you doubting my word? I’ve seen them with my own eyes.”

On the strength of his reply we slept well. That was my first experience of what they call a “schwitzer” in Palestine - a braggart. “Schwitzers” are supposed to retail “Cheesbadim” which is an Arabic word used in Hebrew to connote tall stories.

Early in our army career we had our first experiences of Palestinian military red tape. We were supposed to be at the camp for breakfast early the next morning, but had some trouble finding the right bus for we did not know our way around. At the gate the guard delayed us since we were unable to understand him or to explain who we were. As a result we arrived a few minutes after the meal had commenced, but a considerable time before its conclusion. So we were refused food by some blustering Sergeant-Major, who appeared to be trying to imitate a typical regimental Sergeant-Major of the British army. It was not the last example of imitation I was to see. Unfortunately I was to witness many more and they appeared as irrational and as stupid for the simple reason that this was not the British army and the temperament of the local soldier demanded a different approach.

Most of the N.C.O’s in our section sympathised with us and smuggled food from the kitchen so that we did not go hungry. Lunch was another example of the Sergeant-Major’s inefficiency. Everyone had to parade for lunch at one o’clock sharp and march in units to the mess-hall. Consequently all the columns converged on the mess-hall at exactly the same time and the queue stretched into the far distance. There was only one queue so a meal entailed a long wait in the hot sun. The food was ample and nourishing, containing large quantities of vegetables and fruit. After some time a few of the South Africans, tired of this more or less vegetarian diet of cucumbers, tomatoes, peppers, fruit, cheese, cream and herring, sarcastically began to enquire whether they were thought to be goats.

We spent little time in the camp, however, having nothing particular to do there. The Anglo-Saxon volunteers (as we were called) kept in close contact with one another. Those who had joined the air-force were also billeted in hotels but ate together in a civilian restaurant. This fact was supposed to be a top secret but fellow diners must have been well aware of what was going on.

The air-force, then in its embryo stage and consisting almost exclusively of a few piper cubs, was a frequent topic of conversation. Its exploits were legion and its birth pangs many. Several people, who had had little or no experiences in aviation, were trying to exert undue influence in its management and their obstinacy was breaking the hearts of those Anglo-Saxon veteran pilots and ground and aircrews who really knew their jobs. Some stupid mistakes were made as a result of this obstinacy. It seemed to be the practice in Palestine to learn the hard way and not to regard a straight line as the shortest distance between two points. Yet the air force did a wonderful job of work, then mainly in supplying besieged settlements and in maintaining contact with Jerusalem whose life-line was in jeopardy. A bitter struggle was being waged then for sections of the Jerusalem road with the Jews launching an all-out effort to open the road although it was really the duty of the British to keep it



passable and secure. The cream of the country's youth were risking their lives on the highway from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and the price paid was enormous. Sections of road were captured but arms and men were not available in sufficient quantities to open the road completely. At the same time the epic resistance of Kfar Etzion and three little settlements in its vicinity was evoking the admiration and sympathy of all the Jews and many who were not Jews.

These settlements, in the midst of wholly Arab areas, had repulsed countless attack and were still resisting the might of the well-equipped Arab legion. It was only a matter of days now. The settlements could not be saved. They were completely isolated. One could clearly read the sadness on the faces of the air-crew when they returned from the flights to Kfar Etzion. It was hopeless. They had dropped what could be spared but the Arabs were swarming all over. Then one day their faces were sadder than ever. It was all over. Only smoking and charred remains were left.

In Tel Aviv and all over Palestine there were discussions on the wisdom of deciding to fight it out at Kfar Etzion when the settlements might perhaps have been evacuated. Subsequent events and history proved the decision amply justified. The might of the Arab Legion was blunted there and valuable time was given to Jerusalem which helped the Holy City to survive.

Uri and I decided to go to Jaffa to take photographs and to look around. Comparative peace reigned there. Etzel and the Haganah were holding their lines and British troops had moved in between the Jews and the Arabs and had taken up positions to keep the peace.

Uri and I never got very far. The Etzel were most unco-operative and refused to allow us to take photographs. The Haganah were friendlier and allowed us to move around. We were permitted to take snapshots of certain areas. There was massive destruction everywhere and I was reminded of Cassino and other areas of war-torn Europe. Asking for permission to photograph the Jews facing the British and also the British, if possible, we were told that this would have to be obtained from headquarters whence we were escorted. The H.Q. was ideally camouflaged in a little house that appeared completely domesticated and unmilitary, with washing on the line and a pram on the porch. We were refused our request.

A day or two after that Jaffa surrendered to the Jews.

The hospitality of some Tel Aviv inhabitants for the Anglo-Saxons knew no bounds. Each night that we were in the city parties were arranged for us. One I remember as being particularly lavish. It was in a private flat and there was caviar and whisky and several other kinds of liquor. The women were fashionably and smartly dressed and were beautiful. Their husbands, for most of them were married, engaged us in conversation on a variety of topics. All expressed confidence as to the outcome of the hostilities and forecast a great future for the new little state.

Jack and Uri and I made the most of our last few days perhaps for some time, in a city. Here was a little opportunity for sleep and we soon acquired our favourite haunts. Life was gay in Tel Aviv and expensive, but we had some money and did not mind.

One little place recently opened attracted us especially. It was a tiny bar-café holding about fifty people in the basement of an hotel. A man played the piano and a girl, who was not beautiful and didn't really have a good voice, sang. The warmth of her personality communicated itself however, and the song she sang were moving and inspiring. They were about the Haganah and the Palmach; the permanent, mobile force of the Haganah and regarded as the elite of the army. And every night the man at the piano played a new song which as a rule he had composed himself, and drawn by the girl, the audience was soon joining in like one, happy family. The exploits of the army and its advances were lauded. One new song was about berets and caps. It mentioned that the Haganah and always gone into battle with its men wearing a motley collection of head-gear or nothing on the head at all. Now things would change and there would be hats. Perhaps not a great song, but the audience made it so.

Some Palmach commandos used to come there prior to raids or attacks. Perhaps for some of them this was their last night of life. Such thoughts made the songs the more nostalgic. They and we became firm friends. Our only arguments used to be who should be privileged to pay for the drinks. Everyone claimed the privilege.

It is a pity that not many people came to know this little café for the hotel became the air-force H.Q. and the café was closed.

Each morning, when we reluctantly left there at closing time, we adjourned to another café in Tel Aviv which is open almost right through the night and where the artists, and writers and poets and bohemians congregate. In actual fact, in the early hours of the morning, everyone gathers there who wishes to eat or drink for it is the only café that is open. There we met the men and the women who were really doing the work. They came to drink a cup of coffee before going on or after coming off duty. Tel Aviv was forever alert. One never knew what was likely to occur. Puzzling things happened such as the sudden return of some of the evacuated British troops to Palestine early in May.

One day I was at the sea-front in Tel Aviv, drinking tea at a promenade café, when I noticed everyone looking out to sea.

The objects of attention were a British destroyer and an air-craft carrier steaming in a straight line through the ships lying at anchor outside Tel Aviv port. People wondered what their aim was. Nothing happened. The people had feared lest the ships were up to some mischief. You can never tell, with the British, they said. Few people regarded them as neutral and most were bitter towards their policy, although not always towards their people. Time would show, they said. Now they were waiting for them to get out.

They were not keeping order as they were supposed to do nor were they allowing the Jews to keep order or even to defend themselves. Kfar Etzion was a case in point. So too was besieged Jerusalem.

The great day for which the Jews had waited for two thousand years was drawing nearer. What would world reaction be? Speculation was rife. How would the big powers react? Would the U.S.A. lift the arms embargo? Many people thought that

they would and that American arms would pour into the country. They were to be proved wrong. It was to be a hard struggle. I think even the local inhabitants must have been shocked when our army officially came out into the open and the paucity of heavy arms became apparent. Many never knew the true facts until victory had already been achieved.

Jack and Uri and I had had our “fling.” On Friday, May, 14<sup>th</sup>, we left for the settlement on the frontier.

## Chapter four.

### “A War Commences”.

May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1948 was a significant day for Palestine - the end of the British Mandate and the birth of a new state. There was a feeling of tension and pregnancy in the air, an expectation of a violent and fierce travail. The central “Egged” bus terminus in Tel Aviv was a hive of activity. Passengers jostled for accommodation on vehicles leaving for all corners of the little country. Roads safe that day might be unsafe and impassable in days to come. Bronzed and healthy in simple khaki and blue garments, bare armed and bare legged, the majority of the intending travellers were settlers returning to their scattered strongholds of agricultural settlements. There with their comrades they would take up scanty arms and resist the invading Arab armies. And in the excitement and rush and hurry none foresaw that in four days time Egyptian ‘planes would bomb this very terminus and kill forty-one and injure many more.

Our bus was crowded, but the occupants were pleasant and of good cheer. Most were reading newspapers, oblivious to the passing countryside which they knew so well. Not so Jack, Uri and I. We viewed the green Sharon and the settlements set like jewels in a lush soil. The serenity seemed to denounce the possibility of bloodshed to come. But there were soldiers on the road and men who looked like soldiers. It was difficult to tell who was an army man and who was not, for in summer many people in Palestine wear khaki, and the uniform of the Jewish forces was plain, unadorned khaki free from trappings of badges, epaulettes or other insignia. Most of the soldiers were British hurrying to the ports. They were still manning all the military points and would still be masters that day. Tank carriers rumbled along the road and equipment passed in steady streams. They were not ours.

At Affula, where the proposed Jewish state was to join the proposed Arab state we changed buses. Detours were the order of the day. Arabs were here, there and everywhere. Tiberias was reached by a round-about route. This city had been captured by the Jews on April 18<sup>th</sup> and bore heavy scars of the fighting. The terrain further north was more dangerous and for security reasons we all transferred to an armoured bus. The road to Rosh Pinah, key town of the Upper Galilee, lay through the hills and past the blue waters of the Sea of Galilee. Our first view was through the slits of the armour-plating but later the doors were opened and the jovial driver gave a running commentary of the history and scenes that lay before us.

Rosh Pinah was like an armed camp and all Jewish. Not Britisher in sight. Here the Jews were masters of their own fight and fate.

Trucks were coming and going and a big convoy was forming. Our armoured bus joined the line. Rumours were ten a penny in Rosh Pinah.

On the morrow, they said, fighter ‘planes were due on the nearby airstrip. All had been arranged. Those concerned had been briefed. Each man had his own idea of where the planes were coming from. Unfortunately, as too often happened, this was mere wishful thinking as the morrow and following days proved. Rosh Pinah was to

see many an Arab 'plane and suffer many an air-raid before they were to welcome Jewish 'planes.

It is good to live in hope provided the truth and the reality do not enervate and the local people were too strong and too obstinate to be perturbed when their dreams proved pipe dreams.

The convoy was led by armoured cars. From Rosh Pinah northwards Palestine is a narrow strip of valley land sided by hills and mountains of Syria and the Lebanon until the strip widens into the boarder fertile valley of the Northern Galilee. And atop one of these hills, in Palestine but on the border, the British had evacuated a strong, fortress-like police-station and allowed the Arabs to walk in. From Nebi Yusha, as it was called, the Arabs sniped at traffic in the valley. We slammed our doors and hurriedly closed our shutters. The pitter pat of bullets on the steel seemed futile and wasted. So this was the beginning for some of us. A harmless bleeding. The bus suddenly stopped at a little building. The driver hastily opened the door facing away from Nebi Yusha and three men clambered inside, quickly but calmly. They lit cigarettes and gossiped on trite matters after a cursory reference to the shooting. They were members of Kfar Giladi, one of the largest and oldest communal settlements in the Galilee. Fish ponds belonging to Kfar Giladi lay directly below the police-station and these men had been working there. Life had to continue as normal - if possible. Food had to be produced.

Fires were burning in the distance and there was the clatter of small arms and of a skirmish. An Arab village was in the process of being captured by the Haganah. It was almost over. The inhabitants had menaced traffic and attacked the Jews. Theirs was the retribution. Our bus passed on as if nothing was happening. We waved to the soldiers and left them behind.

Mayan Baruch, our destination, was a newly established settlement containing about ninety souls, men, women and even a few children. The settlers had come from South Africa, America and Palestine and a large number were ex-servicemen of the last war, a comforting thought on May 14<sup>th</sup>.

Jack, Uri and I arrived in time for a practice alarm and a dress rehearsal. The strategy in the Galilee was simple and dictated by the circumstances, of which a dire shortage of arms was the most claimant. Each settlement in the valley, and there were several, was expected to defend itself until the surrounding settlements could come to its aid. Dan, Kfar Szold and other settlements near Mayan Baruch had already been attacked by large numbers of Arabs and had beaten back the attackers. But this time there would be organised armies of states on the march and not irregular groups or single army units. Communication was maintained between the settlements by radio, heliograph, lamps and flares.

The practice alarm and briefing showed the situation in its stark reality. According to accepted military calculations and handbooks little resistance could be offered. There was a pitiful lack of arms and ammunition stocks consisting of about twenty-five weapons and comprising one, old two-inch mortar with a few shells; one "Chateau" light machine-gun with several hundred rounds and twenty or so smaller arms of diverse makes and age. The locally made sten-gun with an effective range of not more

than fifty yards, vied for pride of place with a tommy-gun, an old shot-gun normally used for hunting buck, and French, German, English and Czech rifles. Each weapon had its idiosyncrasies. A ukase was issued by Josef, the military commander, that ammunition was to be most sparingly used, for one never knew where the next lot was to come from.

The settlement had been well prepared for attacks from the ground and from the air. Bunkers and shelters enabled the whole community to go underground and a little sick-bay had been prepared in a shelter. The perimeter of the "meshek" (centre of the settlement comprising the buildings) was surrounded with several layers of barbed and concertina wire and some (but not sufficient) mines had been laid.

Shooting and observation positions ringed the camp and these dug-outs were linked to one another and to the dwelling houses by wide communication-trenches and by telephone.

The vegetable gardeners had viewed the defence preparations with some misgivings for the plants had of necessity to be up-rooted to make way for trenches and dug-outs. Ingenuity played no small part in the defence arrangements due note being taken of Arab psychology and superstition. One thousand crackers, which go off when tramped upon were strewn around to frighten marauding Arabs, and plans were devised for dummy dug-outs and phosphorescent and frightening figures.

In the midst of the urgent preparations a party was held, attended by those not manning the dugouts. The Jewish State had been proclaimed by the Provisional Council of the Government in Tel Aviv. A two thousand year old dream had come true. Nothing valuable is easily obtained. We were on guard and alert. Awaiting the attack. Few slept that night. The Arabs had three ended to swarm their armies across the borders of the new state and drive the Jews into the sea.

The sound of the alarm sent everyone dashing to their action-posts. The metallic clang of the gong cut the tension cleanly and came as a relief to some. What menaced in the darkness? The word raced around: "Relax. It was a false alarm. The gong has been struck accidentally". Once more to wait with fleeting thoughts of the uniqueness and greatness of the occasion. A Jewish state, Jewry in the diaspora rejoicing, Jewry in the new state, happy, alert and ready. Thousands of thoughts and knowing that others were thinking like you in the darkness, on watch, peering into the night, confident of the future yet unknowing of it. And Arabs were wakeful too and at U.N.O. the world was far removed and treating the matter as one of politics and diplomacy. Would Truman lift the embargo? We had to have arms.

The night passed in peace. The morning brought a flurry. The going booming a warning and a dash to the shelters and posts. The sound of shots, theirs and ours. It was brief and transitory. Some passing Arabs fired at the settlement and made off when we replied. Brief interlude. Uneventful really.

No invasion of Arabs that day but the contrary. Streams of them through the valley, northwards to Syria and the Lebanon. Moving like ants, trotting and jumping and walking. Galilean Arab villages fall to the Jews. The inhabitants flee although they

are asked to stay. We watch them going and do not fire or molest them. They have chosen. Some remain behind. They wish to be friends. They are welcome.

From Nebi Yusha they still attack Jewish traffic. Our forces try to capture this fortress. It is almost impossible. We have nothing with which to pierce its massive walls. It is difficult to approach without being seen. The first attacks are in vain. Finally courage prevails. Nebi Yusha falls but more than twenty brave youngsters from the Haganah lose their lives outside its wall. Soon the whole of Northern Galilee is in the Jewish hands. Our forces are few but a brilliant strategy is employed. A place is captured and seven or eight men left to hold it. This the enemy do not realise. Each night the same indomitable youngsters go in to the attack. The Arabs do not know that all the attacks launched at widely scattered place are undertaken by the same men, who move rapidly because they are few and must give the appearance of many. The enemy overestimate Jewish strength.

The Arabs never fight at night if they can avoid it. We take advantage of this. The hours of night enable us to prepare, to anticipate and to attack. The Jews, coming from the settlements know their Galilee, are trained in night fighting. The foe are surprised and bewildered in the darkness.

We are not strong in equipment or in numbers in the beginning. And we offer thanks that we are fighting the Arabs and not a modern European army for might, if overwhelming, can vanquish belief and bravery. We make mistakes too and have to learn by bitter experiences but we improvise and are canny in war and hold our own. And the Lebanese army is quiet and the Syrian army is occupied in the Jordan valley where the gallant settlement Daganah has beaten it back with the help of artillery. If the armies of Lebanon and Syria had attacked in the Galilee they would have outnumbered the Jews many times. But they delayed and we took the offensive, despite our paucity of arms. A few hundred men moving and mobile and appearing many.

It warms the heart to hear that there is some Jewish artillery on other fronts in Palestine because there is none here. We watch the Arab guns shelling the settlements in the valley. Their flashes are visible, one can find their location but we have nothing with which to reply.

There is a frustrating feeling of ballistic impotence as we see their shells burst and damage and we can do nothing but watch. Dan has a bad time but the settlers have dug in and casualties are surprisingly few.

It is eerie and strange being in a dugout in the evenings. In the day we are not continually in the dugouts since we can see from the high watch-tower and have ample warning of impending attacks.

At night it is different. Vision is limited. A stealthy foe will be right on one before one can see him. I like the shot-gun at night. Its range is short but its shot will spray the darkness. All the dugouts are usually manned, two people in each, changing around, one on watch and one resting. Women play their share too. They have learned how to shoot. If possible they are not given dangerous tasks but we are few and have no choice. It is quiet and still in the Galilee in summer. The nights are clear and warm

and the mosquitoes are annoying. Glow-worms carve dashes of light and only the tinkle of the phone from the command-post and the friendly: "Anything to report?" disturbs the immediate silence. But in the distance there is noise and colour and one interprets its significance.

The brightly coloured lights of tracers and flares. The flashes of light from guns and the dashes of red and orange as shells explode. That's a battle. One side is attacking. People are grappling for their lives. And one peers into the darkness more determinedly lest the same colour and meaning be due to flare up here. The howls in the night are the jackals. Hundreds of them and the howls are taken up and form a circle which surrounds one. The first night I heard the cacophony of jackal sounds I thought it might be the Arabs shouting their war cries.

There are lights in the valley. Transport from the South. What have they brought? Oh, if only arms, heavier stuff. At every light one hopes and at every daybreak one is disillusioned. Nothing new. And one knows that to-day when the 'planes come one will still have no anti-aircraft weapon to drive them off with nor will there be such a weapon anywhere in the valley. So the 'planes come and you don't even look to see if they are yours for you know they are not. And your "Chateau" opens up, single shots at the time, purposeless and useless, but you cannot do otherwise for rounds are scarce. From the valley pinpricks of missiles come from the light weapons of your neighbours. Futile. The 'planes are over often and you forget to take cover unless they fly menacingly near or dive. You have work to do. These planes have no consideration. They come when you are naked under the shower and your friend on the watch-tower bangs the "take cover" and you have to dash to a slit-trench. Fortunately the 'planes don't pay much attention to the settlement. To them its an insignificant blob on the landscape. But they dive-bomb the roads and you worry for the travellers. When will our planes be overhead ?

Then the excitement that morning, when 'planes were in the sky, theirs, and an unfamiliar sound was heard from Kfar Giladi and the pilots were more cautious. The sound of the rattle. Not one little rattle but many. A great day for the Galilee. Kfar Giladi had a Hotchkiss, not very good as an anti-aircraft gun, it's true, but at least it kept the planes high and, above all, it indicated progress and a promise of things to come.

The Jews often neglected to take the most elementary safety pre-cautions against air-raids. A hearty contempt for the Arab's efficiency and military skill made them fail to take cover. "An Arab could never bomb accurately", they would say. Tel Aviv learnt its lesson after the raid on the Egged station and thenceforth all the bus termini were scattered. Kfar Giladi also learnt its lesson the hard way. Once I was in hospital there and it was rather awkward for patients to continually hop in and out of slit trenches. Bitter experience in Italy during the Second World War had taught me to take cover whenever possible while 'planes were up to dirty work. I had long arguments with a young patient in the bed next to mine on the question. He had marked contempt for Arab marksmanship. Some time after that my point was proved. Kfar Giladi was bombed. A bomb fell right next to a slit-trench and no-one there in was hurt. Two people, however, who had thrown discretion to the winds, and preferred to watch the 'plane did not take cover and were killed outright.



Despite the war, life on the settlements continued its normal tenor as far as possible. Food had to be produced and such a labour as could be spared from war work was turned to agriculture. Lengthy discussions ensued on the allocation of labour and the priority of work. Some considered the planting of peas more important than the laying of a mine-field and Jack, who knew something about laying mines and asked for assistance, was unable to get sufficient help. Meanwhile the peas were planted. Ploughing and preparing the fields received a high priority and involved a great deal of work since all the abandoned Arab lands had to be tended. The ploughman was always given an armed escort whose duties were twofold. He was to protect the ploughman from any hostile Arabs and was to signal the presence of 'planes. The tractor, which drew the plough, made such a noise that the driver was unable to hear approaching 'planes.

In all the fields, any distance from the Meshek, workers had to be protected. On certain routes too an escort was provided drivers.

Most of the Arab villages were abandoned and yielded no great treasures. In the villages surrounding Mayan Baruch articles stolen from the settlement in the past were recovered. Some of the friendly Arabs who had remained were armed by the Jews, despite our own meagre armaments. They required these in order to protect themselves from reprisals by hostile Arabs. The Galilee and very few Arabs left but every night there was a movement back into Palestine. Arab who had fled to the Lebanon and Syria were smuggling themselves back, regretting their acceptance of the advice of their leaders and hoping for the better conditions in Israel. They had realised that the Jews were not so bad after all and were envious of the condition of the Arabs who had remained.

The water for the settlement was pumped from some distance away and every few days an expedition had to be made to the pumping-house.

It was in the nature of a patrol. The group split into three. One lot went to the pump and the other two groups took up flanking positions to protect the pumping group and to provide covering fire if necessary.

The settlement might have been isolated geographically, but by means of wireless kept in touch with the outside world. All listened to news services regularly and newspapers provided contact when they arrived. Thus we were aware of the magnificent feats of the Haganah in other parts of Palestine. They had held the Arab Legion and had stopped the Egyptians. The Syrians had been thrown back in the Jordan valley. Jerusalem was still cut off and supplies were running low but the defenders had extended the areas in their possession although they had been forced to evacuate the Old City. In many areas of Palestine the Jews were taking the offensive and the Jewish air-force had bombed Amman, the capital of Transjordan.

In the political sphere Israel, as the new state was called, had made notable advances being recognised by the U.S.A., the U.S.S.R. and other important states. And U.N.O. was trying to stop the fighting. Sanctions, truces, embargoes were discussed. Count Bernadotte was nominated as mediator in the dispute.

Gradually too the Haganah was becoming a fully fledged army. Mobilisation was more comprehensive and efficient and the government issued a law providing for the establishment of the Israeli Defence Army.

Before our month of “probation” was completed, Jack, Uri and I, asked to join a regular army unit. Things were comparatively quiet in the Galilee and we felt that our specialised military experiences could be used more profitably elsewhere. Mayan Baruch seemed in no danger and reinforcements had arrived from Tel Aviv in the form of young Tel Avivians. The armoury was also better stocked now. Our demands met with considerable opposition, raised important issues and were heatedly discussed by opposing sides. The principle was raised whether a settlement, on the border, as it was, should encourage or even allow its members to join the army. Volunteering for the army was opposed by one group. They said that the army had already taken several of their members and would probably take more. The settlement had to think of itself first. Our view was different. We claimed that the military situation should be viewed as a whole. No settlement could judge whom the army did or did not need. If they did not need us in Tel Aviv we would come back but the central manpower body should judge. On the settlement one man who could use a rifle was as good as another man who could use a rifle.

In the army, however, specialists were needed because the local inhabitants had not had much experience in heavier weapons. The majority opinion seemed to support us but the committee did not. In the midst of the discussions the turn of events solved the conflict.

The Arabs grew wise and called our bluff. Realising, at long last, the small numbers of our forces, they launched a two pronged attack trying to cut off the Galilee from the rest of Palestine. Initially they were successful. They attacked Mishmar Hayarden in the East, captured Malkiya in the West and advanced on Rosh Pinah. Trained men were collected from every settlement to meet this new threat. Mayan Baruch had to provide three men and Jack, Uri and I volunteered to go and were now allowed to do so. We left in a hurry and rushed to Rosh Pinah to find the village in an uproar.

It was recovering from a panic. A few hours before Arabs had been seen advancing near the town and all had been thought lost. The sentry and given the alarm and there had been confusion until it was recognised that the Arabs were the band of Druses who were fighting on the side of the Jews. But the situation was still critical. A motley collection of individuals were defending the Galilee. In those days, while the army was as yet unorganised, manpower was raised by conscripting people in the cities for two weeks service and sending them to areas where they were needed. Those in Rosh Pinah came from Haifa. The older ones were kept in the camps and did the base duties, freeing the younger ones for combatant service. Everything was free and easy and friendly. There was no army yet and no code of discipline.

Yet each man did what he was told and few shirked their duties. No time existed for training. You were asked if you could handle a rifle and if you replied in the affirmative you were suitable for combat and might find yourself in action in the near or immediate future.

The most colourful of the troops were the Druses, dressed in their flowing robes and wearing keffiyehs. They were good and faithful soldiers and we were happy to have them with us.

At Rosh Pinah Jack was separated from Uri and me. He became a demolitions and “saboteur” man. Subsequently he was taken prisoner-of-war in the Negev and for a long time we did not see each other again. He was one of the finest soldiers I have ever met and a good friend. Uri and I, being Anglo-Saxons, were somewhat of a novelty in the town and the objects of many questions and remarks. We had a fine lot of comrades and experienced the warmest friendship on all sides. Our job was to wait, as reserves of infantry, until our action would be required. The hours of waiting were enlivened by enemy air-raids. That night we obtained little sleep.

The next day the situation had improved. The Syrians and Lebanese had been held.

Uri and I met our first artillery officer in Israel but look as we might we could see no guns. He was young and dashing and tired and spoke a perfect English. When he heard that we had service in the Artillery in the South African army he almost threw his arms around us. He was prepared to take us with him immediately and we were most willing to follow. His guns were French, however, and calibrated in mills whereas we were accustomed to the British system of degrees.

He could, he said, teach us the mills system in a short time but he was very busy and would be unable to spare the opportunity. So he advised us to go to the Artillery training camp, near Tel Aviv, for a few days.

An urgent authorisation was granted for our trip and we left for the camp with the men of an artillery troop who had lost their heavy mortars in action and were returning to be re-equipped, if possible. The loss of the “guns” had been a tragic blow, but when tanks and guns and planes were thrown against the Jews at Malkiya the weight of the enemy armour had proved too much. After a gallant but losing struggle the Jews had been forced to evacuate.

These chaps had received their artillery pieces in the morning, had trained the same afternoon and had gone into action that very night. And most of the Jewish “artillery” considered of heavy mortars, some of local manufacture, not too accurate, and not too reliable.

It was a tiring trip. The driver was always losing his way. It was dark and road-blocks, demolitions and deviations obstructed progress. Once we almost went into the Arab lines. No one seemed to know our location so we nosed the truck through the night and manned our stens and rifles - in case. Thankfully we reached a Jewish kibbutz and snatched a few hours of sleep, before continuing on our way to the artillery camp where we arrived in time for an air-raid. Those ‘planes seemed to follow one everywhere.

## Chapter Five.

### “Forming An Anglo-Saxon Troop.”

Our introduction to Pardess Katz, the artillery training camp, was a hasty one. We took a dive for a slit-trench. Egyptian ‘planes were overhead. The camp was a beautiful target, a big sandy field with row on row of tents interspersed with administrative bungalows. Nothing to withstand blast. It was tiresome walking in the sand so much so that we were to get into the habit of hitching rides from one part of the camp to another.

We met “Foxy” and some other Canadians in the slit-trench. “Aw ghosh, when will this end? I’m getting browned off. “He loved to talk and did not particularly care what he said. By profession he was a chicken dealer, but in the army he was to prove an outstanding driver despite his continual moans, groans and criticisms.

The raid over, we were interviewed and posted to an English-speaking regiment, with promises that we would be in the field soon.

The first Mortar (Heavy) Regiment, which died before it was really allowed to live, was a queer unit with great ambitions and vague plans. Top-heavy in personnel it embraced at that time, one brigadier, one major, one captain, one adjutant also a captain, four lieutenants and approximately twenty men. Characters indeed, as time was to show.

Ben was the Brigadier. He had distinguished himself as a young major in the Canadian army, particularly in the field of mortars. Joe, with carrot hair and a disarming smile, was the major. None could doubt his administrative abilities. He was the born organiser. When I first met him he told me that he had been in charge of several hundred men. When I last saw him the number had jumped to several thousands. No-one could prove anything of foreign military service in Israel and each man could claim as much as he dared. One soon discovered a man’s true worth. Joe was a good soldier and a leader of men although later tiffs with higher officers made him inclined to spend great deal of his time in Tel Aviv. More often than not he was in the right. The captain was Mike who was said to have come from Australia, as he publicly proclaimed, although close friends averred that he was an Englishman.

He had served as a captain in the British Army with Wingate, had been in Palestine for some time and had done sterling work for the Jewish cause. He was a gentile and, deservedly, was to gain a good name and a degree of fame throughout the army. He knew more about artillery work than most people in Israel, was dashing and popular with the girls and loved action, suffering from fits of moodiness with the continual eruption of truces which stymied and interrupted the local fighting. The lieutenants may be referred to in brief except for the American Mike, a sorry character. Two of the lieutenants were from Palestine. One was efficient and the other spent most of this time preening himself like a peacock. Once he went into action he proved himself unfit to be an officer and was sooner demoted. Mike, the American, became notorious and the laughing stock of Pardess Katz, although he was too dense to realise that himself.

He was jovial and fat and took early morning P.T. singing out the instructions in a booming voice. He was a chronic liar and Joe regrettably believed him when he said that he had been a Lieutenant-Commander in The United States Navy, a gunnery expert and had directed and commanded the Jewish naval forces in the conquest of Haifa. Mike's girl-friend in Tel Aviv was as gullible when he proudly informed her that he was Officer Commanding Pardess Katz. On the strength of this she willingly lent him her private car which he was wont to drive around the camp to exhibit the extent of her love for him. My first lecture at Pardess Katz was on Mortar Range Tables. After two minutes of attention Uri and I began to play noughts and crosses. The lecturer was Mike, He knew little of the subject and was imparting false and inaccurate information. We placed bets on how long he would last. It took Joe a same time to see through him, but finally he did. One day Mike was demoted to private. The next day he was under arrest and then he disappeared. We heard of him from time to time. He claimed to be Commander-in-Chief of the Israeli Glider Corps a non-existent unit. Subsequently he spread the tale that he was testing highly secret and dangerous weapons. No one else in Israel was willing to do the job, he boasted. He, Mike, had volunteered.

The men in the unit were interesting and friendly. Mostly Canadians who had already participated in the fighting as infantry on the road to Jerusalem and in the South. Due to language problems they had never really known what was going on and wished to join an English-speaking unit. Then there was an English Jew, two Dutch Jews, one of whom had fought in Spain and continually spoke about "fighting Fascism, anywhere", an Iraqi Jew speaking a perfect English and one or two Palestinians who spoke English. Uri and I became the first South Africans in this unit.

Joe made us very welcome and took us into his confidence. "We are going to create a hard-hitting force of Anglo-Saxon. First mortars, later other units if possible. We must be fully trained, unlike the Palestinians. We won't go into action until we are trained. I am expecting many men and soon we'll be up to strength. We want men with experience and I hope to make the two of you officers soon. I want our unit to be one happy family. If you wish to say Good morning, Sir to me you may. If you do not wish to do so you are equally free not to do so."

Ranks, clearly differentiated and defined had still not come to the Israel army. There were no distinctive badges for the different ranks. The only distinction was that N.C.O's wore yellow arm-bands while officers wore black arm bands.

Joe showed us photographs of our future weapons, the French I20 millimetre mortar. We argued that it was a "Beauty". Uri and I were perturbed at the infancy of our new unit, still in its embryonic stage. It did not appear as if it would be ready to take the field for some time.

We had no alternative. It was policy then to put all English-speaking volunteers together and we were politely, but firmly, informed that we had no option. Some experienced men had to form the nucleus- that did not exclude us.

That afternoon the Major was in the kit-store when I spoke a little Hebrew. Immediately he summoned the Sergeant-Major, a genial and helpful Canadian, and

spoke a few words to him. As a result he came towards Uri and me, patted us on the back and imparted the fact that the major had granted us instant promotion to the rank of corporal. With equal promptitude and much to his consternation we refused the two stripes and, thus rejecting four in all. We told the major that our mere knowledge of Hebrew and past military experiences should not qualify us for promotion. This was a mortar regiment and a knowledge of mortars should be a prior consideration. When we knew more about mortars it would be a different matter. Others, however, accepted the rejected stripes. Usually the most useless individuals accepted. Joe had a theory of psychology that a certain proportion of the ranks should go to careless and troublesome individuals. Given a sense of responsibility they would reform. His theory was not proved, correct.

Pardess Katz was a dreary camp fenced in by wire and by cactus hedges. Sometimes we received passes for Tel Aviv but for such a short time that it was impossible to go and return in time. To solve the problem we took the law into our own hands and slunk through the hedges.

While waiting for the complement to augment our unit to strength we busied ourselves with drill in Hebrew and with learning the language. Most of us knew no Hebrew at all and even had to struggle with the alphabet. The Hebrew teacher was very persevering and enlivened the lessons by teaching us songs. Our bass voices, singing popular songs, must have sounded bizarre in a military camp where strident, barked orders generally rent the air.

New recruits arrived in dribs and drabs and soon the majority were South Africans, some of whom had had no military experience whatsoever and did not even know how to handle a rifle. Basic training was given them.

U.N.O.'s efforts were crowned with success. After several false starts a truce began to operate in Palestine from June 11<sup>th</sup>.

The previous evening Israeli 'planes had bombed Damascus. It was a fitful truce. A convoy under U.N.O. supervision reached Jerusalem. Meanwhile the Jews had been busy building their Burma road to the besieged city.

The truce hit the first Mortar Regiment hard. It was like a depression to a growing concern. While the truce was in force no able-bodied immigrants were allowed to join the army but were detained in camps. Our wells of replenishment had run dry. We could not snatch English-speaking recruits out of thin air.

Now, however, we could gain some indication of the nature of our artillery since most of the units came back to Pardess Katz, the base. A motley collection of cannon arrived. A museum of pieces lay under the shade of the Orange trees. Little 65 millimetre guns whose size evoked jokes about Napoleonic times. So small that a blanket slung over served as camouflage. And the show-pieces of 25-pounders. Conglomerates of parts. They had been painstakingly assembled from stolen parts. A part had been removed in the night, a copy made and the part replaced. Fitting the parts together was an art. The guns resembled a rainbow in some respects. Marks of different colours and the one colour had to fit over a similar colour before the gun could be brought into action. Each part had its little fads and no new crew could

suddenly have mastered this concocted gun. And shells were lacking. Only Great Britain and the dominions made 25-pounders and they were giving no ammunition to Israel. Report said that old shells had been fished out of the sea (where the British had dumped them) cleaned and refilled with explosives.

The gun-yard was a heart-breaking sight. Too few guns. Yet these had held the Arabs back.

Two more gentiles joined us shortly before the truce. Both had been sailors and had jumped their ship at Haifa to join the Israeli forces. We all became firm friends. Peter was from Yorkshire and his accent left no doubt of that fact. Kiwi was from New Zealand and soon I became his "cobber". They had jumped ship without their kit but we soon fitted them out and made them feel at home. The Jews appreciated the non-Jews on their side. It was heartening and showed that not only Jews believed in the justice of their cause and that some non-Jews were prepared to back their beliefs with their lives. Peter was a good Englishman. Woe to the one who criticised anything about England except Mr Bevin's Palestine policy. Many Englishmen, Scotsmen and Welshmen fought for the Arabs, but many fought for the Jews for the principles at stake. They were paid no more than their Jewish comrades and all received two pounds per month. Peter and Kiwi had a knack of spending theirs the first day of the month, generally on beer. Their conduct in battle was exemplary and in many matters they had a better appreciation of the issues at stake than some of their Jewish friends had.

The first truce in Israel was marked and marred by a very unfortunate and unpleasant incident-the affair of the "Altalena". For the Anglo-Saxons it was particularly upsetting.

On one occasion we were suddenly called out on an emergency stand-by and told to be ready to move immediately. The air was buzzing with rumours of trouble with the Irgun Zvai Leumi which, in the time of the British, had been an illegal underground organisation. Our fears were confirmed. It was Jew against Jew with the possibility of civil war hanging like a sword of Damocles at a time when all our united strength was needed to resist and defeat the Arabs. Mike explained the situation simply and succinctly. A ship, the Altalena, manned by Irgun members and loaded with arms, had approached the shores of Israel. The provisional Government, led by Ben Gurion, had ordered them not to unload the arms, or failing that, to hand them over to the government. Since the truce was operating U.N.O. would allow no arms to be landed. The Irgun persisted in landing the arms and were only prepared to give the government a certain percentage of them. Meanwhile Irgun members had left their positions in the front-lines, without permission, to make their way to the coast to assist in unloading the arms. By doing so they had endangered the security of the country and the positions of their comrades. Attacks were now anticipated by the government from the Irgun and we were being called out to forestall and to deal with any such attacks. Mike said we were members of the army and were in duty bound to support the government. No private armies could be allowed and no private group had the right to withhold arms from the government. By landing the arms the Irgun would prejudice the Jewish cause in the eyes of the world.

The Sergeant- Major, Julie, spoke next. I was reminded of Sergeant York as portrayed by Garry Cooper. Rarely have I heard such a simple or moving speech. "I here am only a soldier. I'm no politician. I don't think you there are either. You guys came here across these 'ere oceans to fight for something you believe in. You came to fight the Arabs and now while you're busy fighting the Arabs someone tries to pull a fast one on the government and wants to make our name mud in the eyes of the world. I don't like to stand for things like this and I'm sure you there don't either. Those guys have done a scam from their positions. That's almost desertion. I'm behind the government.

A fast discussion ensued. Several of the men were not too happy at the possibility of having to shoot fellow of Jews. Finally those who wished were allowed to remain in the camp to guard it. The remainder were issued with rifles and sten-guns and rushed to various strategic points. I was on a mobile patrol with six or seven others. I believe that we were all praying that nothing would happen, but we were equally determined to do our duty and to allow no nonsense.

Mockie was on the truck with me. He had arrived from South Africa recently and we had become good friends. He was inclined to be serious and thoughtful at times and pondered over many weighty problems. That night conflict was waging in his heart and soul. I could read the pain and doubt in his blue eyes. I sympathised with him but not in a maudlin way. "I hope we don't have to shoot any Jews. This old struggle between the Haganah and the Irgun is not our concern. Let the Palestinians settle their own problems. I came to fight Arabs and not Jews."

We discussed the matter "ad nauseam" as we raced up and down through the night. Our task was to tour various war factories and ammunition dumps to see that they were safe. An additional task was to patrol areas near Irgun strongholds lest they be up to mischief. Every vehicle we encountered we stopped and searched while a battery of arms was trained at the occupants. Fingers on the trigger, we had a prayer on our lips. It was a tiring task and mentally agonising. Day-break brought no relief. Fighting had broken out at Kfar Witkin where the Irgun had tried to unload the arms and a few men had been killed on each side. The ship sailed to Tel Aviv where government artillery set it on fire.

It blazed in sight of the whole populace and nearby houses were evacuated lest shells should explode. The country was in a state of excitement and there was a cabinet crisis.

We patrolled the road from Tel Aviv to Petach Tikvah stopping and checking all transport including buses. A tedious and odious task. We Anglo-Saxons could hardly talk Hebrew and could scarcely read Hebrew documents and identity cards. Fortunately we had a Palestinian officer with us.

The populace did not take to our activities kindly. One man was heard to remark: "First it was the British. Then we got our own state and now it's the Canadians." A most unkind remark, we thought.

As with all crises this one passed over too. And a fair proportion of the arms was saved.



Perhaps it was coincidental but a week later, at elaborate ceremonies, all officers and men were required to take the oath of allegiance to the State of Israel. Thus too was completed the process of transforming the irregular Haganah into the new Defence Army of Israel.

Complications arose for the Anglo-Saxons. Prior to the oath-taking ceremony every soldier was required to sign a statement pledging allegiance to the State of Israel. This most Anglo-Saxons were unwilling to do for we were citizens of other states and wished to remain such. We could not pledge allegiance to two states at the same time. Our position was finally met by a special oath in which we only agreed to obey "all reasonable orders" of the army. "Oath-taking day" was attended by great celebrations all over Israel. Parades were held everywhere and despite the motley collection of uniforms some semblance of order was attained. Dignity had to struggle with incongruity.

A large and well-attended parade was held at Pardess Katz. Uniformity of uniform was an impossibility but in one item uniformity, to a degree, was obtained. There were sufficient steel-helmets for all. Different shapes and makes, it's true, from England, Germany, Russia and America. It was funny yet moving. An army in the making. Rows of steel-topped heads marching, masses of helmets on parade. Fat men, thin men, short men, long men, all with steel-helmets, some too big and some too small, perching on heads or drowning heads. All one army.

The flag was broken. A roll of honour from the short, bitter conflict was read. The oath was stated and unit by unit they shouted out; "I swear," in reply. And the steel-helmets snaked off in long columns and it was all over and there was an army. The towns and settlements were gay that night and people danced in the streets and drinks were "on the house".

Israel was happy to celebrate the first of anything important for it was always the first in two thousand years.

At camp the soldiers in the other units were more trigger-happy than usual. It was a queer symptom in Israel, this tendency to shoot fire-arms at the slightest pretext or at no pretext at all. Before the possession of arms had been illegal and this enthusiasm of shots was perhaps the reaction and the desire to compensate for the lost opportunities. The easiest way found by trigger-happy individuals to clean a rifle was simply to fire a shot. The Anglo-Saxons, accustomed to the rigid fire discipline of the armies of their countries, found this tendency perturbing. Bullets appeared to be whizzing everywhere and accidents were not infrequent.

Organisationally the first Mortar Regiment was in the process of dissolution. Certain governmental changes had brought about army changes and the starts of some people were in the ascendancy. It is too complicated to describe what went on behind the scenes, even if I knew the whole truth, which I'm not sure I did. Suffice to say we bade farewell to Ben and Joe, the former to become the Commanding Officer of a brigade consisting largely of Foreign and Anglo-Saxon volunteers. Apparently a mean trick had been played on Joe. He was offered an artillery regiment but, as often happens in Israel, other people were offered regiments too. In the end there were

simply not enough regiments to be allocated so Joe was given an armoured car regiment instead. There were talks of our joining the new brigade but Joe had a little tiff with Ben, and Mike was apparently annoyed with them both. So Mike was asked to form his own unit and we all offered to accompany him.

Meanwhile a few of us had appeared before Ben and had been recommended for an officer's course. The course was a queer affair. All kinds of people participated, some who had been artillery officers before and some who had not. And those who knew something taught the others. Mike was the chief instructor and he really knew his work. He was conscientious and thorough and I personally learnt a great deal from him. Len, a South African, also had a good knowledge of artillery work and acted as an instructor. The course was only of several days duration since we received what we had long been awaiting - guns, and more or less new ones. In the past there had been countless rumours that guns would be arriving from the queerest of places. None eventuated. But this time the news seemed genuine. We heard that they were heavy ones too. They turned out to be heavy in weight but not heavy in calibre.

We were pledged to secrecy for the guns were classified as secret weapons, which in Israel meant nothing sensationally new but simply implied that the Jews had not yet used such weapons. And that did not mean much.

We moved to a "secret" training camp near Herzlia, right on the coast, in the yard of a disused distillery. It was quiet and lonely. And overcrowded. The guns arrived during the night. Four the first night and later three. How they got into the country I don't know. Whether they arrived during the truce I couldn't say either. I heard that they cost 16,000 dollars. Anyway, they were most welcome. We were happy. Long-barrelled, they were French 75 millimetre, anti-aircraft, anti-tank and general purpose guns, although they later proved unsuitable for field use. They had been manufactured in 1942 and we were informed that there was ample ammunition available.

Few people know how to fire the guns. Such handbooks as we had were in French and after these had been translated the gun was laboriously brought into action, according to the directions, like a boy makes a Meccano model, only much slower. It was trial and error with everyone standing around and offering advice. The idea in the training was teach one to teach another.

No range-tables were available for the gun. We did not know what degree of elevation of the barrel was necessary to obtain required ranges with our shells. We had to find out. A shoot was had to sea to compile tables and simultaneously men from the ordnance unit experimented with different charges and fuses.

No chances were taken.

The barrel was pointed out to sea. The gun was loaded and a long cord attached to the firing-mechanism. All spectators were bullied to remove to a safe distance and from a hole in the ground, thirty or forty yards from the gun, the firing-lever was released by means of the cord. There were no casualties. The gun was safe, for those who fired it.

Mike needed about fifty men for his unit and only had about thirty by then. Plans were devised to find them. It was virtually a private matter. People arriving from

overseas to join the army found no central recruiting committee to direct them to the units where they would be best suited. They were arbitrarily allocated to different units. The system lacked efficiency and commanding officers, impatient at the delay, engaged in private and often dishonest recruiting. Each man only thought in terms of his own unit. Thus a tank corps officer (there were no tanks then), meeting a man who had had experience in the artillery and who wished to join the artillery in Israel would inform him, untruthfully, that there were no guns in Israel and that it would be advisable for him to join the tanks. Swayed by persistent argument and not knowing the military situation the recruit would agree. Consequently many people were not in units where they could render their best services. The recruiting officers for the armoured cars and the tanks were so assiduous that our unit suffered from a dearth of recruits. So Mike and I become recruiting agents. We went to the reception camps where all those who had escaped U.N.O. were housed and presented our case, truthfully and often successfully. Many of those whom we interviewed overestimated their own importance and laid down all sorts of conditions prior to their agreeing to join us. They wanted commissions and various privileges. And they had just arrived after the worst was over. Luckily these types were few and far between.

Mike and I found recruits everywhere. In Tel Aviv various clubs had been opened for the soldiers and the Anglo Saxons were accustomed to frequent certain ones which used to cater specially for them. We also knew in which hotels and in which cafes they could be found.

Some Canadians in our unit, in their desire to augment its numbers, somewhat overdid themselves in their enthusiasm. They come into conflict with U.N.O. Meeting fellow Canadians and Americans from the U.N.O. camps in Tel Aviv on "leave", they persuaded them to "escape" from the camps and to come to Herzlia for training. Another plan was to train the fellows while they were on "leave" and allow them to go back to the U.N.O. camps at night. The Israeli frowned on these arrangements and immediately put a stop to them. We had to wait until the end of the truce and take the field with untrained men if necessary. It was obvious by then that the Arabs had no intention of extending the truce. Even during its duration they continually and consistently violated it.

Herzlia camp was none too comfortable. We were crowded. Besides the Anglo-Saxons there were many recent Jewish immigrants from Europe and now and again there were grouses about their habits and ways. Some were justified but many were not. We had some real "squealers" amongst the Anglo-Saxons who were capable of finding fault with anything and anyone. The morale was not too high and there was little spirit. The soldiers were tired of idleness and we only managed to train on the guns about once every five days. Something always seemed to go wrong. Either the guns were being overhauled or repaired other crews were busy on them.

Among the officers a great deal of antagonism existed and matters came to a head when Mike and Len, our officers, were more or less ignored by the others. We were always being criticised. Most of the other officers knew next to nothing about artillery and were perhaps jealous of Mike and Len. Some of us who had been on the course were offered commissions in the other troops but we preferred to stay together even if it meant a lower rank.

Uri and I were not too happy in our unit. There was a fine crowd of fellows but a spirit was lacking. We might as well have been fighting in China or some other land. Above all we wished to learn Hebrew and had no opportunity to do so amongst the Anglo-Saxons. We were reluctant to leave Mike and the others and delayed as long as possible. Mike was sorry when we told him of our decision and, I fear, a little hurt, but he understood. The O.C. of the camp promised us that if we went to the fourth troop for a few days young Palestinians would soon be arriving and it would be formed into a Hebrew speaking unit. We took his word. He raised no objection to our leaving Mike.

At that moment the fourth troop, which we joined, was Yiddish-speaking, and being unable to speak Yiddish, Uri and I felt a bit out of place.

The days of the truce were numbered and we hoped to be leaving the camp soon. Its existence was hardly a secret by then and we could expect it to be bombed as soon as the truce ended. If my information was correct it was bombed shortly after we left. One day Spitfires, with R.A.F. markings, came sweeping over the camp. My blood boiled. What right had the British over Israel? They paid our camp and guns particular attention and the Anglophobes forecast that the Egyptians would have the news in a few hours. Later we read that the 'planes were searching for "Cromwell" tanks which had vanished in Haifa. Subsequently they found their way to Jewish lines brought by British drivers.

On June 30<sup>th</sup>, the British withdrawal from Haifa was completed. Rumours were rife again. One of the guns left for Jerusalem along the Burma road. Its arrival in the Holy City boosted the morale of its defenders considerably. Where were the other guns going? It transpired that the fourth troop would probably be used as anti-aircraft guns in Tel Aviv. Uri and I awoke with a start. No waiting in Tel Aviv for us to shoot down 'planes. We wanted to be in the field. Besides, we had been double-crossed. No young Palestinians came to our unit or were expected to come. Nor were we learning Hebrew. Then we heard that Mike's troop was going to the Galilee.

Uri and I had to go along, we decided. We had a personal interest in the Galilee. The O.C. refused to allow us to return to Mike. Mike was willing to take us back although he could not guarantee our old jobs back which had been interesting ones, Uri having been an N.C.O. on the guns and I an "ack", or officers' assistant. Officially we would be deserters by going with Mike and officially he would have nothing to do with our actions.

Uri and I disobeyed orders, left our unit and jumped on Mike's truck, kit and all, when he left for the Galilee. We never regretted it. The truce had ended. It was the night of July 9<sup>th</sup> and there was a job to be done.

## Chapter Six.

### “Can we hold the Enemy?”

The night of July 9<sup>th</sup>. To-day the truce ended. Tel Aviv has been raided again and on all the fronts there is fighting. Mike's troop is due to move at ten but there are delays. Not sufficient trucks. Two for the two guns and one tender. Men and kit must also find place aboard. Sardine-like packing needed. A shortage of equipment and each troop trying to scrounge what it can. Two guns are off to Haifa and two to Tel Aviv. We load in the dark. The guns are heavy and awkward to manoeuvre and must be manhandle. The boxes of shells are heavy and are raised from their hiding places in the ground. Faster, faster. Uri and I are anxious. We are “deserting” to the line. We must get away before we are caught. We labour like Trojans. This missing and that missing. Shadowy figures in the night, excited and keen. For many this will be their first action. A week or two back several of them were peaceful civilians in America, Canada and South Africa. Some arrived but a few hours ago from the U.N.O. camps. From corners of the world, bound by one ideal, united in one fight. Three young signallers arrived. They speak a perfect Hebrew. One has been born in Palestine and is a “sabrah”, as the locally born people are called.

Midnight. Much to be loaded. Frenzied work. The Galilee is far away and the guns are heavy and the trucks can only pull them slowly.

There is a Bren-gun and Mike is looking for a Bren-gunner. I push the gun into Uri's hands and say to Mike: “You have a Bren-gunner”. Uri is happy. He has a definite job now. He fondles the gun affectionately. His new charge.

The guns are hitched. The trucks are loaded, piled high with men and equipment. The guns jog along the sandy path and onto the road. We are off on our way to the Galilee. It is four o'clock in the morning and there is a freshness in the air. We sing songs. Our hermitage is ended. Our secret weapons are revealed. The Arabs will soon know about them. They won't like them.

Day breaks in the Sharon. We pass through the fertile plain, fields and orchards and gardens on either side. The little garden towns are awaking. Passers by stare in surprise. Some kiss the barrels of the guns and offer a blessing. The guns bump along the road. Going downhill the brakes must be manipulated and smoke rises from the friction.

Nothing serious. Six tons of metal and power and punch. We feel good. So too do the people in the villages and along the roads. Wide-eyed they stare. Is it a dream? They blink and reality comes and they cheer and broad grins wreath their faces. Greetings of good-luck are shouted.

A stop is made at Zichron Yaacov so that hungry and thirsty men may have tea. It is Saturday and the people are resting. A boy is singing his Barmitzvah songs in the synagogue. His voice is sweet and peaceful. Avidly the populace fire questions. Youngsters exhibit a surprising interest in weapons. “What is the calibre of your gun?” “What is its range?” “Where does it come from?” “Can it shoot tanks?”

We are friendly and answer, “Military secret. “They laugh boyishly and speculate amongst themselves on the answers to their own questions.

Our Hebrew is not too good and we have pronounced American and English accents and they ask our origins. The word spreads around that there are Anglo-Saxons in the town and more people gather. Those who have relatives in the dominions ask if we know them, perhaps.

A little café is open and the proprietor is generous and provides free tea. But cakes must be paid for. Some soldiers discover this too late and have no money. We scrape around and raise sufficient. We are a poor army and the men are poorly paid. Inflation is rampant in Israel and two pounds per month does not go very far.

Onwards through less populated areas and uncertain ones. Phillip’s truck is overheated and we have to wait for it - annoying delay to impatient men. Rifle fire. “Take cover!” The vehicles jerk to a standstill and we scatter for the ditch. And wait. The trouble is a little distance away and we continue.

At the settlement, Ramat David, we await further orders. On the move we have had no contact with H.Q. Instructions are to go to Rosh Pinah.

Affula was on the way. I had always found it a rather quiet, deserted, agricultural town which sometimes has the audacity to claim that it should be the capital of Israel on account of its central position.

Our arrival evoked extraordinary interest. All the town-people turned out en masse and we were feted. Usual questions and usual answers. Friendly rural folk, hospitable and appreciative. Larders emptied and the contents distributed. Generous helpings of cake, preserves, fresh bread and butter and jam and iced containers of milk. Swarms of people. Cheerful and confident. Affula had been twice bombed that day. Guns brought security and confidence. The boys felt good. Something like I had felt in Italy when we had entered “liberated” towns. Our hosts hoped that we would stay in the vicinity. Regret marked their faces, when, having refuelled with petrol, we moved on.

Twenty minutes later enemy ‘planes bombed Affula again, right near the petrol point, where we had been.

By then we were in a nearby military camp and had had our first “casualty” when the trailer of one of the guns fell on a signaller’s leg and injured him.

Although tired and exhausted we decided to travel through the night. We would save time. And there would be no ‘planes at night to reveal our secret or to thwart our designs.

The sea of Galilee was calm, white tongues of froth lapping its shores. Snatching what sleep we could we missed beauty. Squat bodies, unlighted, crawling through the night, engines purring and ticking and huddled masses of men, oblivious and fitfully dozing. Countless stops for Phil’s engine to cool. The despatch-rider wandered up and down along the road like a hen watching its chickens.

Breakfast was ready when we reached Rosh Pinah that Sunday morning. Our reception surpassed that at Affula. Our gun could have blushed with all the kisses. Soldiers are generous in apportioning kisses and they appreciated the value of those guns on that front. Without having done anything to warrant it we suddenly became very popular. With speed we camouflaged the cause of our popularity making full use of a nearby orange-grove.

Rosh-Pinah was more a military camp than ever. Once again there was a dire shortage of troops and artillery for the Israeli army was on the defensive in that area, having moved the bulk of its troops to other fronts where results were soon evidenced by the capture of Lydda, Ramleh, Nazareth and other Arab towns and by the opening of the road to the Negev. Here at Rosh Pinah we just had to “hang on”. The enemy were attacking.

In the future we would have to justify our popularity. That same morning we took up our first gun-positions near Mishmar Hayarden, then in Arab hands. The terrain was not suitable for gun-positions particularly for our type of gun. We were in the neck leading to Upper Galilee and had few choices, being confined to a strip along the road. The enemy held all the heights on each side of the neck and overlooked the valley. Since our guns had a low trajectory we could not shelter behind any hills for then our shells would fail to clear these hills.

So we made the best of a bad job, and being in view of the enemy, sought refuge in camouflage. The guns were carefully covered and hidden but it was almost impossible to conceal the tracks that we had made in the tough grass.

To dig in was the only real precaution and we proceeded to do so - a tiring task in the hot sun and aggravated by the stony and rocky nature of the ground. Shade was at a minimum and often non-existent. The heat hung over the valley like a blanket and many of us had no caps or headgear since the army had issued us with none and we had no money to buy any. The shops of Tel Aviv were crammed with military head-dress, however.

Annoying little insects persisted in playing games in ones ears, nostrils and eyes, moving in a succession of irritating black dots.

Water was severely rationed these being none in the vicinity. Loeb, our first-aid man, found it his duty to distribute salt tablets and the consumption of these made the heat more bearable.

Many of our future targets could be seen from the gun-position. Arab transport and men were moving around with impunity. None of our guns had been able to reach them in their rear areas but they were in for a surprise. Our 75's had ample range but we had to exercise patience for we could not avail ourselves of adequate supplies of shells. Our whole stock consisted of 170 shells and we only possessed time-fuses.

These fuses were best suited to anti-personnel work. For other targets, percussion fuses (which caused the shell to explode on impact, and not after a certain time like time-fuses), were more useful.

One never knew what the morrow would bring so we resisted temptation and did not fire that Sunday. The soldiers were given time to dig holes and the whole “set-up” and the dispositions on the front were explained to them. Montgomery, in Italy, had started the practice of explaining the lay-out of the front, the strategy and the tactics to all the men so that each soldier, knowing how his part fitted into the general pattern, would give of his best. Mike followed the same policy.

All precautions were taken to reduce movement to a minimum and a wide ditch, serving as a communications-system, aided this plan.

Some aeroplanes were overhead that day - theirs, but they left us in peace. The front was quiet. A nearby battery of 65's, the only other guns on the front, were shelled, and some stray shots landed near us.

The night was moderately still but we had to rise early in the morning, before it was light, to hide away our blankets and ourselves.

That day, Monday, we opened up. It had been intended to surprise the enemy that night by shooting at some of their gun positions which we had observed during the day. But the advance of enemy tanks towards one of our positions brought sudden fire-orders. There were some hitches in the shoot. One was amusing. An ack gave the wrong calculations and the barrel of the gun, instead of pointing at the enemy, swung right round and pointed directly at the command-post, from whence the orders came. Len put up his hands and said; “O.K. I surrender.”

This only caused a delay of a few seconds and to avoid any further errors I took compass-bearings from behind the guns and along the barrels to see that they were pointing in the right direction. We fired up. The crack and the blast re-echoed through the valley. We were returning his own medicine to the enemy.

Suddenly Harvey, one of the “layers” on the gun, staggered, rolled and fell. We rushed to him. He was dazed and unsteady but appeared unhurt. One of the protective side-plates had blown off the gun and he had caught the full blast which had shocked him. Fortunately the flying metal of the plate missed him. The mechanical rammers of the guns then began to give trouble, first on the one gun and then on the other. They jammed and could only be worked with difficulty. All this made the rate of fire rather slow and Mike was none too pleased but his annoyance was tempered by the fact that the object of the shoot had been archived. The tanks had been surprised and turned back. No damage had been done to them since the shells we had were incapable of doing any.

That night in a shoot the troop compensated for its tardiness in the afternoon. Mike was more than satisfied. The men were getting into the swing of things with practice. One gun was incapacitated but the other excelled itself delivering rapid fire. Just across the border, in Syria, there was a customs-house which appeared to be some headquarters building or other. Behind was a vehicle park. That was our first target. One had that horrible yet comforting feeling of satisfaction in destruction. Our aim was accurate. One could see smoke from burning vehicles and a movement out of the park along the road to Damascus. A gun position nearby also received our attention.



We were using percussion fuses which had arrived in time and were able to do some damage.

Retaliation followed fast. Enemy guns replied. Four of them. They seemed to think that the little 65's had been shooting at them for they dropped a few shells in that area. Then they moved over and crept nearer with their fire spasmodically dropping a shell here and there with no apparent plan. A few fell close. The fellows took it very well. And thenceforth they were more careful.

In charge of each our guns was a Sergeant. Both were Canadians. Completely different characters. Mo was wild, excitable and reckless. His eyes flashed with fire and his unruly hair shook with delight when his crew were firing. He hurried them on like some overseer urging and badgering galley-slaves. "Give 'em, hell!" "Let the bastards have it!" "Faster, faster." And his eyes fixed on the distance where his shells landed in dabs of red and the sight of smoke and destruction evoked cat-calls of delight.

Dan was quieter and more practical and the best soldier I have ever met. Cool, calm and collected. He was observant to an unusual degree continually noticing phenomena of his surroundings and environment. Men had the fullest faith in him and he could lead them anywhere. Previously Dan had been in the infantry, fighting along the Jerusalem road. During the World War he was a member of the specially selected American Rangers and had been wounded at Cassino. At first I thought that people took advantage of his kindness and practical generosity but when I got to know him better I realised that he allowed no one to fool him and was hard on shirkers. He could rightly be.

The gun-crews lived together and yet separately. Each had its own little bivouac and received its rations as a unit. Their quarters were in the ditch behind the guns and primitive Indian-fashion "bivvies" had been erected to give some protection from the sun. Some of the fellows had little individual "bivvies" scattered in the nearby field.

One afternoon, just after a bout of shelling from the enemy Boxer, an American, crawled across the field to the "bivvy" of Jimmy, a South African. Their conversation was clearly audible in the lull of the hot afternoon.

"Are you at home, Jimmy?"

"Yes."

"Are you receiving, visitors?" Boxer, our wit, had scored again.

Uri also led the life of a hermit as befitted his occupation as a Bren-gunner and which often suited his moods. He lived in a little bivouac on a nearby height from which he could view the valley and have unobstructed range for shooting at 'planes. Strict instructions were given him not to shoot any aeroplanes unless they were about to attack us, for we did not want to reveal our positions.

The drivers of our unit remained at Rosh Pinah and made trips to bring food and water. The gunners took turns to go back with them in order to have a good wash

where water was more plentiful. The drivers were always grouching and complaining and criticising one another. The gunners had no sympathy for them and told them that they should be grateful to spend most of their time at Rosh Pinah, away from the immediate line.

Once a truck due from the village did not arrive. The soldiers who had been its passengers came running and stumbling by a round-about route through the fields. The enemy had been shelling the roads and it was too dangerous to travel along them. So the truck had been abandoned and its occupants continued on foot.

Daily the front quickened in the activity and we had less and less rest and sleep and more and more excitement and danger.

We took the offensive in the area. It was a limited offensive and hindered by our lack of anti-tank weapons. It was an unusual situation. The Jews were in a position to recapture Mishmar Hayarden but were in no position to hold it without anti-tank guns, unless we could blow up the bridge.

Mishmar Hayarden was an old settlement on the border of Palestine and on the Palestinian side of the Jordan river. A bridge connected it to Syria. Over that bridge the enemy could and did bring tanks and they had many of them. If we took Mishmar Hayarden the tanks simply had to come over the bridge and take it back since we had nothing with which to stop them. So we had to blow up the bridge.

An attack was thus launched to capture Mishmar Hayarden and to blow up the bridge. If we failed to blow up the bridge we would inflict casualties on the enemy and retire. The attack was planned for the evening and we managed to obtain a 2-pounder gun that very day. Those of the Anglo-Saxons who had had anti-tank training went to show the crew of the 2-pounder how to handle it. Although an anti-tank weapon, the 2-pounder is not very effective except at close range and few shells were available. Again a hitch occurred. It was quite usual for hitches to occur in the Israeli army in the beginning, and even afterwards.

The 2-puunder was not used that night and our guns opened up at 11p.m. instead of 2a.m. as had been planned.

Our flashes gave us away. Our task was to “soften up” the enemy and keep his guns quiet by drawing their fire onto us and away from the infantry.

We succeeded. Watching their flashes we forced their gunners to stop firing except for one gun that used our flashes to find us, and find us it did. Its shells were falling too close for comfort.

An eerie few hours. Our flashes lighting up the faces of our gunners. No shouting in the dark and Dan quietly giving orders. The enemy flashes like cuts of yellow in the distance and the muffled echo of their guns. And the infantry, doing the real job, signified by colours and rattles and lights. Then the whizz of the enemy shells and their explosion. Nearer and nearer and right on us. Now silence punctuated by a single shot or by a burst.

We have failed to take the bridge but have the caused, damage.

Next day their 'planes are over early and continually, circling and circling and searching and searching. I am surprised that they cannot see us. Perhaps they do and are not interested. From afar our soldiers fire at the 'planes. With no effect. They are not high but they are too high for our arms.

We read in the "Palestine Post" that last night our forces killed fifty and wounded two hundred and fifty of the enemy in the fighting near Mishmar Hayarden. Our casualties were eight wounded.

The following night another little attack, a smaller one, is launched on an enemy position nearby. Again we fire and are fired at. The next morning we dug up the remnants of enemy shells. Little had we realised how close they had been. The blessing of darkness has its advantages.

The enemy had left us in peace during the day. They do not fire unless we commence first. We are very short of shells and can afford no luxury shooting.

On Thursday the enemy guns, four of them this time, pin-pointed us with remarkable accuracy. They have good officers. We hear them over the air talking English and German. They have so many guns that they can afford to allocate four for the express purpose of silencing our two.

We open up on the customs-house. They reply immediately. Their shells fall short, to the left, to the right. I'm checking our guns with a compass. I realise that the enemy is ranging, that soon the shells will be amongst us. So too does Len.

"Take cover!" he shouts from the command-post. None too soon. They have found our range. My ears ring and there's a powerful smell of cordite. Stones brush my face, shrapnel whistles and I join the others in the rush through dust and smoke. We fall into the ditch. Breathing heavily and panting and somewhat shaky. We comment on the close shave. Some one fells a joke. The tension evaporates with the laughter. We relax. "Life" magazines are lying in the ditch. I take one and read it. It describes, with photographs, the shooting of the scene from the film "Razor's Edge" in which Isabelle tries to seduce Larry in Paris. And multi-coloured advertisements of tasty dishes, of strawberries and cream and juicy steaks. And photographs of pretty girls. Outside the shells are whizzing overhead but one feels safe with Larry and Isabelle and the strawberries and cream and the pretty girls. A shell lands near. More fumes of cordite percolating into the dug-out.

"Take post", Len bellows from the command-post on the hill. Fire orders follow. We dash out, shoot and dash back into cover, to the "Life" magazines and jokes that soothe. Once the four enemy shells have landed one can estimate the arrival of the next ones since one can hear the bark of their guns and knows the time of flight of their shells. So while they are in the air, we fire ours. Things get too hot for us. We stop firing.

That afternoon I saw my first 17-pounder gun in Israel. It had been captured from the Egyptians a day or two before and had been rushed up North. Most new weapons in

Israel had been captured From the Arabs. After every offensive of the Jews new weapons become available as the result of conquest. Raffie, a “sabra”, who had been in charge of my party on the night of the “Altalena” episode, was in command of the gun. One or two friends and I volunteered to man the 17-pounder. Raffie replied that he had already been given a crew, but they did not know much about the gun so he would like us to assist in training them. He did not need any men. All in all Raffie had 19 shells.

Back at the gun-position we had considered moving out guns. The enemy had us “taped” and could neutralise us with ease. The accepted practice in such situations is to move to an alternative gun-position. Our gun was so heavy, however, that it required considerable time to bring it in and out of action. So no decision was taken that day.

The following day events moved so rapidly that the issue became a technical one.

Friday the sixteenth of July is a day I shall never forget as long as I live.

I awoke to a clear and bright morning. A ‘plane was droning in the skies and a clatter of small-arms, furious and fast, spoke of trouble. An odd missile buzzed overhead. I woke Mike and the others and we hid our bedding away. It was clear that a battle was ragging and since we knew nothing about it we presumed that it was an enemy attack. Wireless contact was established with headquarters at Rosh Pinah. They had nothing to report. Their communications system was by no means perfect, as we knew from the past experience.

One of our drivers, Foxy, had arrived from the town. The ‘plane followed him and all of a sudden Mike, who was watching, shouted. “He’s got him”. I thought that the ‘plane had bombed Foxy’s truck. Mike was dancing with delight. Then I saw. The enemy plane had been hit. One wing crumpled, the ‘plane fell spiralling downwards like a dropping stone and crashed into the ground near the collective settlement of Ayelet Hashachar (Morning Star).

We were delirious with delight and jumped and danced and shouted. That was war. People had probably died in the crash but we were exhilarated.

“I’m going to find the wreck”, Mike said to me. “Come along.”

He appeared to have forgotten about the battle but I knew that it was in his mind. He had been pondering over it. We went to the jeep. The engine would not start. A truck, not one of ours, came towards us in a hurry. It stopped with a jerk and man jumped out.

“Could you give us a push? Mike asked. I can’t get the damn thing to start.”

The question was ignored. “Do you hear that noise?” the man asked in Hebrew. I translated for Mike. “Yes.”

“Do you realise that there is a battle on?” Translation and answer. “Yes.”

“Do you know that the Syrians have close on 20 tanks?”

Mike’s face showed surprise. “No!”

“We want your help. You must shoot at the tanks. “The man’s attitude was a mixture of pleading and defiance at Mike’s apparent indifference.

“We’ll try our best,” I promised.

Mike was thinking furiously. “I don’t see how we can help them,” he said to me. “We only have shrapnel and very few of them. They wouldn’t even tickle a tank. Besides I don’t think we can reach the place from here and we can’t bring the guns up closer.”

It was a difficult decision to make. Those guns were very precious and we had instructions not to risk them unnecessarily. Our shells would not even graze a tank.

“We’ve got to help them, Mike. We can’t stand by.”

“Let’s go and see. “The truck gave us a push and the engine started. Mike tore down that road. At the best of times he was a fast driver but now he travelled as if the devil were chasing him. The sound of battle became louder and more distinct. We entered the settlement. It was not too healthy being around and bending low and running close to shelter we made our way to the graveyard on the edge of the settlement.

It crested a hill and a trench had been cut between the tombstones. Settlers were manning sandbagged positions and running to and fro along the communication-trenches. A girl was sitting in one of them. She was the first-aid “man.” Her smile was friendly and made the situation seem less serious. Mike and I stopped next to a Spandau gunner. He and his loader were too busy to notice us. Here and there, squatting in the trench, settlers were working among the bright, sometimes warm, rejected cartridge-cases, filling the empty belts with live rounds. The situation was clear. Yarda, down below, a collection of two or three mud houses, was in the process of being taken. The settlement would come next. Enemy infantry were attempting an outflanking movement and for a moment it seemed as if it might succeed.

Momentarily I thought in terms of being killed or more tangibly of being an Arab prisoner-of-war. Near our positions there were about fifteen or so Arab tanks. Complacent, squat bodies belching fire with the greatest of ease and meeting no opposition since we had no anti-tank guns.

I spoke to the defenders. Mike and I moved around a lot and often lost each other in one trench or another. Everyone wanted to know where we came from and when I answered. “Artillery,” they stared at us as if we were bereft of our senses and asked: “Why don’t you bring your guns up here and help us?” The technicalities of fuse and percussion and trajectory they failed to appreciate. Their eyes seemed to reprimand. I felt a cad. Mike knew little Hebrew but even he must have read the searching in their eyes. I pleaded with him. “Mike, we must help them. Even if we have to bring the guns up and fire over open sights. The chaps will be willing.” Things were moving fast. At that moment Raffie arrived with the 17-pounder. He and his gun and crew were godsend.

We went to assist him. A youngster showed us the minefields. Youngsters of thirteen and over seemed to have remained on the settlement and their bravery knew no bounds. They ran messages and brought water and refreshments to the trenches. It was difficult finding a position for Raffie's gun since a great deal of the Mashek had been mined.

"Let's get our guns into action," Mike suddenly said. I had been waiting for this. Heaven knew what we were going to do but we would try. Action, although unsuccessful, is not as enervating as mere waiting and watching. We dashed back, stopping to take cover for a few minutes when an aeroplane paid us too close attention. We had not found the wreck of the other 'plane.

At the gun-position ammunition had just arrived but we still only had time-fuses and could only fire shrapnel. The boys jumped to the guns. Messages were coming over the air. Yarda had fallen to the enemy. The 65's had run out of ammunition. Rosh Pinah was threatened. If the tanks cut the road they would cut off the whole of Upper Galilee. That seemed to be their plan. Mike, Mockie, a few others and I climbed the hill atop the command-post and watched the tanks. They were moving in the direction of Rosh Pinah. Orders were relayed down the hill to the command-post and to the guns. Mike was determined but cool.

"We have to pray that we miss the tanks. If we hit them they will know that we can do them no damage and they will continue."

To wish not to hit something was an extraordinary wish for an artillery officer. But then it was an extraordinary war.

The tanks moved slowly along the road. "Fire!" "Crack! Crack!" From the two guns. Little puffs of smoke over the tanks. Shrapnel bursting, a little bit too high. Fresh orders. New puffs. Shrapnel bursting, just right now. Shot after shot. Will it help? No one talks. Cheers. The tanks have turned tail and are going back towards the border. "Fools! Arab Fools!"

I don't know why they retired. Probably they thought that they were in danger. We knew that we could not rest on our laurels. You cannot fool everybody all the time. A respite had been gained, however.

We breathed a sigh of relief. Before it had seemed as if we would be cut off and perhaps surrounded. Mike had spoken about spiking our guns rather than letting them fall into enemy hands undamaged.

Meanwhile Mike went back to Ayelet Hashachar with Mockie and Uri and told me to remain with the guns. Things were noisier than ever at the settlement. Raffie had hit three or four tanks with his nineteen shells and had no shells left.

That afternoon at about three o'clock the tanks came back down the road. They were travelling slower and more cautiously. Some officer, who knew something about artillery, must have told them that we could do no harm. This time they had artillery support for the guns opened up on us. They were accurate and moved their fire to the

hill. After each shot those of us on the hill would get up in the dust and peer around to see that the others were unhurt. We shouted for one another until we had obtained sufficient affirmative answers.

The enemy shelling was deadly and to make matters worse one of our guns had mechanical trouble with its ejector-pin.

The tanks did not stop because of our shrapnel but continued on their way, slowly. Fires were burning all around and the air was ominous. Down below, in the command-post, Len had been wounded in the buttocks by a piece of shrapnel from one of the enemy shells. He tried to ignore it as unimportant but he was bleeding badly and, against his protests, it was decided to take him to hospital to have the shrapnel extracted. Meanwhile an order had come through from Rosh Pinah that we were to return there with our guns.

For a moment it seemed as if we might not manage to get through. The tanks were behaving queerly, moving around in circles and making no attempt to cut the main road.

It is not a nice feeling “retreating”, even if it is by command to prepared positions and in order to fight another day.

We were glum and despondent but realised that Rosh Pinah had to be held at all costs and that we would help to hold it.

So we returned to the outskirts of Rosh Pinah and immediately after Mike and I and a few others went to reconnoitre a new gun-position. We investigated areas which had been dangerous a few hours previously since the Arabs had pulled back, to the surprise of everyone. The officer in command of the Galilee said that the enemy had suffered so many casualties that he was unable to press an attack or take advantage of his gains. Credit was given us for causing many of the casualties and for helping to drive off the tanks in the morning.

So although we had “retreated” we found ourselves treated as heroes and with respect. We even began to see ourselves in a different light.

## Chapter Seven.

### “The Truce Brings a Gun-duel.”

While searching for a suitable gun-position we found the Syrian aeroplane that had been shot down. The wreckage lay next to the children's house in Ayalet Hashachar but had done no damage to that or any other buildings in its downward career. The aviators lay in a nearby field. Gruesome sights.

Two bodies. Deformed and squashed by the impact. One only a queer shaped, cylindrical chest with his entrails lying besides him. The pulpy limbs of the other. It was a difficult to realise that that very morning they had been live, pulsating human-beings. They said that the one who had a very white skin was a Yugoslav. The 'plane was a "Harvard".

Our bodies almost suffered a similar fate. The light was darkening and Mike did not see the aerial-bomb, unexploded, that had penetrated the road. The menacing fins rose several inches above the ground. He passed over it.

Those who saw shouted out in alarm and Mike hurriedly reversed the jeep-right over the bomb. Luckily nothing happened. We surveyed the missile from a distance. The aviators had almost wreaked vengeance, even in death.

Returning to the settlement we warned them of the bomb's presence and told them to have a demolition's expert remove or neutralise this potential death.

Suitable gun-positions were as rare as Englishmen in the Galilee. A better site than most lay behind the settlement, Ayelet Hasachar, but there was a danger of drawing fire onto it, a risk which we were not prepared to take. So the search continued. Another site seemed good but in the rear there was an Arab or two on a hill-top and since that was the border of the Lebanon we did not know whether they were "our" Arabs or not. Nor could we take the chance of having our gun-positions given away by Arab spies.

The chosen gun-position was near Rosh Pinah. It was getting very dark and we had no time to search further. Len was in hospital, so Les and I took over his task in a joint capacity.

The boys had excellent and almost incredible news when we returned to the guns. Flying fortresses were due to bomb that evening and they were ours. Jubilantly we clamoured for details. Where had they heard? They pointed up the hill where a row of flares was being readied to guide the 'planes on a run over the Arab positions. This was a far cry from our little Piper Cubs. The Fortresses did not come that night. Another change of plan or a hitch, but they came the following morning.

Len had spoken to me of a plan of his. He had a friend who was an important officer in the Air Force, also a South African. Len had written a note to him asking if it were possible for them to bomb the bridge over the Jordan near Mishmar Hayarden.



That was the way the army worked in those days. Someone who knew someone else who could do something got something done. All official efforts to have the bridge bombed had been unsuccessful.

The guns were moved to the new position early the following morning. Tired and weary men laboured at preparing the site, digging themselves and the ammunition in and bringing the gun into action. A few of the troop were disappointing, not pulling their weight and only concerning themselves with their own little dug-outs. The more industrious and co-operative first brought the guns into action, a tiring and lengthy task.

When down broke it was noticed that an inhabited Arab village lay about half-a-mile away. They inhabitants were friendly and had been given this village in lieu of their own, from which they had been driven by the Syrians. They were loyal allies and many of their young men were in a special unit in the Israeli army. Soon they became frequent visitors. Mike managed to obtain a colourful, Arab head-dress from one of their leaders. It was red in colour with white spots and he wound it round his head in Arab fashion. A favourite pastime of the members of the troop was to have a photograph taken of themselves, attired in Arab dress, and standing between two genuine Arabs.

That morning the Flying Fortresses actually came. Only these 'planes enabled the Israeli air force to bomb in the broad daylight with comparative safety. In the early days unarmed 'planes or "kites" had done their bombing at night in order to avoid the enemy ack-ack. Hand-grenades and nuts and bolts in abundance were the first "bombs." Later metal pipes filled with T.N.T. were manhandled out of the 'planes and there were jokes in circulation about how the "chucker" had almost fallen out of the craft together with his bombs.

Our Flying Fortresses were a most wonderful sight. A dream. Three of them and their motion was like an aerial glide. Nothing could perturb their graceful course. They appeared totally unconcerned with the Syrian ack-ack down below. Harmless bursts, lacking elevation, much too low. Those were the first Israeli 'planes I had ever seen in the Galilee, except for a "primus" or two (as the Piper Cubs were nicknamed) and now there was a treat of three four-engined 'planes. They were really wasted on their task - being more suited to concentrated bombing. In the dry and unpopulated battle zone many of their bombs fell waste. Yet the enemy must have been impressed. Even more so than we were.

They dropped their bombs. We cheered as they burst. We wished the bombardiers good aim. Were they truly ours? Honestly and truly. And the old question. Where had they come from? Usual speculations in reply. Someone had pulled a "fast one" on the American government? Where were they based? They turned and sailed back for another run on the target. The enemy's ack-ack shells were bursting no higher. The "forts" flew on and vanished in the distance, a parting sight of silver shining.

Back to reality. It is blisteringly hot. The drivers have arrived and have brought no water. They say that the pump in the village is out of order. There are murmurs and whispers and accusations from the others. Hints of disbelief. Accusations that the

drivers were simply too lazy. Frayed tempers of weary men who have not had sufficient sleep.

We open fire that night. Our targets are again the customs-house and enemy gun-positions. Their guns reply. They shoot at our old position. We laugh but a little too soon. They move nearer, searching, but not near enough. The darkness confuses them.

Len came back from hospital the next day, against doctor's orders. He had not been gone forty-eight hours and was still limping and sore although the shrapnel had been removed. It was too quiet at the hospital and he wanted to be back with the "boys." He arrived in time. Mockie and Mike went to an observation-point in an old Arab village held by Israeli Arabs and orders were given to fire. The gunners were wary of their guns. In the last shoot there had been a "miss-fire," a shell had exploded ten yards after it had left the barrel. Luck had been with us again. No one was hurt.

Now the Arab guns did not even bother to range. Before you could say "Jack Robinson" the shells were landing all around us. It was almost uncanny and there were shouts that the Arabs on the hill must have given the position away. Len asked Mike, by telephone, for permission to cease fire. For some time no answer came. Every few second there were resounding crashes and smoke and blast and noise. The shells seemed to graze the roof of the command-post and yet never fall inside. Perhaps we had a guardian angel. An affirmative reply came from Mike and on Len's order there was a dash behind a rocky outcrop to an old, disused well. It was comical to watch Len hobble along to shelter with a smile on his face. And when Mockie and Mike came back and saw that we were all safe and sound they laughed and laughed and laughed. Funny how one joked with life - after the danger had passed.

An instant discussion developed. Elliot and one or two others upbraided Len for giving a cease-fire order as soon as things became too warm for us. They called it cowardly to desist fire when the enemy were shelling you heavily. We discussed the pro's and cons. The issue was more complicated than it seemed at first sight.

My own opinion is that when one is supporting one's infantry in an attack or defending them while they are being attacked by the enemy, under no condition must one cease firing no matter how heavily one is being shelled. When, however, one is simply engaged in a shoot for no immediate purpose there is ample justification to hold one's fire.

U.N.O. had been active again and the second truce was due to start at seven o'clock that evening. Out of sheer perversity we had a valedictory shoot in case the news was definite. Then Mike dashed to H.Q. in Rosh Pinah and returned to confirm the cease-fire.

It augured a welcome rest and break but we all realised that this cease-fire was by no means as advantageous to the Jews as the first one had been. We had been stymied in the Galilee, but elsewhere there had been notable victories. At Lydda and Ramleh we had taken over one thousand Arab prisoners, including several British officers. (Our commands had been given in four languages in that battle). In Jerusalem the Jews had broken into the Old City but the truce had forced them to withdraw. Cairo had been

bombed, quite a feat for it was reported to have heavy anti-aircraft defences. Nazareth had been captured.

So we had a good and quiet night's sleep. But there was to be no respite.

I was preparing to take a shower on the morning of July 19<sup>th</sup>, the day following the truce, at Rosh Pinah, when Mike's jeep ground to a hurried stop outside the shower-room. I was half-undressed. He dashed inside.

"Jump on board you and Uri. Any other of our chaps around? We must be off. There's work to do."

We grabbed our clothes and hurried out. He turned the jeep around and flew off to the gun-positions.

"What's the matter?"

"The Arabs have broken the truce."

"Where?"

"On the Lebanese border."

"The Lebanese border is long. Where about?"

"In the North."

I spoke to Uri. "That means that we may have a chance to see the people at Mayan Baruch again. It was a pleasant prospect."

Mike spoke before Uri could answer. "What name did you say?"

"Mayan Baruch," I repeated.

He looked at us sympathetically. "That's the place we are off to. The Arabs took it during last night and this morning."

A mist rose before my eyes. I was dumbstruck and stupefied. A terrible blow. Mayan Baruch in enemy hands! Impossible! What had happened to the people there? Had many been killed? I could see the Arabs moving round the settlement. I could see them looting and searching. I hated the Arabs with a deadly hatred.

My fired questions evoked no answers from Mike. He knew nothing else and could supply no details.

We must hurry. No time was to be lost. Perhaps we could recapture it. Mike said our troop would be dividing in two. One gun would go to Mayan Baruch and one would remain at Rosh Pinah. He asked me to go along as gun-position officer. I naturally agreed and made a special request that those South Africans who had special associations with the settlement should be included in the party.

We were on the way with the gun and equipment in record time. Hurriedly everything had been divided. We only had sufficient of certain instruments for one troop and we left these behind for the others to use. Our crew could improvise. We would have no time to erect an elaborate command-post.

Few spoke on the journey. None knew what we would see. I thought of each of my friends in turn and hoped that they and everyone else were safe.

With binoculars I sighted the settlement in the distance. It appeared undamaged. All the buildings were standing, untouched. Had they been taken by surprise and without a fight?

Ahead lay the Police station of Hulsa and we would enquire there. They laughed at our anxieties. Mayan Baruch was untouched. Nothing had happened in its vicinity. But some miles away, on the Syrian border, the Syrian army had launched an attack after the truce and with superior forces had captured an important strategic hill, Tel el Azziat, known as Hill 289.

Someone had been confused with names. Either Mike or the headquarters at Rosh Pinah had made a mistake. We were too relieved to search for culprits. Hill 289 had to be taken back.

News from other areas showed that the Arabs had not observed the fresh truce and reports spoke of the enemy continuing fighting on many fronts. The Jews had been ordered by the Jewish government to fight back.

Mike and I went to the forward lines to reconnoitre the position.

I've never seen Mike travel so fast. The road was under close enemy observation and his jeep simply flew. The infantry commander "Efroikie", seemed to be unable to speak any English so I had to translate for Mike, which made things rather awkward. "Efroikie" was a "kibbutznik" (a member of a co-operative settlement) and was a good infantry commander but he appeared to know very little about artillery. Not that he was to be held amiss. There had been very little Jewish artillery in those parts and he had had no experience in that line.

He asked Mike to bring the gun right up to the forward infantry position. From where we were talking to "Efroikie" we could see the Arabs moving around on a hill towering almost above us. Mike asked why they "didn't shoot" at the Jews and was told that they did.

It would have been suicide to have brought the gun up. The crew could never have fired right under the Arab noses and it would have been a trap if we had had to move in a hurry, since the gun took at least an hour to prepare for moving. Besides, the mere journey to this place along the exposed road would have given the gun away and coming up and down through the dips its silhouette would have been most revealing.

So Mike said to "Efroikie", "Tell us what you wish us to shoot at and we'll be within range. What does it matter to you where we are?"

“Efroikie” agreed. He did not seem impressed with our courage. We had been given a wireless-operator and he also had an attitude tinged with slight contempt.

We returned to Hulsa. The best possible gun-position appeared to be the slight dip behind Mayan Baruch but once again there was a danger of drawing fire onto the Kibbutz. So we chose a deserted Arab village and drew up the gun behind some of the houses. Our main targets were Hill 289 and an Arab village in Syria, Ain Fit.

Guns are usually laid along a line of fire by means of an instrument called a “director”, which is really a super-compass. We had no director. Midway between our two targets was a lone tree on a hill and Mike and I decided to sight our gun on that tree. We elevated the barrel, looked up it from the back, moved it until we had focussed the tree - and we had our line of fire! Somewhat primitive but it turned out very accurate.

Our first target was the village and troop concentrations. For Uri and me this was a great moment. Something we had dreamed about in the balmy times of May when we had had no artillery. The enemy’s halcyon days were due to end. Someone commented that the situation was similar to that of MacArthur on Bataan. Uri and I had also “returned.”

The whirr of our shells was an unfamiliar sound in the valley. Masses of smoke billowed up into the air, right above the gun, like a supernatural genie aiding the foe. The ground around the village had been burnt and was covered with a fine layer of soot and dust. This rose like a whirlwind and served as an aiming-point to the Arab guns. There was the muffled crack of their artillery and the shells were soaring overhead. Spotting the enemy guns we transferred our attentions to the source of our trouble. Meanwhile our position was most insecure. The crew, asked if they were prepared to continue, answered with an unanimous chorus of approvals.

It was a duel in a hundred. Our one gun against two. Again the technique of fire - take cover - count the enemy shots - wait till they had fallen - fire again fast - take cover. The crew were wonderful. Peter from Lancashire particularly distinguished himself carrying shells, unperturbed by flying and exploding missiles. Before the firing I had advised the crew to dig personal slit-trenches next to the gun so that they could take cover immediately after firing. Which they did. Watching our shells land Mike called out corrections and I calculated them. All this was done while their shells were in the air. The buildings were shaking.

The signaller was pale and quiet creeping as closely as possible against a pile of rocks for shelter. Most of our time - almost all - between firing our rounds was spent in loving proximity to mother earth. The wireless-operator, trembling, shouted out a message to Mike: “Orders have come to you to stop firing and to move in a hurry.”

“Tell them to go to hell. Do you think we are going to give up just when we’ve found their gun positions?” The operator looked at Mike as if he doubted his sanity.

Several of the enemy shells were duds and never exploded which was fortunate but made our calculations more difficult.

The enemy guns stopped firing. A column of smoke rose from their gun-positions and red flames could be seen. The black fumes rose higher and higher tapering out into thin fingers. We had hit something.

Many months later, when I inquired, I heard that those guns had not fired again. The Galilee had obtained a little peace. Mike was exuberant and the signaller laughed wildly. "You've got them, you've got them." He gazed around with admiration.

We remained in those parts for a week and lived on the fat of the land. We were acclaimed throughout the valley and treated like lords. The wireless-operator did a great deal to spread our name and fame. And we rarely fired again. Our main task was to keep the enemy guns quiet and by not opening up they considerably saved us a great deal of work.

Yet it was an interesting week. Plans were made to retake the hill. Lorry-loads and busses of troops arrived. Technically there was a truce, but the Syrians could not be allowed to succeed with their violation by retaining Hill 289.

We were short of ammunition and frantic cables to Haifa and Tel Aviv brought no reply or response. We had shells but not sufficient fuses. By then we were already using 65 millimetre fuses to which an adjusting band of metal and a metal cap were added to adapt them for 75 millimetre use. Now we lacked the metal bands and the caps. We were in a quandary when I thought of the workshop at Kfar Giladi and remembered that they possessed a well-equipped and efficient workshop. Perhaps they could assist us. An urgent appeal was made and they promised to do their best. They had to make the tools to cast the dies to make the parts. They would work right through the night but could only finish them the following day.

The attack was planned for that night at ten and we had sufficient shells to suffice for that evening if we were sparing in their use.

It was to be a big attack. That afternoon we visited Mayan Baruch and returned early for the event. At Mayan Baruch they laughed at our story of rescue and told of their thrill at watching us shelling the enemy. It appeared as if most of the settlers in the valley had been spectators at the duel. They all thought that we had had several guns - a well-deserved tribute to the speed of the gunners and to the gun which was theoretically capable of firing twenty rounds a minute.

Everyone had been perturbed when they had seen the Arab shells fall amongst us and they had feared for our safety.

That evening a Dakota of the Israeli Air Force came to bomb Ain Fit and spent a good twenty minutes over the target. We counted many hits. Josef, from Mayan Baruch, the military leader, had come to visit us to see the gun and to mark the unexploded shells, for it was the intention of the settlement to plough those lands in the near future.

Mike wanted to give a demonstration of the gun. There was a strong wind blowing and we wished to find out how much it deflected the shell, so that we could make the necessary corrections. He decided to kill two birds with one stone and perhaps a few

of the foe. So we fired a solitary round while the plane was overhead. Discussions ensued on the possibility of the shell hitting the 'plane or else of confusing the pilot when it exploded. The Israeli army was a very democratic army. There were long discussions after certain commands - but mostly after their execution.

There was no attack that night. From what we heard U.N.O. had persuaded Israel to call the attack off by promising to see that Syria was forced to return the hill to the Jews peacefully.

They are still there to this day and that little hill, as a bone of contention, has hindered an Israeli-Syrian armistice agreement.

The metal adjustors and caps arrived from Kfar Giladi the following day and caused a minor uproar and some amusement and astonishment.

The caps were made of wood, beautifully turned and planed. Unorthodox without a doubt. Nothing extraordinary for anything to be unorthodox in Israel, but was it safe? We could only see.

As at Herzlia a long cord was tied to the firing-lever and we lay in a ditch fifty yards away. We did not even know if we were authorised to fire at all then. Headquarters left us so much on our own bat that we were often unaware of the latest developments. We were not in a mood to care. Someone pulled the string and the shell flew from the muzzle. A piercing wail like that of a banshee rent the air and came from the path of the shell. It sounded like a rocket and must have scared the wits out of the Arab by its piercing whistle. The shell flew straight and true but landed approximately one hundred yards short. In future all that we had to do was to add one hundred yards to the range.

The days of the truce passed leisurely and monotonously. We fed like gluttons. At Hulsa they showered rations on us and our rations also arrived from Rosh Pinah every few days. We were not very honest in accepting double rations, it must be admitted. An army is an army everywhere, however, and one had an inordinate delight in getting the better of authority. Besides the extra cigarettes, chocolates and canned fruit juices made life much more comfortable.

Since the fellows were such good gunners we could manage to shoot with half the normal complement so every second day each person was given the afternoon and evening off. The time was used to visit the neighbouring kibbutzim where we were royally received. Kfar Blum, Dafne and Kfar Giladi suffered by our attentions but they did not seem to care.

Mystery arose at the village of El Zug Et Tachtani, where we had planted the gun. Firstly I lost my wallet with the few pounds that I had but I lost that in the forward positions when we went to see "Efroikie." More important, some arms disappeared. Uri's Bren-gun and Mockie's rifle were missing and a search revealed nothing.

It was simple to report the loss of these weapons as lost in action. Uri and Mockie and Mike had been near that looming hill and had been shot at at point-blank range and in their dash to cover, were perhaps entitled to lose their weapons. But we knew that

such a story would not be true. They had simply vanished from the village. Had it been Arabs? One evening one of the sentries heard foreign voices and we investigated but saw nothing.

I think Mike had his suspicions on Mayan Baruch. Kibbutzim were short in arms and might have been tempted. I knew for a fact (but Mike did not) that one of the South Africans who had some sentimental attachment to Mayan Baruch and contemplated settling there after the war, had discovered that they were short of Bren-gun ammunition and told me he had plans to sneak them some. But a Bren-gun, never. Mike saw how feelings ran towards Mayan Baruch and he perhaps regarded Josef's visits in a sinister light. I had a sincere talk with Joseph and was convinced that Mayan Baruch or its members had nothing to do with the disappearance of the Bren-gun or rifle. Uri thought that some of us had hidden them and treated it as a joke - but not for long .

To this day I don't know what happened to those weapons. Mike handed a Bren-gun and rifle back. Perhaps they were original ones, perhaps they were not.

The truce made Mike restless and his moods were disappointing to those of us who had followed him so willingly in the line. He could not sit still. For some days dashing around in his jeep helped to occupy him but when it went to workshops he was at a loose end. He began a systematic search of surrounding Arab villages for any useful items. Then he began to burn them. It was the policy in some areas to burn Arab villages in order to remove sources of infection and plague. A few villages in that area had been burnt either for this reason or as a punishment to the inhabitants for former attacks on their Jewish neighbours. To some of us Mike's action seemed pure vandalism. We objected and said that he had no right to continue his plan unless he had the approval of the Galilean commander. Our protests were ignored, however, and several of the fellows assisted him with gusto. Soon there were no more Arab villages to burn and then Mike's new pastime was to shoot cats, of whom there were many stray ones in the vicinity. When they were exhausted he spent all his free hours playing cards. His fame had spread far and wide in the Galilee and countless invitations had been extended to him to visit the settlements but he was not in the least bit interested. The peace-time Mike was rather disappointing to some of us and made the orderly conduct of things difficult. We had rations planned but if he felt like something he helped himself and passed other fellows some thus disorganising the whole scale of rations. He was always borrowing plates and utensils and never returned them, leaving them lying around dirty.

Mie was a queer mixture of the irregular and the regular British army officer type. He was democratic and believed in equality between all soldiers as far as privilege went. Yet, perhaps without knowing it, he still hankered after a batman and expected people to offer to help him.

This generally did not happen for he was spoilt and took advantage of favours. Two or three of the other fellows were also very inconsiderate and lazy, never having their own things and always borrowing. They deposited refuse anywhere and the little room that we had tried to keep as a larder and command-post became very untidy and dirty despite our continual attempts to clean it. Mike and the other regular card



players persisted in eating their food in the room. All manner of insects were thus attracted.

Dry rot was setting in. The fellows were complaining about Mike, they had had no mail for a long time and were hankering for civilisation now that there was a truce. Mosquitoes and insects and flies made it difficult to get much sleep and every one was dog-tired. Fortunately orders came for us to return to Rosh Pinah to rejoin the remainder of the troop.

## Chapter Eight

### “We Hope No Aircraft Come”

Rosh Pinah witnessed the decline of our unit. It had already begun before the troop had split into two temporarily so that the one gun could go further North.

The day after the truce Mike had surprised everyone by a long and serious speech and a whole new list of regulations and commands. He had accused certain people from certain countries of being too “loud” and others of not pulling their weight and although much that he said was perhaps justified he certainly overstepped the mark and exaggerated considerably. Our unit was by no means homogenous and there were indeed some “spivs” - particularly those in the stores and a few of the drivers in Rosh Pinah. Thanks to them we were known by some of the local inhabitants as “schwitzers” or braggarts. These fellows talked big most of the time about what the guns were doing. When the people came to know the rest of the troop better they changed their tune.

We became very popular particularly after the wireless-operator had gone around everywhere telling everyone that we were fearless and had ignored enemy shells. When we had been at our last gun-position in view of the village - the populace had had a grand-stand seat of our firing. The inhabitants gathered at the local hotel, a high building, and watched the duels.

Mike did not understand his men and allowed his moods to dominate him. Coming out abruptly with a list of restrictive regulations after a whole period of complete freedom was not calculated to instil goodwill amongst volunteers. Suddenly he wanted regular parades, including a breakfast parade with utensils. We were supposed to stand to attention when we spoke to him and to approach him only through a Sergeant-major. It was a minor revolution and many of us immediately objected. Mike was too inconsistent and jumped from one extreme to another. He could not expect us to be controlled by his moods. The following day he had forgotten about his own regulations. We had not, however.

There was a restlessness and an unexpressed feeling of dissatisfaction in the unit. Although we came from different countries we had co-operated well together and when we had criticised people from other dominions or America it had only been in jocular vein and the remarks were taken in good part. Division was not on national lines but rather on the question of personalities.

Contentious issues arose after we had returned to Rosh Pinah. Living together in a big hut we had ample opportunity to air our views. After a few days Mike commenced with his “discipline” again. He wanted to improve the unit and hoped to encourage the more unpopular elements to leave by making things difficult and strict. But he was inconsistent. His plan misfired. He annoyed many people - but mainly those whom he wished to retain with him. After a time several of us decided to apply for a transfer to a Hebrew-speaking unit. For days we had discussed the matter. Lengthy debates on whether it was detrimental to the war effort to break up an English-speaking unit so

that its members could join a Hebrew-speaking unit. Len said that the war had to be won first and that we could worry about the language afterwards. Others maintained that winning the war, assimilating the spirit of the country and learning the language were not incompatible.

Meanwhile Mike had written to Artillery H.Q. emphasising that our guns, which he called “suicide guns”, were dangerous and difficult to use as field artillery. He suggested that they be employed as anti-aircraft guns, their real purpose, and that he be provided with other guns.

H.Q. took some decisions. It decided that our unit was to be disbanded. Mike said that he was to receive another unit comprised of fifty per cent Anglo-Saxons and fifty percent Palestinians and that there would be ample opportunity therein to learn Hebrew. We had heard so many stories that we were suspicious and unable to place any hope in his promise. I knew too that in a unit where fifty per cent was English-speaking it would be impossible to learn much Hebrew for one would mainly talk English.

Len now approached us to join “his unit”. Mike was unaware of Len’s plans. This offer we declined for if Len was to receive a unit we saw no prospect of learning Hebrew there. All the arguments of Mike and Len were of no avail and seven or eight of us applied for a transfer to a Hebrew-speaking unit. Offers of raised rank in the new units had been made to us but we were not influenced.

Ten or fifteen others also applied for transfers but to an English-speaking brigade (largely), commanded by Ben of Pardess Katz days. They were annoyed at Mike and Len. Mike had a knack of misjudging most people and sometimes appointed the most incapable individuals as his N.C.O.’s. Later he realised his mistake and demoted them all including the sergeant major (who was replaced by Uri). The demoted individuals had a sore grievance.

Soldiers who had put in for a transfer suddenly found themselves discriminated against as far as leave and a few other matters were concerned and bitterness arose. Mike was rarely in camp, and we found all measure of interesting things to occupy our time, which tended to alleviate the mistrust and intrigue.

We enlivened Rosh Pinah and even set the tongues wagging. Inebriation is a rare condition in Palestine, where the people don’t drink much liquor. We caused the statistics to soar. There was little else to do in the evening but to drink Rishon wine. It tastes sweet and meek and mild, but it goes to the head. So the fellows discovered. They were gay in the local café-pub and made a lot of noise and one or two were unable to come home on their own motive power being carried, dragged and manhandled, gurgling their drunken songs.

The citizens of the little village were shocked and complaints were lodged with the Town Major that his troops were disturbing the peace and robbing the inhabitants of their sleep. Mike took the matter in good spirits. At a little meeting we concocted a fairy tale which we told the inhabitants. It was the custom in the dominions and in the United States of America we said, to go really gay, and even get intoxicated

sometimes on the occasion of the twenty-first birthday-party of a friend. And one of the troop had celebrated his twenty-first birthday.

The incident was rarely repeated. Firstly we were short of cash. Extremely so. Secondly we had a heated debate in the course of which antagonists nearly came to blows. No-one voiced an opinion against drink but many felt that we must respect the feelings of the townspeople and abstain. Those who had imbibed freely said that as Jews in their own country, Israel, they were free to do as they liked and that included the right to get intoxicated. So we left the matter there and no objections were raised when Mike went shooting pigeons and decided to roast the spoils in wine.

Charlie, our Hebrew teacher, arrived. In truth he was a teacher of English at a senior school and had originally come from Germany. Since the government had mobilised all the teachers on vacation and directed them to one month's service with army units in an educational capacity, Charlie had been sent to teach us Hebrew. He was a capable teacher and also a jolly, good sort. He proved most useful in gaining an entrée to various facilities for us and was a useful guide.

At the best of times I was accustomed to avoid military-police like the plague but at Rosh Pinah they became our friends. The finest parties in town were held at their quarters and we were welcome guests. Our Americans crooned, Sid sang "I wonder who's kissing her now" and then we gave a South African Zulu war dance. We nearly broke the floor and the cheers of the Palestinians almost raised the roof.

So one night we decided to have our own party to repay all our hosts. Organising it was a complicated task for most of us were broke and credit was hard to raise. Some bright individuals thought that surrounding kibbutzim would be only too willing to supply us with fruit gratis. At Ayelet Hashachar they were completely disillusioned and brought down to earth. Settlers don't live in the past and the hectic days at the settlement had been relegated to the limbo of forgotten memories.

"We are from the guns, "we told the secretary.

"Um, "he was not impressed.

"The people at Rosh Pinah have been very kind to us."

"That's nice."

"We're going to give them a party in return. "

"Um." The secretary seemed in a hurry. Our spokesman was glum.

"Perhaps you could sell us some fruit. We were here during the fighting and saw that you have some fine orchards. "Then we waited for him to offer us the fruit, free of charge.

"Go down to the orchard. You can buy some there."

The same resulted at the orchard. There was no sentiment in agricultural economics and commerce. So we bought a pounds worth of grapes, a few kilos, and ate almost as much surreptitiously, while we were conducting the negotiations.

Nor were we invited for lunch despite the fact that it was lunch time. In such a big kibbutz no one notices you. I laughed at the others who had forecast an abundance of gifts. I had warned and had been proved right. After all, a settlement is no charitable institution.

Elaborate preparations were made for the party which became the talk of the town. So much so that everyone, including the village idiot, came although invitations had only been extended to a manageable number of guests. Outside the hut our two guns had been drawn up, barrels crossed, with lanterns attached. To the interested talks were given on the gun. Inside the party was a dismal failure. There were so many uninvited guests that there was no place for dancing and so much noise from the multitude that our carefully rehearsed items could not be heard above the tumult. There was enough to eat, however, and everyone politely said that they had enjoyed themselves.

Practically everyday we obtained a lorry and visited surrounding settlements or went bathing in the Sea of Galilee. The water was most insipid and there were attendant dangers. Once, while bathing, a shower of rocks, bigger than one's fist, fell all around. It seemed like another miracle but was soon explained. Nearby there were demolitions in progress.

We visited the kibbutzim of Dagania, Afikim, Ashdot Yaacov and Ginossar and the towns of Tiberius and Safed and accepted free meals if there were only a few of us or else went back to camp for meals, if we were many.

At Afikim we were impressed by girls of fourteen and fifteen engaged in rifle-exercises.

New army orders had been issued which angered the Anglo-Saxons. From August the first all rank-insignia were to be worn and saluting was to come into force during duty hours. Not only were officers to be saluted but also Sergeants and Sergeant-majors. The majority of us decided to be conscientious objectors and throughout my army career I was, with impunity. I found the practice of saluting false to the spirit of the country, its traditions and its people. Apparently some officers higher up were rationalising in order to feather their own nests and increase their importance.

The mere fact that we knew that such regulations existed was annoying. Most Anglo-Saxons ignored them and generally escaped punishment. There was, however, a danger that some self-important individual would make one suffer for failing to pay him the respect he felt he deserved. Personally I believed that such measures could not artificially induce respect. One respects one's officer if one appreciates him or her as a person and as a soldier and no amount of saluting will induce respect.

It was decided that there would be separate messes for officers and men in case the officers should want to plan their battles during meals and would not wish the ordinary soldier to overhear. But all food was to be the same and to be prepared in the

same kitchen - a regulation not always observed. Officers and men were to have differently cut uniforms but the same quality of material was to be used in each.

Finally the soldiers were to be paid at different rates according to rank - again a conflict with the spirit of the kibbutzim where each man or women receives according to his or her needs. One good thing was introduced - the basic pay was to be raised to three pounds per month.

Peter, from Lancashire, who had been known as "Avraham" at his own wish joined the navy. Kiwi remained behind a little longer. He had become the corporal in charge of our transport.

On Wednesday August, 4<sup>th</sup>, the troop left for Haifa en route to leave and transfers. We were to deposit our guns at Haifa and then proceed to a camp near Tel Aviv, Sarafand.

One of our trucks had broken down so only one gun left for Haifa and the other had to await the return of the truck. For many of us it was our first view of Haifa, considered the most beautiful city of Israel. We agreed. Climbing the hill, leading up to Mount Carmel, with the gun was almost a feat. The engine of the truck groaned and grunted and the brakes of the gun were red-hot with the friction. Climbing and climbing along the winding road. Every few hundred yards a stop was made to allow the engine and the brakes to cool. These halts afforded an opportunity to take in the exquisite view of the bay and the pearl on its shores, Haifa. Each halt at a higher level gave a progressively better view, wider in extent and broader in scope. Modern, white and cream houses dotting the hill. Like light moss clinging to the slopes. Mainly blocks of flats with rough-edged exterior designs.

And the blue waters rolling silently in the bay, stretching to the romantic outline of mysterious and historied Acre. A view ending in the white cliffs of the border. Acre, redolent with tales of the crusaders. Its walls rampant with their castles and fortifications backed by Moslem mosques and minarets. Nearer, below, the leafy parks of Haifa and the smoky port. Devastation in the Arab area. Rubble and bulldozers at work clearing the slums for a city building plan. Crowded streets and busses and cars chugging up to the mount, passing us, their occupants staring at the long-barrelled gun. Looks of surprise and questions. Smiles and waves of the hand. The city glistening below in all its pride and beauty. Down in the port a little area set apart with small, old, unseaworthy craft. Historic craft that ventured the wrath and might of Britain to land long-suffering refugees. The Saga of illegal immigrants and their little ships, rotting in the bay, at rest in their last days. Yet not all for some have been repaired and used.

The young state cannot pick and choose. There are more immigrants clamouring. There is a spirit in the air in Haifa, one of work and endeavour and labour. Along the foreshore factory-chimneys smoking and in the distance where the valley meets the hills the settlements of Zevulun. Life and Labour.

Army headquarter in Haifa have a massive notice outside the door informing passersby of their presence. A total lack of military security. Yet it is difficult to enter. You must sign when you enter and leave. They show us temporary billets nearby in

the former H.Q. of the Arab Legion. A few months ago Britain let them terrorise the Jews, or endeavour to, and then let them loose to openly attack the Jews.

There is a blackout in Haifa but some of us go to town.

Our guns are to serve as anti-aircraft guns and we have to move our gun to a camp in the bay. The truck has returned to Rosh Pinah and we look for another truck. It must be massive and have a hook for drawing a gun. Not easy to find. There is a strange transport arrangement in Haifa. Truck-drivers have been mobilised together with their truck. They own it and get paid for its use. So we obtain a driver with a truck and every day we have to make fresh arrangements. We still eat in Haifa central, at a restaurant, and have to travel in and out for meals – a tedious task.

Len and I have a long talk with David, who is in charge of the anti-aircraft defences of Haifa. On the map he shows us the location of the few guns he has and explains the plans for our participation in the event of an attack. We are to receive signals when the 'plane is on its way, when it is near, and when it is overhead and we must fire up. There are no instruments to aid us in our shooting. We will take pot luck. Trying to hit a 'plane or 'planes in the sky without a detector or range instruments. One chance in a million. Main thing is to frighten them off. Len is over-confident. He tells David to leave it to him, but confides to me that he had never been in anti-aircraft work before. Nor have I. This is Israel and one must make do with what one has. It will be like shooting at a bird with a pea-shooter.

I tell David that two flaws exist in the arrangements. He asks what? I tell him that we have no telephone or wireless at our camp so how are we to receive the signals about the approach of 'planes?

Secondly, if we come to town to eat who will work the guns when enemy craft arrive while most of us are away? He says that he will attend to these matters. We are there a week and when we leave Haifa nothing has been done about them. There was supposed to be a truce but then you never know these Arabs - they've broken it elsewhere.

The black-out is lifted, which is a good omen. I hope there are no 'planes. Mike and the other gun arrive. Len and I had been driving around a new Morris car, but now that we have our own transport we have to give it up. I wonder what will happen if enemy 'planes come over. I remember in Rosh Pinah how down-hearted we were when we heard that one of our guns had shot down one of our own Flying Fortresses.

It was the troop Uri and I were supposed to go to and we wondered whether, if we had gone, our presence would have made any difference. Later we hear that our guns did shoot at our own Flying Fortress but missed.

We are relieved. Stories say that when we are bringing a new 'plane into the country and do not want U.N.O. to know we shoot at it so that they will think it is an enemy 'plane and will not be suspicious. Also that when we wish to unload arms from a ship we sound an alarm and rush all the U.N.O. observers to shelter so that we can unload the ship unobserved and even take arms ashore. I see nothing to prove these stories. There are so many stories in Israel that one must take them with a grain of salt.

No enemy 'planes were observed over Haifa during our spell of duty. Their absence was fortunate. The troop spent a great deal of its time in Haifa. One night an English-speaking family held a party up on Mount Carmel for English-speaking soldiers and obtained a large gathering, for Ben's brigade was stationed in the vicinity of Haifa Bay. Only sergeants and sergeant-majors of this brigade were present and it transpired that the party was for sergeants and sergeant-majors and above only.

The men of our unit were amused and yet somewhat disappointed that fellow Anglo-Saxons had suddenly become snobbish. Matters went to such an extreme in the brigade there was a special bus for senior N.C.O.'s on which the other ranks were not allowed to ride. Nowhere in Israel did similar restrictions apply to any army transport. The spirit of the English-speaking companies was by no means good and their own members were continually grousing and complaining about conditions in their own units. I have to confess that the artillerymen at the party were unable to resist the temptation to tease the senior N.C.O.'s on their conspicuous badges of rank and their assumed self-importance.

Shortly after that we left for Sarafand - and leave. The noise and excitement at the news of the impending departure was warranted. On the road everyone was in good spirits as if a long wished for ambition were about to come true. Dreams of the life and laughter and noisy excitement of Tel Aviv, dreamt in the line, stood chance of being realised. We gave lifts freely on the way and scrawled slogans on the sides of our vehicles. One in English read, "Tel Aviv or bust," another, in Hebrew, read "Pretty Girls Only."

Sarafand is a little military town rather than a camp and is a relic of the British Mandate and of the last world war, when many Jewish Palestinians, then in the British army, trained there.

A network of roads linked the various ancillary camps and traffic hummed along them leaving the camp at three main and closely guarded gates. Sarafand is capable of housing forty thousand soldiers and a story is told of its capture by the Jews .

When England decided to surrender the mandate she offered to sell the camp. The Jews were prospective buyers but considered the English price of two million pounds exorbitant. Instead they offered six hundred thousand pounds which sum the British were not prepared to accept. Both sides remaining adamant the deal fell through and the British allowed the Arabs to enter.

The only alternative to the Jews was to drive the Arab forces out, which they did with the utmost speed and despatch. So what they had offered to pay a large sum for they finally obtained for virtually nothing.

Vandals had been busy, however. The British and the Arabs destroyed the large camp cinema and the buildings of the shopping-centre. Only a skeleton of burnt walls remained.

The swimming bath had escaped unscathed and we found many soldiers disporting themselves in its waters. I think it is one of the finest swimming pools in Israel.



Our bungalows also bore evidence of British occupation, prejudiced and bitter. Slogans were painted in English. Some read as follows.

“Death to the Jews. “ “You will always fear to-morrow.”

“The Zion is doomed. “ “You will never get Palestine. “

“You will die. There is no place in the world for Jews.”

And above these badly prophesied remarks grinned a skull and cross bones.

That evening, a Friday night, I wandered round the camp, paying a brief visit to all the diverse units. I discovered a wealth of culture.

At a Palmach reading-room young boys and girls, fresh from the fighting, were discussing contentious political problems of the day with all seriousness and understanding. They were not only willing to die for Israel but were vitally concerned about its future trends for they also wished to live for Israel. At a nearby camp there was a talk on Jerusalem. Across the road there was lighter fare. A civilian party from Rishon le Zion were staging a variety programme and young performers revealed a wealth of talent.

All the reading-rooms in Sarafand were crowded to capacity. I thought of the writing on the walls, puerile utterings of misguided soldiers, who probably lacked even an iota of the culture that these young Israeli soldiers, men and women, had.

It had been determined that all soldiers were entitled to four days of leave after three months of service. I obtained four days leave and went to Tel Aviv, where all leave roads generally led.

## Chapter Nine.

### **“Anglo-Saxon Volunteers on Leave”.**

Life was more pleasant while I was stationed at Sarafand. The truce, uneasy as it was, continued for several months and opportunities for leave dawned more frequently.

Before commencing my first leave of four days, two others and I, who had been elected as representatives of our unit, attended a conference of one day's duration to discuss post-war settlement problems of Anglo-Saxon Volunteers. It was held at Ayanot, a girl's training school run by the Women's International Zionist Organisation (W.I.Z.O.), and the serious sessions were liberally interspersed with adjournments for tasty teas and meals.

A certain Anglo-Saxon officer endeavoured to team-roller the proceedings and refused to allow the delegates to air their many complaints, particularly against the increasing restriction of democratic privileges in the army. An opportunity to speak was demanded by delegates and some members of the Soldier's Welfare Committee (organising the conference) also wished to allow the soldiers to air their grievances. Kindly Joseph Baratz, pioneer settler from Dagania and one of the veterans and leaders of the communal settlement movement, intervened to urge a compromise and it was decided to limit discussion to post-war settlement and to hold another meeting at a later date to discuss grievances.

The tone and purpose of the official speeches delivered to us was soon apparent. No effort or subtlety was spared to persuade the volunteers to settle in Israel. Strangely enough most of them knew little about Israel and had seen still less due to the confinements of army life. Soldier speakers suggested that the soldiers should first be given an opportunity to tour Israel and to learn the language. Delegates from our unit could offer practical advice for it appeared that we, by our tours in the Galilee, were comparatively well versed in local conditions.

Tel Aviv was livelier and more congested than ever. Uniformed men and women were conspicuous everywhere, many on leave and fresh from the battlefield. Friendships were renewed. One seemed to meet former acquaintances at every turn in Tel Aviv even without looking for them.

The Anglo-Saxons were augmented in number and English was heard with greater frequency. We had been given a name “MAHAL” - an abbreviation of the Hebrew words for “Volunteers from Abroad.” Mahal included Anglo-Saxon, French, Scandinavian, Belgian, Dutch and South American Volunteers and differed from “GAHAL” which was derived from the Hebrew for “Enlisted Men from Abroad”. It was a subtle distinction in many cases, and led to some snobbishness. Whereas Gahal came from the ranks of the refugees who had had no option but to go to Israel where they were conscripted, Mahal were volunteers who voluntarily came to Israel for the express purpose of joining the Israeli army, as volunteers.

They were considered to possess more privileges by virtue of the fact that they had valid passports and could theoretically leave the army and Israel whenever they wished. Practically, however, the army authorities endeavoured to treat all soldiers, local born, Gahal and Mahal, as equals. Mahal did not like this and bad feelings were sometimes engendered. They demanded, sometimes justly sometimes unjustly, special consideration. Were they not in a strange country, without family and friend? Had they not come of their own free will to risk their lives? Were they not accustomed to the luxuries of Western civilisation? Had they not memories of lavish entertainments and facilities for soldiers, sailors and airmen in the U.S.A., England and the Dominions?

In Israel they found the brusque and matter-of-fact manner of the Palestinians rude and disheartening. Mahal members expected to be treated as saviours and heroes and were often ignored or simply treated as comrades. Many welcomed this quiet appreciation from the Palestinians, who had lived through thirteen years of riots and crises and wars and were quiet and sober in their actions. But others were snubbed and annoyed and soon let their opinions be heard. Some Palestinians were very sympathetic to Anglo-Saxons and certain Mahal personnel took advantage of this hospitality and generosity, demanding the world and tolerating no obstacles.

Mahal numbered between two and three thousand. Among the Anglo-Saxons, men and women from South Africa, Great Britain and Canada were in the majority followed by the United States of America which, in proportion to its large Jewish population, had not responded too well, perhaps since certain technical complications made it difficult to send people across.

The Americans as a whole were not very popular in Israel. Israelis found them boastful, demanding and too critical. A fair proportion of American volunteers left the country as soon as they could to return to their homes.

The Canadians had a mixture of exceptionally fine and comparatively bad people. In some of the cities volunteers had been screened by local committees and only selected individuals had been sent. In others, all and sundry had been accepted and a few unsavoury characters slipped through the net. Several found themselves in prison in Israel for civilian offences.

The British Jews were fine people on the whole, quiet, hard-working and efficient. They had been well trained in the Zionist movement and on agricultural farms and soon adapted themselves to local conditions.

The South Africans were the most popular in Israel although a few unsatisfactory characters blemished the good name. For many years the Palestinians have thought highly of the South African Jewish community for its outstanding contribution to Zionism and we thus had an extremely favourable advance publicity.

When Mahal arrived Israel had been thankful but too busy to pay them any special attention. We went through the mill like anyone else often being subjected to aggravating stupidities, inefficiencies and lack of consideration. Some bore this in silence and understanding. Others were embittered and antagonised.

Much harm was done by the Israeli authorities not endeavouring to understand the mentality and background of Mahal members. Granted that conditions were abnormal but some scope for more consideration did exist.

It was not easy meeting civilians in Israel. One can be very lonely in a big city. In the crowds and multitudes an individual passes unnoticed. Many months were required before some of the Mahal made friends and it was a general complaint that soldiers in Palestine during the Second World War, generally non-Jewish, received more hospitality than Mahal volunteers did in the Israeli war.

Facilities for spending leave were not too good or efficient in Tel Aviv, the magnet of most soldiers on leave. As many as eight thousand arrived on some days seeking accommodation and meals and it was a problem accommodating them all. As everywhere some people exploited the situation for their own interests. When a soldier on leave came to Tel Aviv he reported to the Town Major for accommodation and stood in a lengthy queue whose tardy progress often consumed a fair proportion of his leave. His pass had to be entered, he was given a slip for an "hotel" and then went on a third queue to have the slip filled in.

The "hotels" were not of the best and crammed to capacity. Proprietors found all the floor and roof space they were able and juggled beds into the area. Health inspectors would have been appalled by the congestion. In a room normally meant for one or two people four or five were placed. In most cases no cushions were available, sheets were an unheard-of luxury and blankets were reduced to the minimum. Comings and goings of fellow-residents interrupted sleep and early each morning the proprietors began folding up beds and walking in and out. What good is leave if one cannot sleep and get some rest in moderate comfort? Ventilation was a sore point and I had many an argument demanding that a window be opened. The Gahal, who comprised the larger proportion of those accommodated, (the Palestinians went home) had an aversion for fresh air in the bed-rooms. Nor did they engage in ablutions too often and unwashed feet in close proximity in unventilated rooms are not conducive to good or pleasant sleep.

Meals at the civilian restaurants were beyond the reach of soldier-finance so special restaurants were established for soldiers where meals were obtainable at reduced prices. All three meals could be bought for 350 mils (seven shillings) per day. For the four days leave due to him every three months, each soldier received a ration allowance of 560 mils per day often paid only at the conclusion of leave since no money was available.

What the poor soldier was to use for money in the meantime was not considered important.

If one were on less than four days leave meal-tickets were provided in the beginning but later this practice was stopped and the soldier had to pay his own way. One realised that Israel was not a rich country and when pay did not arrive regularly one understood, but difficult situations arose - people must eat. It was no uncommon happening for soldiers to refuse leave because they had no money.

In the cities soldiers obtained concessions in prices at the cinema, theatre and on the buses while special clubs enabled them to obtain refreshments at reduce prices.

In Tel Aviv there was a large camp, formerly occupied by the British, where leave personnel were accommodated. Reaching it was somewhat awkward and toilet and washing facilities were scattered. A lack of windows in many of the bangalows provided an abundance of fresh air in summer - which was an advantage - and gusts of icy-cold breeze in winter.

I seemed to be billeted regularly in this camp, Machaneh Yonah, and could never understand why I was the only English-speaking soldier there. It puzzled me until I discussed the matter with a girl who worked at the Town Major. Her answer was simple. "You were sent to Machaneh Yonah because you spoke Hebrew. Speak English and you'll be sent to an hotel." In the future I employed her formula and never went back to Machaneh Yonah. Soon I found a few better but still not satisfactory, hotels and used to ask for these, in English, and often succeeded in getting accommodated at one of them.

There was a great deal of bureaucracy in the army and in Israel in general. I learnt that one had to shout at clerks and be domineering in a tactful yet threatening way. It brought results - in the majority of cases.

Those of us who had endeavoured to employ the Hebrew language whenever we could in Israel found that in several instances this policy did not pay. Hebrew questions and requests often brought brusque answers, inconsiderate action or simply inaction and no response. English evoked a different response, but not always. Some Palestinians, and rightly I think at times, became annoyed with the way Anglo-Saxons expected everyone to understand English and took no pains to learn Hebrew. So sometimes it paid better dividends to employ the Hebrew language.

The best results were obtained by a mixture of the two languages or by a Hebrew with a deliberately accented English accent. These methods showed a desire to learn the language.

Bus drivers forced me to speak English. Soldiers obtained special reductions on buses and if requested had to produce their pay-books to the driver for identification. For many months my pay-book failed to arrive and when the driver asked me for it I went into a lengthy explanation in Hebrew. Fellow-passengers became impatient, the driver was loathe to believe that I was a soldier and thanks to language difficulties I received the worst of the argument. So I decided to speak English plus a word or two of Hebrew. I'd say to the driver: "One soldier's ticket- k-k-kartis c-c-chayal", deliberately stuttering the Hebrew to show that I was eager to learn. The driver invariably smiled, was friendly and gave me a soldier's ticket.

But there was one sphere were it was extremely inadvisable to speak English - in the shops. City dwellers of Israel seemed to believe that the Anglo-Saxons were extremely wealthy. The Americans and others continually boasts of factories, and mansions, and millionaire relatives and motor-cars back home and the Israelis took them at their word. In reality we were paupers for whatever money we had back home the stringent currency control regulations made it almost impossible for us to have

money sent. But the Israelis were ignorant of this and raised their prices to Anglo-Saxon customers whom they probably regarded as commercial fools. This did not help to promote better relations but fortunately some shop-keepers did not indulge in such practices.

Later I discovered that it was more pleasant to spend leave in Haifa or Jerusalem, not such great centres of leave traffic, less congested therefore and offering better hotels and facilities and more hospitality since each soldier could receive individual attention.

With time, conditions improved in Tel Aviv. In 1949 a special club for Mahal was opened run by Mahal personnel. Arrangements were made at various clubs for private families to invite soldiers for meals and the “boys” began to feel less lonely.

I managed to make many friends privately, thanks to my rapidly increasing knowledge of Hebrew.

The Israeli army began to enlist more and more girls including married women without children. Most of the women were not too happy at being recruited and large numbers avoided enlistment by failing to register when called upon to do so. Then one day the army took drastic action in an “Operation Round-Up” cordoning off areas in Tel Aviv and carefully combing them out for “deserters.” The catch was enormous and brought rich dividends to the army.

Coming in on leave I found most of my girl-friends away from home in the army. When I had leave they had none and vice-versa. In some instances a wife who was stationed out of town had to obtain leave to come into town to see her husband, who was stationed there.

The army livened up, however. The women’s services known as “Chen” were now apparent in offices and mess-halls in all the base camps.

Travelling in Israel, if one did not wish to pay bus fares or could not, was no easy matter. The army rarely provided sufficient transport for leave and recourse had to be had to hitch-hiking, known in Israel as “tramping.” It is a national habit and before holidays half of the inhabitants seemed to be on the highways coming and going.

They lined the roads on the outskirts of cities and towns and there was intense competition. As soon as any vehicle, however dirty or dilapidated, stopped, crowds clambered aboard. Restrictions were imposed by the Military Police on the load army vehicles were permitted to carry. The Sabras (locally born inhabitants) are notorious for their obstinacy. Generally more clambered on army transport than the number the driver was legally permitted to carry. The excess, who had jumped on last, were asked to alight. No one moved. Everyone claimed that he or she had been the first on the truck. Pleading, importuning and threatening were of no avail. Minutes passed. The driver swore and grew red in the face. Nothing happened. Not a person moved except the driver who paced up and down. Empty vehicles passed. Several times I saw the driver return with truck and passengers in the direction from which he had come. Seeing that they were going further from and not nearer to their goal the obstinate passengers came to their senses and alighted.

This hard-headedness of the Sabras played no small part in Israel's salvation and victory for when the British and other experts said that success was impossible the Sabras called them liars and went on to do the impossible - most successfully.

In Israel they believe that few things are impossible and after seeing things during Israel's struggle for independence I almost believed it myself. Sabras are very averse to criticism, a bad trait I think. To all our complaints, justified and unjustified, there was one answer. "We are a young state."

Once this answer made me reply vehemently. A girl-friend and I were waiting for a Canadian friend Dan, the gun sergeant, to obtain accommodation. It was late at night and there was a small queue at the Town Major's office. And it was not moving. The few soldiers on duty completely ignored its presence. Rumours circulated down the queue that there was no accommodation available but no definite answer had been given and the fellows didn't know what to do. They were simply left standing, in the cold.

The girl-friend admitted that the Town Major's offices were at fault but added, "We are only a young state."

"I'm tired of that answer," I replied. "Of course it is a young state and certain things cannot be done yet. I don't expect you to make tanks, or guns or aeroplanes. I don't expect you to build skyscrapers and big ships. These things take time but surely organisation could have been learnt by now. It needs no great art and training to be considerate and courteous and to organise a simple queue." She agreed.

I spent more time than ever in Yarkon Street, the hub of Tel Aviv's "foreign life" with cafes, hotels and soldier's clubs. Drinking beer at the Armon hotel became a regular habit. Richard the barman was one of the finest and most practical philosophers I have ever met. Words of wisdom were intermingled with the drinks he served and cocktails he expertly mixed. Foreign correspondents stayed at the Armon and they were friendly towards soldiers from the English-speaking countries. I learnt a lot from them especially from those who flew up and down between Israel and the Arab states. They knew what was happening in all the Middle Eastern capitals and revealed much interesting information "off the record."

A special correspondent arrived from South Africa and it was good to talk Afrikaans again over a drink. He was a fine and capable man and seemed impressed with Israel although he complained bitterly of the exorbitant prices. He said that the people in South Africa had never realised how few arms the Jews had possessed on May 15<sup>th</sup>, when the State had been proclaimed. People also thought that the collective settlements were merely in the experimental stage. Few realised that they were well established.

U.N.O. observers were also frequent visitors and the main topic of conversation was truce violations. Their activities were not always safe and comfortable and several observers were killed or wounded in the execution of their duties. The truce was merrily violated. Arab irregulars blew up the Latrun pumping-station while discussions were taking place on restoring the water supply to Jerusalem. Two U.N.O.

observers were shot at and killed at Gaza airport. Jerusalem was continually shelled, the Arab heavy guns having opened up.

In Tel Aviv there were new currency notes and the inhabitants were proud and sometimes critical of them. The Israeli pound became legal tender and the crispy new notes replaced the old notes of the Mandatory. Inflation forced prices higher and higher. Yarkon Street saw inflation at its worst for the fashionable hotels and clubs had foreign and English-speaking customers. Mahal could be found dining and dancing. Money was getting through from home now.

One evening I arrived at the Park Hotel in time to see a tussle. Some members of Mahal, including several South Africans, had taken off their shirts and naked to the waist began a Zulu war dance on the dancing-floor. Objections were raised and in the scuffle furniture was flung around and glass broken.

During the day Tel Aviv was quieter and most of us could be found on the beach, swimming and sun-bathing.

Like all good things the leave soon ended and we found ourselves back at Sarafand for training. Our numbers were fewer for many of the members of our old unit had transferred to other units.

The new training began from scratch on the basic but false assumption that we were rookies with no military experience or training. Parade-ground drill, turning by numbers, rifle-exercises and sten-gun drill comprised the programme. We almost rebelled. Here we had just returned from action, many of us had had years of experience in the last world war and now we were being treated as new, raw recruits. Yet we did not demur.

One day we had a lesson on how to hold a rifle. During a rest period some of us, on our own, did more complicated rifle-exercises and the instructor's eyes almost popped out of his head. Good-naturedly and in all sincerity he said, "You know your drill perfectly. You should be teaching me and not I you."

We told him all our grievances and they were reported to higher official quarters. The fact that all the training was in Hebrew and that we learnt the Hebrew terminology for the drill and parts of the rifle and sten-guns, was a redeeming factor in the opinion of some. Physical culture, playing with a medicine ball and basket-ball helped to relieve the tedium and monotony although the hours chosen, often in the heat of the midday sun, made certain of the exercises exhausting.

Our N.C.O.'s on the courses were friendly but too meticulous and industrious for our liking. They observed the training programme to the second and were continually goading on our happy go-lucky crowd. Mahal did not take lightly to discipline and time-tables.

Higher quarters heard our complaints and we began gun-drill in Hebrew. The guns were 65 millimetre French mountain guns and diminutive. Gun-drill meant manipulating them with speed and ease. I quite enjoyed it. The instructor, a little



corporal who had been with the Red Army and knew much about artillery, had no knowledge of English. So, where necessary, I interpreted from the Hebrew.

After the preliminary training we were due to be posted to different units and I made a special request to be sent to a Hebrew-speaking unit, if possible, on the Jerusalem front. I had never been to Jerusalem and had a burning desire to go there. Whereas hostilities were at standstill all over Israel Jerusalem was the scene of countless truce violations and shellings and one would not be idle there.

The short course ended. I was not sent to Jerusalem but to Haifa and not to a unit but to a ten-day course of Anglo-Saxon Mahal. Its objects and aims were to teach Hebrew and Palestinology - and to instil a spirit conducive to settlement in Israel. It was a welcome rest although our movements were rather circumscribed by childish regulations, compulsory attendances and the locking of the doors at an early hour in the evening.

Once, on a free night during the course, we returned shortly after midnight to find the large building, in which we were housed, closed. Our knocking awoke the supervisor and the head of the course. They were cruelly adamant and refused us admission. Our demands to be allowed inside raised their ire and we were told to sleep outside and warned that if we persisted in our clamouring military police would be called and our arrest would consequently follow.

The mansion at whose doors we were knocking had belonged to the late Pincas Rutenberg who had pioneered the electrification of Palestine. He had bequeathed the building as a youth hostel, complete with luxurious furnishings and a well-stocked library. Most of the windows were barred including all those on the ground floor and it was virtually impossible to gain entrance. It took us two hours to discover an openable window in an upper floor, reach it, and send one man through. He, taking an uncomfortably long time, crept through to a side-door and let the others in. As we neared our rooms we were surprised and one or two caught, the remainder dived under the blankets, boots and all.

That evening had been great fun particularly the "burglary." Earlier we had gone dancing on Mount Carmel and witnessed a floor show. One of the entertainers had been a Negro on the U.N.O. staff who sang "Song of the Negev" in Hebrew.

Regular lectures by a prominent personalities were held at Beth Rutenberg and local citizens, from different walks of life, explained their settlement in Israel and adjustment.

One lecture was particularly interesting - that of the personal assistant to the Minister of Defence who answered critical questions in an endeavour to justify the attack on the "Altalena" and the new disciplinary measures in the army. He revealed that on December 1<sup>st</sup>, 1947, after U.N.O. had passed the resolution accepting a Jewish state, which was followed by the outbreak of fighting in Palestine, the Jews only possessed two thousand rifles and ninety-six mortars, most of the later old and rusty.

With fiery remarks he painted an inspiring picture of the future, when it was planned to have a permanent Israeli army of ten thousand men. They would not only be

soldiers but also builders and pioneers and one of their main tasks would be to build a highway to Akaba on the Red Sea.

While at Haifa I went to visit some nurses at an army hospital and they invited me to a film performance held in a large hall. Every patient, and there were several hundred, was an amputee. They had lost an arm, a leg or both. Almost without exception youngsters from that fine band who had borne the burnt of the fighting. The films, prepared for U.S.A. army casualties, dealt with therapy and mechanised aids to enable the amputees to lead a normal life. Great strides had been made in America and the youngsters felt more hopeful for the future.

After the course I returned to Sarafand to hear that I had been posted to a unit whose terrain included the Burma Road and the Jerusalem front. . We had all then scattered and sent to units in diverse parts of Israel. I went to the base camp of my unit, a Hebrew speaking regiment

I told the adjutant that if nothing was due to happen, I would like to go on an artillery course to learn the Hebrew terminology for the work I had done before. He was flattering, but most unencouraging. It was not the policy, he said, to send capable men on courses because they were grabbed by other units and never returned. I was considered a capable man. Queer, unpatriotic logic, I thought, refusing to train capable people. He told me that I could learn all the terminology from my unit and advised me to consult its commander. I agreed. My new troop was out on manoeuvres and returned late that afternoon.

I was pleased to meet Dan, the Canadian gun-sergeant, again. He was in the troop. Now he had no rank for he knew very little Hebrew. Other Anglo-Saxons were an English Jew, Phil, and a Canadian Jew, Milton, a clumsy, childish fellow.

The unit consisted of about fifty men and only contained one Palestinian-born soldier. The majority were recent immigrants having been in Israel for periods ranging from three months to many years. While Hebrew was the official language most of the ordinary conversation was conducted in Yiddish. Several of the unit knew a little English while the sergeant-major and the two officers knew English very well, but I rarely spoke it to them unless I was lost for the Hebrew words. The commanding officer was a Czech Jew, I think, or else a German, obstinate and very sincere.

To him nothing was impossible and he learnt a great deal by bitter experience, particularly when he instructed the driver to take the command-car over rocky terrain- which he considered passable and the driver considered impassable. The driver was always proved correct and the command-car took a terrific punishment. Ravlevai, the O.C., tended to his men before he thought of himself. Never would he eat or sleep unless his men could. Yet he was a hard master often affirming that twenty-four hours' service was expected from each soldier every day and that any concessions, like leave, were a privilege for which the soldiers ought to be thankful.

Guya, the other officer was a Polish Jew. He was one of the most taciturn men I have ever met, solid and seemingly slow, particularly in his calculations - but deadly accurate.

We had four guns, 65 millimetre calibre, somewhat of a come-down after our larger guns in the Galilee. The new guns had a range of five kilometres, or three miles.

I had a talk to Ravlevai who said that I would soon be able to learn the Hebrew terminology in the unit. I gathered from reports I heard that there was a good possibility of our troop going into the field soon. In view of this, since I wished to go along, I made no further representations about the course.

Len and an English Jewish officer, both in my new regiment, wanted me to join them but I declined their separate offers. With them I would always be talking English; with the officers in my new unit I would talk Hebrew.

On Friday, September 17<sup>th</sup>, my new unit "Solela Yud" received sudden movement orders. Within a few hours we were on our way, complete with guns and full equipment. Destination Abu Ghosh, an Arab village 15 kilometres (ten miles) from Jerusalem, on the main Tel Aviv- Jerusalem highway.

It was an interesting journey through areas I had not yet seen. Through the pretty Jewish villages of Rishon-le-Zion and Rehovot, past verdant fields and scented orange-groves, through Kfar Bilu and Ekron. Shortly after Hulda we turned off the main highway along a new road made through the fields. A sign-post said "Jerusalem!" This was the beginning of the Burma Road, constructed in a hurry to open a life-line to Jerusalem. Primitive and temporary, barely distinguished as a road, dusty and bumpy and sandy and wild; leading into the hills of Judea.

A sudden rise and we are in an Arab village, perched on a hill, over-looking valleys. Darkening light. Arab-held Latrun lies to the North, to the East hill follows hill. The moon is a big ball of light suspended so close that you feel you can touch it and perhaps impede its slow ascent. Ascent-descent, the valley drops and the road hurtles below. Strips of wire laid on the sand. Difficult going. One by one on the vehicles of the convoy descend, crawling and slipping along narrow, winding sand stretches. Mechanically feeling in the dark, shouts and warnings.

Tilting downwards as the moon rises upwards, trucks at the bottom waiting for vehicles at the top and on the slope. Gaunt shapes of gun-barrels against the light of the moon. All down safely and onwards through the valley. No lights allowed. The foe is near. Silence punctuated only by the purr of engines and the chatter of men. On to an asphalt road, a mad hurried dash round the danger corner. We are on the main highway at Bab-el-Wad. A good macadamised road. Lights go on. Chatter is more animated. Blood was shed here, carcasses of vehicles, stark wheels and chassis lie on the road-side. Monuments to brave men and women who opened the roads. Hills loom on either side, from which Arabs once fired on lightly-armed Jewish transport.

Lights in the distance. Jewish troops on the roadside. A road-block. This is Abu Ghosh. It is dark and we are tired. A buzz of excitement. "Assassination!" "Death!" "U.N.O."

It comes as a shock. Penetrates like a sword.

"Count Bernadotte was assassinated in Jerusalem to-day."

“And a French Colonel.”

“By whom?”

“Reports say unidentified Jews.”

Silence descends. We say little as we prepare for sleep. No-one can confirm the reports. Everyone has heard the news from someone else. Perhaps it is only a rumour. But no, the following morning the news is confirmed.

I saw the cortege with the ambulance containing the bodies, passing on the way of Haifa.

The Jewish government condemned the assassination, promised to bring the culprits to justice, and enforced drastic measures against the Stern Group from whose ranks the assailants were said to have come.

## Chapter Ten.

### “At Abu Ghosh.”

Abu Ghosh was an interesting and pretty village lying athwart the main highway from the coast to Jerusalem and dominating the road. Its inhabitants were friendly and many had remained behind in their homes when the Arabs of neighbouring villages fled. For years they helped the Jews with arms and information and the Sheik of Abu Ghosh, one of the village leaders, and members of his family and village had belonged to the Stern Group. He was amongst those arrested following the assassination of Count Bernadotte. Later he stood as a candidate for the first parliament of Israel but was not elected as his party only polled a small percentage of the votes.

The houses of the village clung to the terraced slopes of the valley and to the pass that ran through the hills. On the summit of the hill a large white Madonna, visible for miles, overlooked the surroundings. It rose from a little church belonging to a French religious order under whose auspices was a monastery run by a priest and nuns. This institution stood apart from the village itself but in the village there was another, older church, famous in the history of the Crusaders and fount of many a legend and story. Inside its thick walls a well was preserved as a reminder that invading armies sojourned at Abu Ghosh for refreshment.

Abu Ghosh village was out of bounds to all troops not on special duty and the inhabitants were left unmolested. The troops lived in the police station, which served as brigade headquarters, in peripheral vacated houses and in tents.

An exquisite and comprehensive view was obtained from Abu Ghosh of the approaches to Jerusalem, the valleys and hills westwards and villages on the way to Bethlehem. Fruit there was in abundance particularly grapes, figs and plums. Dan and I often went exploring and found many an ancient well, wall or other interesting object. Dan was the most observant person I have ever met. His knowledge of nature was profound and he was blessed with a capacity to be intrigued by and enthusiastic over every occurrence and phenomenon no matter how insignificant.

In the unsteady truce prevailing, our task was to hold the narrow strip bounding the road to Jerusalem. To the north, one or two kilometres away, lay units of the Arab Legion based on a village Rada, a target for our guns. To the South we were hemmed in by Egyptian and Palestinian-Arab units. Forces of all parties were thinly scattered at strategic points and patrolling was an essential feature of the routine. The road was not yet completely safe and on numerous occasions the Arabs fired on it. These attacks necessitate the division of our troop and two of our guns were sent to cover the Burma Road from positions at Sara, the birth-place of Samson.

I remained at Abu Ghosh. Days passed pleasantly enough in perfect weather, ideal for open-air life. From our heights we could see Tel Aviv on clear days. Most of Israel stretched before the eye. The smallness of the new Jewish state was apparent. And yet one felt isolated. There was no mail and few English newspapers for the “Palestine Post” rarely arrived.

Our troop was attached to a Palmach brigade named "Harel." They were renowned for their exploits and we were proud to be with them. Palmach was the permanent, striking force of the underground Haganah. Boys and girls leaving the schools did national service for a year or two and many opted to serve in the Palmach. They were dominated by the spirit of "chalutzit" (pioneering) and wished to do constructive upbuilding. They trained on the settlements. There they were more secure and less likely to be discovered by the British army and police activities. They worked half a day and trained half a day. The work was not only an expression of their desire to create in a pioneering economy but also enabled them to pay their way - the Jewish authorities could not afford to keep full-time soldiers.

The Palmach training was severe and efficient. They came to know and understand the Palestinian terrain; they learnt to improvise and compensate for lack of arms and ammunition by ingenuity and courage.

Wingate, beloved in Israel, had played no small part in their training. During the Second World War members of the Palmach performed daring sabotage work in Europe, Africa and Asia. In the eventuality of the German armies succeeding in reaching Israel they had been trained to form an underground of sabotage.

When fighting broke out in Israel the Palmach bore the brunt. The cream of the youth fell. Young, enthusiastic, spirited, they fought against superior numbers and superior arms. They captured cities and villages, protected settlements and opened the road to Jerusalem.

Now, in September 1948, "Harel" contained few of its original members, whose graves dotted the countryside. Large numbers of new immigrants had filled the gaps but the old spirit and striking power were still evident.

The sabras of Harel were a queer bunch, different types. Those from the settlements and villages were hard and obstinate and tough. Their range of knowledge was narrow and prejudiced and the gist of their conversation consisted of reminiscences of friends and occasions. Their common background provided them with conversation. The world outside Israel was no concern of theirs.

I found it difficult to converse with them at any length. One had to create conversation and it was difficult to adjust oneself to their abrupt ways. Their sincerity was crystal-clear. There was no doubt in their minds and they were superbly confident.

Those from the cities were different. They had had more schooling and education; they were better read and interested in the world outside their own immediate sphere. One could talk to them about diverse things. Yet many of them sank into the rut of humdrum life, amidst excitement.

These youngsters had grown up too quickly, the hard way, amidst death and destruction. They took most things for granted. Some were genuinely tough. Others felt that they had to be - if one were a Palmachnik it was desirable to be tough. So they grew moustaches, handle-bar moustaches, and cultivated a slouch and a slang of their own. And they drove wildly in staff-cars and jeeps. I remember one girl particularly.

She was from Haifa and had probably been quiet and city-like. But her friends were tough. So she endeavoured to be tough. She shouted, was abrupt and rude. Her voice was hard and brusque and commanding.

What would these youngsters do when the war was over? Many would join a co-operative settlement - the life they liked. Some wanted to continue their studies, and the others? But I liked them. They were sincere and honest. And good fighters. I was pleased that my duties on observation enabled me to be with them a great deal, often for days on end. There was democracy in their ranks, comradeship, an elan, an esprit de corps. No snobbishness existed. From brigade commander to private all were treated as equals. There was no saluting or officer privileges. Everyone called everyone else by their first names no matter what the rank. The officers were young, capable and experienced. Their men followed them freely. And this freedom did not impair discipline. No complaints could be lodged against the fighting prowess of "Harel."

We had interesting chats in the reading room in the police station. We came from all over the world and told each other about our respective backgrounds. And we sang songs.

The girls in the Palmach were natural. No make-up was worn. But they were always neat. No fads of diet worried them and several were extremely stout. Others were very masculine particularly one Bulgarian girl who sang nostalgic songs in a husky voice.

Our troop did some training at Abu Ghosh. Each gun-number was not able to perform the duties of all the other numbers with efficiency, as good crews should be able to do. So there was gun-drill with gun-numbers alternating positions. One day I gave my first fire-orders in Hebrew and was extremely happy at the feat. My knowledge of this language was improving mainly due to my association with friends in the brigade. Dan still spoke English largely. We were often together for whenever I had a special task to do I managed to get permission for him to come along as well. He was our machine-gunner. We had a Spandau and I was his assistant besides my duties as "ack."

Lectures and practical demonstrations on the Spandau were given to members of the troop by Dan and since he knew little Hebrew I translated where he could not improvise with his knowledge of Yiddish.

Members of the troop were given a special first-aid course at the army hospital in the monastery and we acquired useful knowledge which we hoped we would never be called upon to use.

It was not all work and no play. Entertainments were provided at odd intervals.

One night there was an orchestral concert by the Jerusalem Police Band, held in the grounds of the monastery. The atmosphere was beautifully peaceful. Lightly waving trees, twinkling stars, the sweet sound of music and the timid, swaying conductor. Some silly fool in the audience disturbed the harmony by whistling during the overture to the "Barber of Seville."

Sometimes there were cinema performances at neighbouring settlements and camps where members of the brigade gathered. New immigrants, not knowing English or Hebrew, and not understanding the dialogue of American films, chattered to their hearts' content during its screening. Such a background of noise spoilt the reception of the films.

Once or twice army concert parties gave performances. Some of the troupes were good. Others overestimated themselves and tired with excessive, voluntary encores. Soldiers in our and other units went anywhere, even on foot, for a film or a concert irrespective of how many times they had witnessed these before.

Every soldier in my unit was a special character in his own right. A veritable League of Nations. All the commands and "official" transactions were in Hebrew, but regularly employed languages in private conversation included Yiddish, German, Romanian, Russian, Hungarian, Polish, English and Dutch.

Hausler, the signaller, was from Holland. I understood his Dutch and he understood my Afrikaans. Like the majority of the unit he had been in a German concentration camp during the war. Several soldiers bore the tell-tale branding of concentration camp numbers on their arms. But they never spoke about those days. We used to live with our thoughts in the future for the past carried too many tragic memories.

Eli Harari, another "ack", was young and keen as mustard. His greatest ambition was to be an officer although, in principle, he disagreed with the institution of officers. He knew a little English and whenever strangers were in the vicinity tried to air his few words. Walking up to me, he'd slap me on the back and say: "How you" Goot?"

Chernik, the third "ack", knew English well and possessed a small English "library" which was a well of learning in the isolation of Abu Ghosh. Because he had been taken off an officer's course he was bitter.

Frischman was a married man with two children. He came from Czechoslovakia and had visited South Africa during the war as a member of the Imperial Forces. I learnt a lot about Palestine from his stories and accounts of the diverse jobs he had held. He never had a decent wash all the weeks at Abu Ghosh although whenever we returned from showers in the Police-station he spoke of following our example. But he limited himself to a few drops from his water-bottle.

Frischman had a sickening habit of expectorating everywhere, in the tent, while at meals. It was a habit common to many of the unit and one which sickened Danny and me. Most of the new immigrants expectorated excessively without any hygienic consideration and irrespective of where they were. I thought of South Africa where the practice is generally forbidden in public and punishable by a fine of five pounds.

One had to be understanding in one's attitude to former inmates of D.P. camps. They had spent their formative years in uncongenial environments without any training or sets of values. One could understand and condone their unhygienic habits but one still felt sick and disgusted.



The nights and sometimes the hours of day were noisy around the Judean hills. The rumbling of cannon could be heard rolling in from the distant Negenv and the staccato rattle and colourful display sounded and flashed from Jerusalem. Time dragged on. U.N.O met and discussed. Jerusalem had few peaceful nights. From Abu Ghosh we were interested spectators. Some nights 'planes flew overhead and shortly afterwards the air-raid siren sent its stream of noise through the night from Jerusalem. No bombs were dropped. The uncertainty of the defective peace was fatiguing and irritating. One never knew what would happen next.

The days were deceptively peaceful. Ripe fruit on the trees and clear skies and a magnificent view. And the nights noisy and the road deserted.

One afternoon, the day after our arrival, Dan and I were picking figs when we saw two girls a few trees away. I noticed that they were listening to us and understanding. One spoke up with an American accent: "Where are you from?" We answered her questions and asked ours in turn. She was an American girl who had been a student at the Hebrew University. Now she was in the army nursing services. Her friend was a Sabra, also a nurse, who knew English well. Both were at a hospital in Jerusalem and had utilised their few hours' leave to get into the country. So now we knew someone in Jerusalem.

From Abu Ghosh there was a good view of the outskirts of the Holy City and I regularly asked for permission to go there. I had a burning desire to see Jerusalem and meet its inhabitants.

Finally, A few days after our arrival at Abu Ghosh, Dan and I wheedled leave to go to Jerusalem. We had a pass from 5 p.m. that afternoon to midnight - not much time considering the lack of transport. We hitched a ride on a ramshackle truck loaded with grapes and a bunch of gnarled, slovenly dressed, Shephardi Jews, Arabic looking and very friendly. They offered us grapes. It was a slow trip which enabled us to survey the surroundings. Famous hills, guarding the route to the Holy City. Contested for centuries by Crusaders and Saracens and recently bitterly fought for by Jews and Arabs. We entered Jerusalem through Machaneh Yehuda, a dingy, crammed quarter, a veritable slum. Our grape-pickers lived there.

Ragged, dirty kids; muddy, dank, evil-smelling drains; washing flapping in the breeze. Further on busy, market-stalls, jostling mixture of the old world and the new; pious men in black garments and forelocks, little children with forelocks and rosy-checked faces and skull-caps. And on the market-stalls an abundance of fruit and vegetables. Gone are the days of the siege.

We continue. The surroundings become more modern, the people better dressed. The streets are busy and the children play in the dwindling sun. Uniformed men and women everywhere. Shops well-stocked with necessities and luxuries. Books in all languages, chocolate and sweets and children's toys, cigarettes and liquors. Clothes and dress materials. A siege seems remote. Even now it is difficult to bring in goods over the rugged, lightly-held Burma Road. The people are happy and contented.

Twisted girders and shattered walls, vacant gaping holes in buildings. There had been an explosion in Ben Yehuda Street and there are ruins. No, this was not the work of

the Arabs, not a result of their shelling. It happened in mandatory days. The impressive Jewish Agency building also bears the scars of a former outrage. But now the gates are closely guarded. Ravage and destruction in Jerusalem, but not from Arab shells.

To me the Arab shelling seems to have been most ineffective. Here and there little craters and wounds in houses and buildings. Building regulations laid down that new buildings in Jerusalem had to be faced with stone. They say unfriendly authorities promulgated the regulations to make building more expensive and handicap development. A blessing in disguise. Shells have done a little damage. If the buildings of Jerusalem had been like the flimsy buildings of Tel Aviv much damage would have been caused. On the outskirts of New Jerusalem, near the Old City wall, it is a different story. Destruction and ruin and a deadly quiet of no-man's-land, disturbed only by the whine of snipers' bullets and the screech of shells. An attenuated no-man's-land over which the Old City looms.

And from its confines the steel of hate flashes and whistles into the new city. Everyday there are casualties of the truce. Brick walls and barricades to screen the New City from the deadly missiles. Through slits the ramparts and ancient walls of the Old City are visible.

I am in Jerusalem. A dream come true. Children's voices and the slow noise of slow traffic. And no water runs from open taps. Water is rationed and scarce - carefully divided.

Up on Mount Scopus the University and the Hadassah hospital; in between the Arabs cutting us off and barring our movement.

In Katamon, where wealthy Arabs once sipped cocktails on terraces and planned for their peasants to drive the Jews into the sea, Jewish refugees from the Old City now live. They are ill at ease in their new mansions. They have grown up in narrow lanes and dark rooms. Their men-folk are prisoners-of-wars in Transjordan.

It becomes dark as the sun sinks behind the hills. Black-out. No light. People go home and the city is quiet as death and Dan and I are strangers in its midst.

It is no easy task to find the hospital where our nurse-friends live. They are pleased to see us. They work hard and long hours and study for their nursing examinations. Ten sleeping in one room-there are many patients who need place.

Jochevet and Dina show us more of Jerusalem. We go to Bevingrad, the former British security zone. Buildings looming in the night. The shops and offices are still sealed as in mandatory days. Fierce fighting took place for this vital zone which dominates New Jerusalem. The girls tell how the British shot indiscriminately from here down some of Jerusalem's thorough fares. The Anglo Palestine Bank buildings, partially burnt and pock marked. Not too far from the Old City. Jagged edges of masonry and brick work, barbed wire and dug-outs.

In another direction to more pleasant Rechavia, a residential quarter, pleasant, verdant surroundings. Modern houses and blocks of flats.

“Would you like to see a Yeshiva?” Jochevet asks.

We are interested to see a training college of the orthodox Jews.

Every few minutes martial noises are heard. Scattered and dispersed. Women are not allowed to enter a Yeshiva so our escorts remain in the porch.

We pass through the black-out curtains. Murky rooms lit by candle-light. Several rooms. Flickering lights and open books on the tables and people poring over them in muttered study, sitting, and standing, swaying and bending. Young and Old. Bearded men and forelocked youngsters. A remote world. So unreal in times like these. Outside war and violence and men manning the dug-outs. Inside quiet and reflection and men praying. We shake hands with the students. Flabby, soft, girlish hands. Cold and clammy. Red-cheeked youngsters, tender years. One young man claims he can talk English. His friends persuade him to talk. He is dressed in working clothes and a peaked cap, a contrast to his black-coated friends.

We return to the girls. The air is noisier. The previous night was bad, hours of concentrated barrage and counter-barrage.

Dina says she hopes to-night will be quieter. The people in Jerusalem are brave, but tired and restless. The siege is over and the Arabs are held but they have many guns and there is neither peace nor rest. We go to a café. Bright lights behind curtains. Dan and I have not much money. Coffee and cakes and high prices. After paying we have little left. Strange worlds in the Holy City, war and shelling, contemplation and prayer, coffee and lights and money.

Some Palmachniks are gone to Abu Ghosh. The girl from Haifa says they have place in their limousine, the latest model. We say good-bye to Jochevet and Dina and are on our way.

The driver must be sixteen or seventeen. He is in a hurry. After that I went to Jerusalem fairly regularly. Sometimes I found quiet, sometimes I found heavy shelling and people indoors and troubled. When the guns opened up the streets cleared in a twinkle and the cinemas emptied and a hush hyphenated the explosions. So people lived and died and defended their city.

Once I went to Jerusalem with Ravlevai and Guya. We visited some of the look-outs and surveyed the Arab positions. That day I saw the 75 millimetre gun, which had been sent from Herzlia to Jerusalem, just before Mike's troop had left for the Galilee. The Arabs had not found its whereabouts yet and the Jews returned the Arab fire with impunity. A lucky gun, unlike our two in the Galilee. Never did an Arab shot find them.

I saw most of Jerusalem that afternoon and had a good view of the Arab lines. Names of places made famous during the siege. It was a strange war in Jerusalem. A city almost surrounded. In one street Jews, in another Arabs. A fortress city. Most of the soldiers on duty in Jerusalem were inhabitants of Jerusalem. For non-combatants the anxiety of having dear ones fighting nearby; for combatants the anxiety for dear ones

under Arab shelling behind the lines. Yet the Jews of Jerusalem knew what they were fighting for. They saw their own homes and families threatened and responded gallantly.

At Artillery H.Q. in the basement of the Jewish Agency buildings I had a pleasant surprise. I met Len, now second-in-command of the Artillery in Jerusalem. Ravlevai and Guya were somewhat astounded at the way Len revealed all the information to me, introduced me to all the officers and showed me all the maps and plans. That was typical of Len. He did not care about preserving the sanctity of an H.Q. My knowledge that our artillery was hopelessly outnumbered in Jerusalem by the Arab artillery was confirmed by definite data. Len told Ravlevai that he would like me to be transferred to Jerusalem but Ravlevai refused to agree, saying that he wanted me. Len and I spoke Afrikaans to each other. Perhaps it was rude to speak a “foreign” language but it enabled us to speak freely. On Len’s request Ravlevai agreed to allow me to remain over in Jerusalem that evening.

While I was at H.Q. telephone communication was established with Tel Aviv for the first time in many months.

It was a “Shabbat” and citizens were taking a stroll in the streets.

Len and I visited two girls and made an appointment to take them to the cinema that evening.

It was getting noisy when we arrived to fetch them. On the way, in Len’s little car, we saw the inhabitants clearing the streets in a hurry. By habit everyone crouched, involuntarily almost, at the sound of shells even if they fell far away. The Arabs were shelling quite heavily and the mothers of the girls refused to allow them out. So we had a little party at the home of one of them.

Len took me back to Abu Ghosh that night. It would have been impossible for me to have returned otherwise for trucks and cars rarely travelled from Jerusalem at night. Stringent transport regulations were in existence and Len had to obtain a special permit to travel to Abu Ghosh. My conscience bothered me somewhat for my journey was not exactly essential but Len insisted and not being eager to walk home, I acquiesced.

The following day Len ‘phoned me from Jerusalem and I took the call in Ravlevai’s tent. We spoke in Afrikaans. Len wanted to know whether I could get him any grapes or figs, a trivial matter which did not warrant the call. When I had put the receiver down Ravlevai enquired whether Len had broached the matter of my transference to Jerusalem. I replied that Len had not even mentioned it. Probably Ravlevai doubted my word but I could not reveal that we had merely discussed grapes and figs.

Two unhappy incidents occurred in the area covered by our regiment. On September 22<sup>nd</sup>, a Jewish convoy, under U.N.O. auspices, was on its way to Jerusalem along the main highway when it was attacked by the Arab Legion at Latrun. Four people were killed including a woman and an American civilian visitor. A U.N.O. officer had pleaded with the Arab Legionnaires to spare them, but in vain. In my opinion this was

cold-blooded murder for according to the truce agreement the Arabs were to guarantee the safety of the convoy.

Two days later a Jewish-held height at Midya, near Lydda, was captured by Arabs and re-taken by the Jews in counter-attack. It was found that the Jewish prisoners, captured in the first attack, had been killed, decapitated and mutilated.

Count Bernadotte's report had been published. It made unpleasant reading and was a disappointing document. He proposed a smaller Israel, refused Jerusalem to the Jews and wanted Haifa internationalised.

These incidents and the report were embittering.

I thought of the people of New Jerusalem. And it was suggested that they be denied their freedom!

I thought of Neve Ilan which I had visited and which would not be in the Jewish State, in terms of the report.

Neve Ilan was a communal settlement situated on a hill near Abu Ghosh. A steep climb brought one to the few bungalows and tents dotting the rocky ground which comprised the "meshek". Shelters, storage-cellars and fuel-reservoirs had been hewn out of the rocks. A drill enabled the settlers to evacuate two meters deep. Very little was cultivated. The earth was being reclaimed and cleared and the settlers were paid for their reclamation work. Most of the settlers had been with the Maquis underground in France, some were from Holland, others from Trieste. Long Island Jewry had taken a special interest in their progress and sent regular gifts of equipment. Neve Ilan was a stronghold and withstood many a siege and attack, although completely surrounded by Arab villages. 'Planes and artillery were used against them.

There were casualties, wounded and dead. But they stood firm. The lesson of Neve Ilan and the few other settlements along the road led to the construction, at a later date, of new settlements flanking the Burma Road as a protective measure. The war had taught that a life-line must be protected and that strategic settlements were the best ways to do this.

One morning a convoy came along the road and stopped at Abu Ghosh for breakfast. An artillery convoy with guns, new ones of 75 millimetre calibre. Field-guns and light, not like our three purpose, six ton, 75 millimetres. They were on their way to Jerusalem to reinforce our meagre artillery strength. Another happy and auspicious occasion. More weapons. Now the Arab guns would receive a deadlier answer.

The Jewish New Year dawned and the army chose its occasion for our brigade to move from Abu Ghosh to cover the Burma Road more strongly.

All the units had gathered a diverse assortment of equipment and furniture and trucks were crammed to capacity. Before our departure the priest and nuns came down from their quarters to reclaim the belongings which they had lent us. I returned a wide, soft, spring mattress and a book-case. The articles were handed over in the friendliest of

spirits. The priest asked so many questions that Hausler, who spoke French and provided the answers, was told to desist, lest he reveal military information.

Before moving we went to Sara to join the other half of the troop at a party to celebrate Rosh Hashana, the New Year. We travelled by a round-about route to avoid observation and gathered round a lantern in a dip out of view of the enemy. It was the first New Year in a Jewish State for two thousand years and a fine close spirit reigned. Sketches and songs and speeches. Ravlevai gave a stirring address. Here present, he said, were people from all over the world, many from countries where they had lived in luxury. This had been a year of victory. Nothing was ready-made in Israel. Everything had to be built and demanded immigration, pioneering and settlement.

Nor did we forget those who had lost their lives for Israel. The night was silent and the sky clear. Jackal calls disturbed the peace. Songs in Hebrew and Russian rose. The enemy did not intervene.

But the food, for a Jewish festival like Rosh Hashanah, was poor. One sardine sandwich, one biscuit and a little wine.

On the second day of the festival prayer services were held at a neighbouring kibbutz, Kiryat Anavim, and in an Arab house at Abu Ghosh. Ravlevai, Guya and I went to reconnoitre gun-positions, spent the day bumping and jostling in the Judean hills and returned past ten that night. It was difficult finding a suitable position. The roads were bad and there was no water at most places.

Deir el Hawa, which I had noticed before, appeared to worry Ravlevai. He pronounced the name with awe. It was a height held by the Arabs overlooking the Burma Road. Passage on the latter would never be safe until the former had been captured.

We decided that Sara was the best position and on Tuesday, October 5<sup>th</sup>, we moved thither with guns and impedimenta.

## **Chapter Eleven.**

### **“Securing the Burma Road”.**

As Sara I realised why Samson had been renowned for his strength. One must have been tough to have survived in a place so rugged, desolate, stony and dry.

We pitched camp amongst some fig-trees (with atrophied fruit) at the foot of the hill of the ruined village. Water was a problem for there was none in the immediate vicinity and supplies had to be carted daily, a fatiguing and time-absorbing task. Keeping clean occupied much of one's time. Dan and I found a well about half-an-hour's walk from our guns and we tried to pay it as frequent visits as possible. With a bucket that bordered on a sieve we gathered the icy-cold water in stone receptacles and bathed.

Sara village was a pile of ruins with the gaunt arches of some broken buildings still standing. The remaining rafters were rotting and a musty smell hung in the air where dirt and dust scattered with the wind.

A derelict ghost-town. Remains of shops and a little low drug-store with mortar and pestle and bottles and tins. An abundance of caves and empty, cold ovens. Books littered the floors of the dilapidated school house. Dan, in his exploring, found some good books including a 1948 edition of Sinclair Lewis' "Kingsblood Royal," and Bennet Cerf's "Joke Book!"

Sara was off the regular routes and as dead as a dodo. At night we had no lights or diversions and the only alternative, when not on duty, was to sleep.

Ravlevai, now nicknamed "Tom Mix," by virtue of a broad Stetson that he wore, substantially increased the number of guards and arranged for us to go on patrol with the infantry. He was very apprehensive lest the Arabs managed to sneak in through the large gaps in our lines. Indeed, if the Arabs had been adept at commando warfare, they could have caused considerable havoc for our forces were few in number and covered a large area.

While at Sara I spent most of my time with the Palmach, doing observation duty. Our "nest" was a stone house overlooking the valley around Hartuv (through which the railway-line ran from Lydda to Jerusalem) and presenting a commanding view of the enemy lines and positions. Its only drawback was the fact that it was conspicuous and the Arabs probably knew the purpose for which we were using it. Below lay the Arab villages of Deiraban and further away Beit Jimal containing a large school of agriculture, run by Italian mission arises, and housed in a fortress-like stone building. Nearer were the historic ruins of Beth Shemes where the holy ark had once been housed in biblical times.

My main task was to find the Arab guns so that we could neutralise them. A certain six-pounder, anti-tank gun was in the habit of making things uncomfortable for our troops. We found what we judged was the location and let them have a few shells.

It was interesting watching the Arabs and their movements and feeling that they were oblivious of the fact that they were being watched. But it was tiring and a strain on the eyes. Being cooped up in the observation-post for most of the daylight hours made it difficult to find an opportunity for a thorough wash. My comrades, young Palmachnik members, were a friendly, cheerful and unselfish bunch, who gave me every assistance.

One day a Piper Cub of the Israeli Air Force spent most of the day overhead. Its purr was comforting. Then on another day a Spitfire came over zooming and diving and behaving most suspiciously. Flying low, peering and searching. We did not know whether it was ours or theirs - the markings were not Egyptian as far as we could see nor did they appear Israeli. I never solved the problem. But it woke us up and a frantic digging of slit-trenches followed with Ravlevai hurrying on the work.

On the afternoon of Saturday, October 9<sup>th</sup>, I obtained some leave to Tel Aviv from 3.30 p.m. that afternoon to 11 a.m. the next morning. I was excited and gay like a little child who has received a new toy. It was a welcome break. Getting to Tel Aviv took close on four hours of hitching and involved several lifts and long delays, because there was little traffic on a Saturday. I arrived in Tel Aviv coated with dust. Sara and Tel Aviv were poles apart. I was unattuned to lights and noise and crowded cafes and streets. The atmosphere rasped and annoyed. Why did we have to live in discomfort and isolation while thousands danced and sang and made money and spent it?

I appreciated the good food, the warm corn on the cob and the "falafel" (an Arab dish) sold by street vendors.

The following day I went shopping. First I bought "Palestine Posts" for the past fortnight. The latest one informed me that Jerusalem had been bombed and the Egyptians had launched a big attack in the Negev with guns and 'planes.

At the post-office I tried to buy some stamps. The queues were disorganised, inchoate and noisy. I did not buy the stamps but left the post-office in a hurry. If this was civilisation give me Sara!

I hitched back, first stage to Rehovot, in time to witness an incident. A soldier, impatient, shouted at a truck to stop and take him. The driver ignored his request and drove on. Enraged, the soldier fired a burst of bullets with his sten-gun at the wheels of the truck. Military police arrested him immediately.

An army bus stopped and the driver said that he would only take passengers who were going direct to Jerusalem. I clambered aboard. I knew Israel sufficiently well to know that he would stop where I wanted him to. He did. On my way to Sara I delayed at the well, which Dan and I had found, and had bath. I returned several hours late.

That night there was a practice alarm. And shortly after the real thing followed. The Egyptians were reported to have taken Rafat, a village on our flank, and there was



supposed to be no one between the guns and the Egyptians. Once again frantic digging and hasty erection of sand-bagged emplacements. Dan dashed up the hill with the Spandau to look out for enemy aeroplanes.

Nothing happened, Rafat was still in our hands. It had been a false report. I spent most of that night and most of the next day at the observation-post and was dog-tired.

The following night was the eve of the Day of Atonement, generally observed as a fast day and inaugurated by a good meal. For us it was introduced by a bite of sardines and cheese and the majority did not fast the next day. Units in the field were given food to eat if they wished. Units at base were not provided with food.

From October 12<sup>th</sup> the Intelligence Officer of the brigade asked me to do more comprehensive observation which could be of great assistance to him. I requested that Dan be allowed to assist me and Ravlevai agreed. We noted and recorded, in my faulty Hebrew, every movement of the enemy. We watched them parading in the village, building fortifications, eating, coming and going. We also spent hours at night observing flashes of their artillery and mortars and taking compass-bearings to them.

Soon we moved to an alternate observation-post in a cave, nearer the enemy. From the darkness of the cave we could see without being seen. We crept in at dawn and crawled out at night. Our main fear was the prospect of being cut off by Arab patrols. It was awkward staying cooped up the whole day and a strain on the nerves and the eyes, but the Intelligence Officer was highly satisfied with our information so we persisted.

On Wednesday, 13 October, leave was cancelled in the brigade and a stand-by proclaimed. Troops moved in as reinforcements. The following day the commander-in-chief of the Israeli artillery paid a visit and the stand-by was intensified to an "extraordinary stand-by." Something was going to happen. Tension and anticipation. Anything to end the deadlock.

To the rear of Sara the Burma road was being widened and asphalted. Workers had been conscripted from Rehovot, Jerusalem and other areas. The very old and the very young - all above or below military age. Bearded elders and youngsters who did not need to shave. Labouring in the sun carrying the stones, pouring molten asphalt. They came in lorries at day break and left as the sun went down. An inspiring sight. The macadamised strip grew and grew and grew. Progress. Hurry before the winter rains. And now an attack might come so that we could widen the corridor. And Deir el Hawa, Ravlevai's bugbear? Time would show. Friday, October 15<sup>th</sup>, revealed which way the wind would blow.

I went to bathe in the well and when I returned Guya informed that we were to open fire at 4p.m. that afternoon. We were twenty minutes late and the four guns fired 49 rounds in all at Deiraban, Beit Jimal and the cross-roads near Beth Shemes. The Arabs were shaken up and took cover in a hurry. Apparently ours was a feint attack to draw the Egyptian forces into our area and away from the Negev, where the main Israeli attack was to be launched. An Israeli ultimatum had been given to the Egyptians to comply with U.N.O.'s demands that the road to the Negev be opened to Jewish transport.

Perhaps we were defying U.N.O but if they were unable to provide justice the Jews might be justified in taking the law into their own hands and enforcing compliance of the truce agreement.

We fired until seven o'clock at a slow speed. It was tame, like a harmless game, watching the shells falling amongst them and getting little in return. That night reports arrived saying that the Egyptians had attacked an Israeli convoy in the Negev and that heavy fighting was expected.

Had the Israeli convoy been a decoy? Did Israel wish to force a showdown? The evidence seemed to indicate that the Negev campaign had been anticipated and planned. And we saw nothing wrong in it all. For weeks the Egyptians had been launching attacks on Jewish settlements, with impunity. Such a situation could not continue. Now the Egyptians would receive a taste of their own medicine. And they did. They were hard hit.

On our front things were not too exiting compared to what happened in the Negev, but our part fitted into the general strategy and was to have vital and important consequences.

Contrary to expectation Saturday was quiet. The silence worried. It was unreal and suspicious.

The following morning early we opened up again and had some shell burst in return. From the Negev gun-flashes were visible and the under tones of battle audible. Great happenings, but we had no news. Sunday was quiet around Sara but further south the road to the Negev was opened by the Israeli army. We mounted our Spandau on the hill as a precaution against infiltrators. Wild shots and frantic voices rent the night. It turned out to be a case of mistaken identities and trigger-happy fingers - but no casualties.

Monday afternoon we took two guns to Rafat, fired at Bureij, an Arab village, and dashed back to Sara. We hoped that the Arabs, receiving fire from many quarters, would overestimate the number of our guns.

Great things happened that night. Monday 18<sup>th</sup>. "Harel", our brigade, attacked on a wide front in a carefully planned and brilliantly executed manoeuvre. The organisation was perfect and the scattered signal network functioned without a flaw flashing orders and relaying progress reports.

Len came from Jerusalem to direct the artillery and brought some French 120 millimetre, heavy mortars. They concentrated their attention on Deir el Hawa. Our guns added their bit, small shells more demoralising than damaging. We had our targets perfectly ranged. Enemy positions were known and plotted to a tee. The work in the observation-posts reaped dividends. And "King David" was in action, the pride of Israel's backroom boys. A massive, home-made, improvised mortar with a small range but a powerful punch. It terrorised the Arabs flinging heavy explosives with vehemence, noise and colour. A magnificent spectacle lighting the surrounding area

with white, red, blue, orange and violet colours, roaring and coughing. Reverberating through the hills.

Everywhere a constant clatter of the other weapons, dots and dashes of tracers, the whumph of light mortars and the steady pounding of the 120's. At the cross-roads near Beth Shemes the armoured cars joined in. One hit a mine but was only punctured. The others raced on into the night and up the road to Beit Jimal.

Compared to war in Europe that evening was in miniature, but as well planned. Places Dan and I had only observed from a distance now came to life. Ours. Newly captured. All over in a few hours. Deir el Hawa and Deiraban and Beth Shemes and Beit Jimal all ours. A great victory. Strategic points, well-situated and wide spaces, ours.

We had one man killed, an officer, and a few wounded.

News from the Negev said that good progress had been made and that our guns were shelling Gaza. Our air-force held the mastery in the Negev and heavily raided the Egyptians.

Beit Jimal was a massive fortress-like building. Good soldiers could have held out there indefinitely. The brigade members were excited and happy. The whole of Southern Palestine and even Egypt lay before us. It was a new army, better equipped, stronger. There was talk of capturing Bethlehem; the air was alive with reports.

Beit Jimal had been evacuated by the Arabs in a hurry and food and other articles were scattered everywhere. The tired Jewish troops were not too tidy and their empty tins and uneaten food lay about. But Beit Jimal had water and showers and flush-toilets and electricity. Lovely! I found a bed. The rooms had the musty smell of past occupants. It was more comfortable to sleep outside. Flies and insects were abundant and as a precaution I sprinkled myself with D.D.T. powder.

The days were hot and we were tired. For the moment the impetus of the attack slowed and stopped. Ahead, three kilometres away, lay Beit Nattif of evil name. Its inhabitants had been very hostile to the Jews and several months before has assisted in way-laying and massacring a relief party of Jews on its way to Kfar Etzion.

Beit Nattif rankled in the memory. The soldiers cursed it and were impatient to conquer and punish. Beit Nattif was captured on Wednesday, October 29<sup>th</sup>, under the interested survey of newspaper correspondents and several high-ranking officers. The 120's were excellent laying shells accurately. They raised a lot of smoke and dust in the day-time and A1, their Canadian commander, was in good form. Our guns let them have it too. I've never seen people run as fast as those Arabs did once we started closing in. There was almost no opportunity to take prisoners. We had no casualties and that night we feasted on captured Arab chicken. In Beit Nattif we found articles from Kfar Etzion.

By taking Beit Nattif we cut off the Egyptians in the Hebron and Bethlehem areas from their bases and from Beersheba. We cut the road to Bethlehem from the West and increased Arab supply problems.

We were itching to advance. The previous evening there had been a plan to attack in conjunction with a simultaneous move southwards from Jerusalem. The latter move had misfired.

The correspondents gave us news. Mount Zion, in Jerusalem, had been captured by Israeli forces, the Egyptians had been cut off in three places and the Security Council had ordered an immediate cease-fire. In our enthusiasm we were impatient of U.N.O.. Invading armies of neighbouring countries had no right in the Jewish state. I wrote in my diary; "If only U.N.O. will lay off."

That night we did not leave the Arabs in peace. Turning our attention westward the mortars dropped a few salvos on Zaccaria, another Arab village. Indications pointed to the enemy having evacuated the village but we wished to make sure. There was no point in our capturing Zaccaria until we held the surrounding hills. An hour or so later I saw our 'planes bombing nearby Beit Jibrin.

At Beit Jimal the water situation became deplorable. There was no longer unlimited supplies of water so instead of rationing what there was some unwise individuals sealed up the washrooms and toilets. Soon the only water available was a muddy mixture from the well. Such inefficiency was aggravating. The out-door toilets were in a terrible condition. Rather than take a chance I drank no water. Our representations brought no results for some time. On the establishment of units in the Israeli army no provision was made for hygiene orderlies.

The priests and some of their flock had remained behind at Beit Jimal and lived in a separate part of the building. Whenever we revealed any piece of artillery we hurriedly ushered them indoors. One young Christian Arab working in the monastery spoke a good English and seemed intelligent. He did not like the Moslem Arabs and derided the primitive ways of the fellaheen.

On October 21<sup>st</sup>, Jewish forces captured Beersheba and on the 22<sup>nd</sup> we heard that a cease fire was supposed to operate from 3p.m. that afternoon.

This news was confirmed the following day, but the Egyptians continued bluffing their people that Beersheba was still in their hands.

Late that night Guya asked me to accompany a driver to Deir el Hawa to contact two of our guns which had gone there. The driver could not read maps so I had to guide him. The road was bumpy and corrugated and three-quarters of the way up the steep climb to Dier el Hawa it was found that the battery was flat. We pushed and the truck nearly toppled off the winding road, when some rocks on the edge gave way. The truck stuck. No vehicles passed. While one soldier walked on to Deir el Hawa an attempt was made to build an extension to the road. We tried to start the truck by pushing it backwards but the turns in the road made this impossible and it stack several times. We pushed from 11p.m. that night till 3a.m. the next morning. Our shoulders were bruised and our legs sore. At last a jeep arrived and solved our problem. Our friend had returned from Deir el Hawa to report that the guns had left. Their crews re-joined us that morning. They had been about four kilometres from Bethlehem which we might perhaps have captured. Again a technical hitch interfered. The Jerusalem artillery, who were to assist, could not be contacted in time.

I unexpectedly received twenty-four hours leave to Tel Aviv, one of the advantageous results of the cease-fire.

A blackout reigned in Tel Aviv. At the cinema there was a “short” of scenes of Lake Como set to a background of Italian music. And the previous evening I’d been on Deir el Hawa.

On my return to the unit, ensconced at Beit Jimal, I found peace and routine regulations; shaving each morning, a haircut every ten days (where?) and the like.

We shared the guard duties with the Palmach. One night I went on in the early hours of the morning. My fellow guard could talk no Hebrew, nor English. He knew a little Yiddish so we carried on an abrupt monosyllabic conversation for several minutes. Then I asked him where he came from. He said that he was from Belgium and since he knew Flemish, which is very similar to Afrikaans, we had a common medium of expression. There was a section from Belgium and I met the others the following morning. Mahal volunteers. Amongst themselves they spoke French. There were also three girls one of whom had been educated in England and spoke a good English. These Belgian Jews were enthusiastic and cultured. One of them had had a lengthy conversation with a priest from Beit Jimal in which the latter had said that the Arab troops had been much better than the Jews. Only the four Egyptian officers had entered the school grounds and the soldiers had been made to sleep outside. “They had been perfect gentlemen.” Now the Jewish soldiers were given free run of the school. He failed to realise that the Israeli army was run on more democratic lines.

The priests were by no means confined and were always searching and snooping to find us amiss. Ample rations were given them, guards were set over their well-stocked stores and they did a roaring trade by selling wine to the soldiers.

The military situation was very fluid in our area. Officially there was a cease-fire but the Arabs were voluntarily shortening their lines and evacuating villages and we took advantage of the situation and moved in.

Once I went on a reconnaissance with Ravlevai. He had a wooden sword which he used to test the road for mines. Not that it was effective but such mines as we found were so poorly laid that it was easy to spot them. Zaccaria was deserted, but suddenly a little Arab child ran out of a house and dashed away in fright like a hunted animal. Railway sleepers littered the ground. The Arabs had pulled up the railway-line and stolen sleepers in case they might be of use. Further on we were somewhat confused. Miles and miles of space and we did not know which was theirs and which was ours. An Arab on a camel rode up the saddle of a nearby hill and was silhouetted on the skyline. The village of Ajjur was also in our hands. A book in Yiddish from Kfar Etzion was found there. Our soldiers held the height overlooking Ajjur. Kfar Etzion was visible in the distance. Bureij was also in Israel hands. The foe had lost no time.

Chickens; emaciated, Arab chickens were abundant but they were thickly covered with Fleas. It was difficult to even enter an Arab village without collecting fleas on one’s person. I preferred to deny myself tasty (if tough) poultry if I could avoid the fleas. But it was a collective matter. The fleas jumped with remarkable agility and if

anyone near you had them the chances were they would jump on to you too. Coming in on leave to Tel Aviv from the field there was always a dread that one would, unwittingly, carry fleas into a nice civilian house. I made a habit of dusting myself with D.D.T and sprinkling layers of the powder over my blankets and clothes. It was a grim struggle.

In the Galilee the “Arab Liberation Army” of Fawzi Kaukji was busy looking for trouble, attacking the Israeli lines, snipping at Jewish traffic and generally making a nuisance of themselves.

It was rumoured that forces of the Arab Legion had taken over the triangle formed by Beit Jibrin, Bethlehem and Jerusalem and that they were thus facing us.

Guya was more loquacious than usual one morning. He gave an account of his life in Israel where he had been since 1935. At one time or another everyone unburdened themselves. Guya said he hadn't led a normal life since 1936. There had been riots and more riots, slumps and depressions, war and now more war. One must try to make life normal he said - marry and have children and snatch what normality one could from the busy tide of events.

At this time many marriages were solemnised in Israel, a soldier about to marry obtained seven days' leave and a gratuity of ten pounds.

During the morning of Thursday, October 28<sup>th</sup> we sent a party to Beit Nattif to scavenge for what they could find. Some soldiers loaded half a truck-load with grain and collared several chickens. Meanwhile our new officer, Alex a sabra, and I went further forward to the advanced infantry position overlooking the road running from Beit Jibrin to Behlehem. The enemy positions were a short distance away and we had a Czech Bizet, a heavy machine-gun, trained on them.

We saw some Arabs moving around and the machine-gunner opened up. One fell. The others ran for cover. Our three inch mortars fired and a mortar shell fell smack on a position where two had taken cover. Three of our armoured cars were due on patrol and the Bizet had to protect their advance. They rode along the highway, slowly and elegantly. Arab machine-guns opened up. Bullets pitted harmlessly against the armour. For short bursts the guns were turned on us. The armoured cars arrived safely.

We returned to Beit Jimal. I was informed that I had some leave. The same evening I was in Tel Aviv. That morning the situation had been so different - a Bizet and mortars and enemy casualties. Israel is a small country.

On the way to Tel Aviv the soldiers tried to sell the grain. Our “agents” were terrified of giving anyone a lift in case the nature of the load should be revealed. After I left them at Rehovot they sold the grain for more than one hundred pounds. Technically it was an illegal black-market deal. All field units engaged in similar activities and most divided the money from the spoils amongst their members. Several days later we had a meeting to determine the disposal of our assets. Some wanted the money shared amongst the soldiers of the troop. They were in the minority and we formed a unit

fund to assist members and their families in needy and deserving circumstances. This I felt in some-way mitigated the gravity of our offence.

In Tel Aviv everyone was enthusiastic about the victories in the Negev and particularly the role played by the air-force.

Possible sanctions from U.N.O. tempered the celebrations. I met many friends in Tel Aviv. I also discovered that there were several whom I would never see again. There is rarely warfare without any casualties.

In Tel Aviv there was a family, mother, father and son, named Wurman, who treated me very well and were what might be called my "Foster-parents in Israel". I had met their son at Pardess Katz where he had been attached to assist us because he knew English. Through him I met his parents and visited them regularly enjoying many a delicious meal at their home in a pleasant family atmosphere.

Originally from Germany, the Wurmans had come to Israel shortly before the advent of the Nazis and were a cultured and charming family. Many other English-speaking soldiers enjoyed the hospitality of their home. Eli, their son, was an only child and according to army regulations, being an only child and minor, was not supposed to participate in any actions. But being a spirited youth, imbued with the Israeli spirit, he tried his best to land up wherever fighting was the toughest. He generally succeeded and in doing so gave his mother and father anxious hours and days. He was in the Negev fighting and his parents had been very concerned and worried.

In Tel Aviv I learnt that little ships were "illegally" carrying refugees to Israel from the Cyprus detention camps.

On my return to Beit Jimal I visited some friends at Rehovot. One of them, a married man with three children, had been suddenly conscripted for the Negev campaign, given hurried training and sent into action with mortars. He had been in heavy fighting. I had thought that now that the army was organised married men were no longer conscripted for short, limited periods.

Back at Beit Jimal there was that tension and expectancy in the air which one was easily able to scent. Intangible and based on fancies and rumours but generally proving the adage that there is never smoke without a fire.

In the Galilee our troops had replied to Fawzi Kaukji's taunts by routing his forces in a short, forceful campaign of two days duration, with very few casualties sustained on our side.

Len arrived and told me that there was to be some more fighting in our area. First we would probe the enemy defences and then strike. Two guns were left in reserve and we went forward with the other two. That evening comparatively large forces converged, including bren gun carriers and armoured half-tracks. Vehicles and men were concentrated ready to leap forward. And nothing happened. We fired a few shots and withdrew to rear positions. Apparently the plan for the attack had been conceived too late.

The following night we repeated the performance. Again the attack was postponed. Orders were given and countermanded. There appeared to be some hesitancy and indecision. From what I heard I had my suspicions and gathered that our brigade was acting on its own initiative and launching a private attack without the consent or even knowledge of Army General Headquarters.

Our tentative thrusts and preparations brought results. The Arabs withdraw from a large slices of territory and we walked in.

Later Len told me the whole story. The Palmach had decided to launch an attack of their own and had asked Len for artillery support. Len agreed and brought artillery from Jerusalem for which action he was censured and removed from his post in Jerusalem. Later an army tribunal cleared him since our operations had placed large area in Israeli hands at very low cost. In April 1949, when Israel concluded an armistice agreement with Transjordan, this territory came in useful as a bargaining counter. It was returned to Transjordan in exchange for a strip of territory near the "triangle" at Tulkarm, along the Tel Aviv - Haifa railway-lines.

Ben Simcha was a good friend of mine. He knew no English and spoke a fair Hebrew. He was always helpful, pleasant and smiling. One day he found me at the well at Sara and we had a long talk. Ben Simcha (son of joy) told me his life story. A difficult life replete with hardships. Uprooted by war in Europe, then serving as a soldier in the Red Army. Wounded by shrapnel at Stalingrad and in hospital for many months. When peace came he searched for his family and found few members surviving - the others had died in the concentration camps. Now he was in Israel, free and happy and confident. Without family but between fellow Jews and with friends. He knew he would have to work hard here and perhaps struggle, but he would be working for something worthwhile. Life was good now. We had defeated the Arabs and the war would soon be over. He, Ben Simcha, would marry and have children and create a new family.

Abulbul, our Sephardi orderly-room clerk, was streaming with blood when he struggled up the road that afternoon and collapsed in a heap before arms could catch him. Their truck had overturned. Ben Simcha, Shames, a driver and he had gone to Ajjur to find chickens and now Ben Simcha was unconscious and pinned beneath the truck. Shames was badly hurt. The driver was safe and had been left with them. He was notorious for his reckless driving, but that was no consolation.

Ben Simcha was dead when he was extracted from under the truck. He had been killed instantly. The reality took a long time to sink in. Smiling, happy, optimistic Ben Simcha dead - gone to join the others of his family.



## Chapter Twelve.

### “Jerusalem”

On November 4<sup>th</sup>, the Security Council ordered a withdrawal of all forces in the Negev to the lines they had held before the reopening of hostilities on October 15<sup>th</sup>. A sanctions sub-committee was appointed. Both Jews and Egyptians refused to budge so we remained at Beit Jimal - not that the Egyptians had anything to surrender as a result of the recent fighting.

Dan and I, sleeping outside, feared the approaching rains and decided to find accommodation indoors. All the occupied rooms were stuffy so we chose an empty room in an out-house. Thick layers of blood covered the floor for the sergeant-major, a butcher in private life, had slaughtered a calf there. Dan and I moved in with disinfectants, shovels, brooms and water and in a few hours had the room spick and span. We installed electricity, scrounged chairs and tables and had a cosy little room.

Ravlevai, watching us work and impressed by the result, had dropped a hint that he would like our quarters and the sergeant-major approached us on his behalf but only to meet with a point-blank refusal. Since we had done the work we intended living there, commanding officer or no commanding officer. The authorities acquiesced.

The days passed. Dan and I came to know the surroundings well. We found well cultivated Arab gardens each with its own primitive well and irrigation system and containing an abundance of tomatoes, radishes, egg-plants, pumpkins and marrows. In Tel Aviv these articles were in short supply and expensive. And at Beit Jimal they were rotting in the fields. Yet there was nothing we could do about them. We could obtain no transport to carry the vegetables to the city - the army was not interested.

I came to know my fellow-soldiers better. Whenever I was on guard with one of them I'd encourage him to talk and interesting life was generally revealed. Many would be problem cases for Israel. Like Mensell. About twenty years of age, he had been in Israel for five months. For many years he had lived in Czechoslovakia and during the war he was interned in the Auschwitz concentration camp. Mensell said that he was no idealist. After his release from Auschwitz he had done well in Prague “in the currency and jewellery business” and made good money. And spent in on a gay life with many night-clubs. An easy life. He was due to be conscripted for two years service in the Czech army and to escape this had come to Israel - a Jew might as well be a soldier for the Jewish cause. “Lots of dollars” were confiscated when he left Czechoslovakia. “I want to move around,” he said. “I must make up for the lost time in the camps.” People worked too hard in Israel. He, Mensell, would perhaps have to go somewhere else, always on the move.

The first Israeli national census was held on November 9<sup>th</sup>. We answered questions at Beit Jimal and those who could write Hebrew filled in the forms. The authorities were most inquisitive and their questions ran to two pages.

Rumours of peace talks circulated up and down Israel, originating from a variety of sources. But like most rumours they died a rapid death.

A peaceful lull in the air. Units moved back to base. We returned to Sarafand with loads of equipment and on arrival endeavoured to dash off to leave immediately. First, however, we had to fold all our tents. Then we were off to Tel Aviv.

Many Mahal members were returning home already for a variety of reasons, genuine and otherwise. Some left to complete their studies, others were recalled to sick relatives and many were simply tired of the army and often of Israel itself. Generally the Mahal who had come the latest were the first to leave.

Dan and I were tired of Tel Aviv and decided to spend our leaves in Haifa. We found fewer queues and a clean hotel. The food at the soldier's restaurant was good and once, when we arrived late for a meal, we gained admittance and were given food by looking mournful and hungry and talking English.

U.N.O. continued discussing the situation in the Negev. Dr Ralph Bunche introduced a plan for the demilitarisation of the whole Negev. It seemed unlikely to be accepted by the contestants.

At Sarafand there were discussions on an impending artillery officers' course and recommendation had been called for from the commanding officers. Ravlevai broached the subject to me. Was I interested? He said that I should have gone on a course before. He admitted that he had been selfish and apologised for keeping me back, but he had wanted me as an "ack." Now he would not stand in my way.

Together we had an interview with the second-in-command of the regiment and as a result expressed my unwillingness to go on an officers' course. The course was to be of six or seven months duration and many interesting things might happen during that time. I could not face the thought of being cooped up in a military school for half a year or more and after that being under moral obligation to remain on in the army longer than I might otherwise do. The whole course was to be in Hebrew and I did not believe my Hebrew to be sufficiently fluent to justify my taking the course.

With my refusal I made a request- that I be transferred to Jerusalem.

"But Len is no longer there" Ravlevai interjected.

The 2 i/c laughed. "On the contrary, while Len was there I would not send an English-speaking 'ack' to Jerusalem for I wanted Len to learn Hebrew. Another problem was that we needed 'acks' here too."

I presented my case. And shortly after that interview I was transferred to Jerusalem where, with short intervals of absence, I was to remain for five months, until my discharge from the army.

It was one of the finest areas in which to be stationed. The enemy were on most sides but the people and the soldiers were confident and strong and not perturbed. We were like one big garrison, knit together by a common danger and an excellent spirit

reigned amongst the defenders of the Holy City. One big, happy family with Arabs here and Arabs there, but life continuing very much as usual. One faced the Arabs and held one's positions and not many yards behind and not many minutes away lay a big city with culture and music and life, where snatches of leave could be profitably and pleasantly spent.

A city in a front-line. A front-line in a city.

I grew to love Jerusalem, New Jerusalem, modern Jerusalem and its peoples and became embittered at the proposals to take it away from the Jews.

The front-line in Jerusalem was jagged, but definite. In some buildings; Jews; in buildings opposite, Arabs. On one side of a street, Jews; on the other side, Arabs. The walled Old City, in Arab hands, stood out in relief, something like a cardboard model. But it was alive and dangerous. Snipers shot at the Jews in the New City, guns shelled them, mortars pounded them. Arab Legionnaires with their red "Keffiyehs" and black-coated Palestinian Arabs opposing us. In the South, around Ramat Rahel, were the Egyptians.

I was senior "ack" in Jerusalem; a mobile "ack," moving from position to position to observe. At places we were very close to the Arabs. So close that you could hear them talk and laugh and watch their movements with ease.

On November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1948, a "real truce" was signed between the Israeli and Transjordan commanders and from December 1<sup>st</sup> there was supposed to be genuine peace on the battle-front, no shelling and no sniping.

With few exceptions this truce was honoured to the very letter. But once or twice our men were fired at. The difficulty was that one never knew when some enemy soldier was going to violate the truce. So one had to be careful all the time. The early days of December were halcyon days at the Jerusalem front-lines. Momentarily everyone was suspicious.

It was difficult to trust the party who had continued shooting and shelling for many months after the U.N.O. truce. One or two brave spirits ventured forth and drew no answering fire. Others followed. Jews spoke to Arabs and Arabs spoke to Jews. A bizarre situation. Jews and Arabs stared at each other, arose from their dug-outs, stood erect, laughed and chatted. Cigarettes and other little items were exchanged. It was reported that friendly football matches were played, but I cannot confirm this story and believe it to be a bit far-fetched.

On the wall of the Old City the Arabs played cards, drank tea and sunned themselves. Within the Old City, under our very eyes, they drilled, without arms, and danced their folk dances. Around lay the ruins from bitter, close fighting. Ravaged, twisted, junk-heaps of stones and ash, debris and metal. To get to some of our positions, without being observed, we had cut holes through walls of buildings with ropes to lead the way at night, along ruined rooms, up steps and down steps, twisting and turning. Empty, gloomy houses, holed and defaced, dirty, burnt and scarred. Barbed wire, sand-bags and spent cartridges and empty cases. Quiet and dead. No souls!

And we were waving and talking to one another. It seemed so unreal and so untrue. The reality was fascinating. I never tired of visiting the position, of seeing the Arabs and of photographing scenes - although the Arabs didn't like that.

Later our commander, Moshe Dayan , and the Arab Legion commander, Abdulla el Tel, had frequent meetings to discuss matters of mutual interest. It was said that a direct telephone line had been laid between Jewish and Arab lines and that each commander simply had to lift the receiver to speak to his counterpart. Indeed a queer war!

Jerusalem has a variegated community. From all four corners of the world, of different races and religions, of different thoughts and creeds, I came to know Jerusalem very well and found some of its areas most interesting, particularly Mea Shearim inhabited by very orthodox Jews. Inquisitive and seemingly hostile eyes followed strangers. Closely packed older buildings, often squalid. Little children with forelocks under peaked caps or wide-rimmed, black hats.

Dingy shops cluttered with musty goods. Narrow alleys, market-stalls laden with favourite Jewish foods, pickled and spiced. Yiddishe Mamas, heads covered with kerchiefs. Untidy streets. And everywhere bomb damage. These citizens refused to be moved by Arab guns and shells. Their parents had lived and died there and they would too. Nothing could move them. Only the Messiah would stir them.

Talmudical colleges in every street with pupils from bearded, muttering aged men, to squeaky, soft-faced youths. Pupils and teachers, praying and studying.

Our unit in Jerusalem was one happy family, hardworking and full of initiative and, fortunately, not hidebound. All friends. Living together, eating together, no saluting, no parades, no unnecessary regulations.

Our quarters were in the German Colony, in a large stone building formerly belonging to the Arab Higher Committee, well furnished, large and spacious.

The O.C. was an English Jew who had been in Israel for a few years. An excellent organiser. Noach, fat and fatherly, was the sergeant-major. He would have broken a stereotyped, regimental sergeant-major's heart.

No parades for Noach, no drill, no orders. Instead a friendly but firm request. An appeal to a spirit of co-operation. Industriously he showed the way with tireless effort and example, carrying on for hours and days on end, without respite or sleep. Roaring and shouting and threatening when he was angry. Hearing him for the first time, watching his bulk shaking and his hands gesticulating, a novice would be sore afraid. But those who understood Noah's ways and moods knew that his bark was worse than his bite.

Gideon, the second-in-command, was even more taciturn than Guya. Strict yet fair. True to the word of the army code concerning leave and privileges and perfectly just and honest. Zaav, the chief signaller, who spoke a perfect Hebrew, a perfect German and a perfect English; Yehuda from Budapest, talented and ambitious, learning English and writing good Hebrew plays although he had only been in Israel for a year

or two. And the young sabras, fresh from the schools, conscripted before the conclusion of their studies, keen as mustard and willing to take on all comers.

A free and easy spirit reigned. Provided you did your job efficiently you were allowed complete freedom. A contented atmosphere.

At times they came from Sarafand on tours of inspection. They could find nothing wrong with our work but they didn't like our spirit. Too comradely and not like an army. Too democratic and unfettered. They wanted more parades and routine orders and restrictions.

So in our daily orders we included parades and routine orders and restrictions - and ignored them at Jerusalem. But down in Sarafand, reading them, they assumed that we carried them out and they must have been very happy.

We availed ourselves of the truce to intensify our training. Courses were held so that specialists in one branch could also qualify in other branches. Signallers learnt driving and gunnery; drivers learnt gunnery and signalling and gunners learnt signalling and driving.

A community spirit reigned amongst the soldiers in Jerusalem. We came to know one another. Anglo-Saxons never numbered more than a handful and no Mahal clique arose. The residents were very hospitable on the whole, more so than in Tel Aviv. Soldiers were made to feel at home and clubs were organised for them. I was a regular frequenter of these clubs and sometimes spent hours at a stretch there, chatting, meeting friends, listening to music, drinking tea and coffee, eating cakes and sandwiches. But in the evening I could not tolerate the noisy, smoky and stuffy atmosphere of some clubs for more than a few minutes. One could hardly move in the crush and felt suffocated and confined.

"Nachson" was the largest club, open throughout the day and serving refreshments. About once a week "quiz contests" were relayed from "Nachson" over the army radio programme of the "Voice of Jerusalem." Some of the soldiers participating were very bright; others not so. One thought Belgium was in Scandinavia.

A Mrs Atlas presided over the "Chocolate Box", which served as a civilian café in the day-time and a soldiers' club in the evening. She was the perfect hostess and possessed the knack of unearthing Mahal and Gahal soldiers from the crowd, assisting them and making them feel at home. Speaking seven or eight languages fluently she had no difficulty in conversing with them. And Mrs Atlas was tireless in her efforts. Without fail, every evening, after a hard day's work in the café, she was in attendance at the club. Once I asked her whether she never tired and why she didn't take a rest. Her answer was typical: "I am tired but when soldiers are risking their lives the least I can do is to give up my time."

Through the soldiers' hospitality committee soldiers not resident in Jerusalem, but only stationed there received invitations to meals, to parties and to tea at private homes. It made a big difference to one's morale and all the efforts were deeply appreciated, the more so since we knew the difficulties under which the housewives had to work. The shortage of water and food. Water was a big problem in Jerusalem,

even after the siege had been raised. There was enough to drink but only limited quantities for washing and cleansing purposes, particularly on the out skirts of the city. I found it most awkward. One never had enough water and such water as what there was obtainable in our quarters was not even sufficiently clean to drink.

The people managed somehow or other. Soldier-guests lent a helping hand. After a meal it was our custom to clear the table and wash the dishes, ignoring the protests of the hostess.

There were many parties in Jerusalem. The festival of Chanukah saw one every evening for a week as each unit had its own dance with many guests from other units.

Politics made our social life easier. Before the elections, the major political parties vied with one or other in opening clubs in the hope of wooing votes and support. One went to any club that was pleasant, however, irrespective of whether one agreed with the views of that political party or not.

Chanukah was a joyous festival. Once before, hundreds of years ago, Jews fighting for independence had resisted and subdued foreign invaders. History was repeating itself. Torch light processions and massive, illuminated candle-sticks are the order of Chanukah in Israel, but there was a blackout which spoilt the colour and the display. Illuminations could not only play their part in the short period of semi darkness between sunset and dusk.

The civilian cafes were focal points of attraction in Jerusalem, but most of them lacked orchestras and music and closed rather early. Jerusalem was quiet and almost dead after even o'clock at night and coming home from late parties I was once or twice stopped and questioned by the police. They asked for my papers and were satisfied. Anyone around Jerusalem in the small hours of the morning was regarded with suspicion. It would only happen in Jerusalem. People in Tel Aviv considered Jerusalem so sedate and much too quiet.

Special performances of plays, operas and orchestral concerts were held for the soldiers at reduced prices. The Opera company, the "Ohel", the "Habimah", "Matate," and "Chamber Theatre" companies came from Tel Aviv and generally presented performances for soldiers at 6p.m. and again at 9p.m. that same evening and repeated the performances for civilians the following evening. It must have been tiring for the cast since the last performance often ended well after midnight.

Israelis have an extraordinary mature and talented appreciation of music and the few occasions that the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra came to Jerusalem were red letter days. Soldiers' concerts were generally held in the mornings and everyone who could get away from the camps and bivouacs was there. Complete silence reigned while the orchestra played. Row on row of khaki-clad figures in a variety of poses, listening intently, absorbed and critical. After the performance they poured through the doors exchanging critical remarks and analysing the performance of the orchestra and soloists.

There is a Hebrew University in Jerusalem, situated in imposing buildings on Mount Scopus. The Arabs cut the buildings off from the New City and the students and staff

turned their attention to more urgent martial duties and studies ceased. In Jerusalem's New City the spirit of the students and their associations still made themselves felt. The cultural life of the city revolved around the staff and students. Time was found for lectures, studies and discussions. And music. Record recitals were held thrice weekly in the Students' Club. Lectures on literary and philosophical subjects provided a soothing change amidst the hardness and harshness of war.

It tempered the reality without being unreal. I have vivid recollections of one in particular. Professor Leon Roth delivered a lecture in Hebrew on Wordsworth. Discussion followed, we were a small audience and a diverse one. Professor Klausner, who the day before had been an unsuccessful candidate for the presidency of the state of Israel, made a moving little speech. In times of stress and travail he had found Wordsworth soothing, he said. His voice was soft and itself soothing. A young girl followed him. She spoke in a strong, emotional voice and begged to differ. The audience listened intently. The Arabs outside were forgotten. Here was culture in the midst of strife.

The students were keen to recommence their studies. Most of them had obtained commissioned rank by then, however, and the army was very reluctant to release officers. So negotiations continued. I attended the conference of students. Professors and students were overjoyed to meet but their joy was sobered by the irrevocable absence of their comrades who had died for Israel.

The discussions were sincere and appealing. They wanted to study. But was the war over? Many thought so. Students had been conscripted the earliest, months before the state had been proclaimed. They had fought in some of the hardest and toughest battles.

There were conflicts in Jerusalem between the army and the more orthodox elements in Jerusalem. Soldiers felt that the strict demands of religion imposed a heavy burden on those of them who were not religious. The soldiers' clubs served no refreshments on Saturdays and the one or two cafes open in Jerusalem were too expensive for the average soldier on leave to eat there. So he had to go hungry.

The route to some of the Israeli forward positions passed through one or two very religious quarters. On Jewish holy-days members of the extremer sects sometimes stoned drivers and endeavoured to stop military trucks passing through on duty, carrying rations, supplies or Israeli representatives to attend discussions with the Arabs.

Once I witnessed a little incident outside a soldiers' club in Jerusalem, which typified the conflict. It was a Friday afternoon and nearing the Sabbath. As they were wont, black-coated orthodox men were going from business to business warning the owners to cease trade for the day and close their doors. A boot-black, squatting outside the club, was engaged in cleaning a soldier's boots. A man in black coat and broad-rimmed black hat loomed over him, hands folded, urging him to hurry for the Sabbath was approaching. The soldier became annoyed.

"Leave us in peace," he said. "Is this not a free country?"

“The Sabbath is approaching and you cannot violate the holy laws. It is my duty to stop you.”

“If you wish to be religious you may; if I wish to be irreligious leave me in peace to be so.”

“It is my duty to save you from sin.”

“You save me! What did you religious people do when Jerusalem was being shelled and attacked? You prayed but we fought and had hard times and some of us lost our lives.”

“We saved Jerusalem. If we had not prayed to the Almighty He would not have spared Jerusalem.”

A conflict which appeared irreconcilable.

On December, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1948, fighting again flared up in the Negev. The Egyptians had not been silent and had launched a few minor attacks against the Jews. On December 1<sup>st</sup>, the Jews had agreed to allow a “relief convoy” to go to Falujja to supply the Egyptians trapped there. On the discovery of arms amongst its contents it had been turned back.

The fighting waxed fierce in the Negev. Jewish columns struck far and wide, hard and fast. In Jerusalem the situation was quiet. The Arabs were letting the Jews tackle them one by one. Watching their own interests, divided by their own feuds in the midst of their “Holy War” with the Jews. In Jerusalem we felt like idle spectators and were sorry that we were not in the Negev. Three or four days before the new outburst of hostilities in the South we had been placed on a standby in Jerusalem and had been awaiting events in our own area.

Nothing exciting happened. It was a phoney war. In the South the Jews were fighting Egyptians, but on the Jerusalem front peace reigned. All were “pals” even those Egyptian soldiers facing Ramat Rahel, who were so close that we could hear them talking.

Yet the Egyptians from Egypt did not allow us a perfect peace. It was the night of January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1949 and I went to visit some friends on the Western fringe of Jerusalem - an area I rarely had occasion to visit at night. Nearing their house I heard the hum of an aeroplane engine overhead. Since no air-raid siren had sounded I presumed that it was “one of ours” and continued on my way.

I rang the bell of the house. The effects of the manipulation of the button were more drastic than one could have expected, but the events were unrelated. Explosions and bursts rent the air. The lights inside the house went off in a flash and there was a muffled sound of movement of furniture and people. The door opened suddenly and I was dragged inside. We all waited in expectation. Jerusalem had been bombed and I had pressed the button at the same moment that the bombs had fallen.



The siren whirred through the night followed by the all-clear half an hour later. On my return I saw the damage. The bombs of 250 and 500 pounds had injured seven people, damaged a road and some buildings including an old-aged home and a synagogue. Later that night another alert was sounded followed by explosions from the Old City. Were the Egyptians trying to involve Transjordan in the war too?

Israeli troops smashed the Egyptian armies in the Negev. By January 7<sup>th</sup>, 1949 the operation had concluded. In 15 days' battle the Egyptians had suffered an estimated 2500 casualties of which 700 were known dead and another 700 prisoner. An Egyptian brigade had been wiped out, the enemy's armoured forces destroyed and large numbers of armoured vehicles captured by the Jews. The enemy had been surprised and outmanoeuvred. Israeli forces spent two or three days in Egyptian territory penetrating inwards for 50 or 60 kilometres. Enemy installations were destroyed, aerodromes raided, military trains derailed. Israeli ships controlled the coast and Israeli fighters and bombers ruled the skies.

Headline news was the shooting down of five R.A.F 'planes over the Negev and the capture of two R.A.F. pilots inside Israeli frontiers. The mighty R.A.F. Served them right, the people said. The Israeli government charged that the British had to bear the blame for the loss of the planes since the aircraft had carried out, undeniably over Israel territory, a reconnaissance of Israel positions in a battle area in co-operation with the Egyptian air-force. They had no right to be flying over Israeli battle positions and had to accept responsibility for any untoward results.

British activities were hitting the headlines and causing alarums and excitement. We Anglo-Saxons were especially involved. In December England charged the Jews with incursions into Transjordan and issued a warning that she would be obliged to take action. Yet when the Arab states invaded Israel, against the orders of the United Nations, England was silent. In January she announced that her troops had landed at Akaba. Rumours were ten-a-penny. The British were supposed to be near Bethlehem and Hebron. Tension was heightened. At times it seemed as if we and the British might come to blows. No Israeli would have flinched despite Britain's might.

The young Sabras were quite keen on the idea. They'd teach them to interfere in other people's affairs. One or two Anglo-Saxons were mooting a plan for Anglo-Saxon units, which would volunteer to fight specifically against any British units which might attack the Jews.

Personally I was not keen to witness any such conflict. While I found the British Middle East policy wicked, unprincipled and dishonest, I was not happy to see young Jews and young Britons, (with whom we had no real quarrel for they were mere puppets) lose their lives for power politics. But if Great Britain tried to sabotage a little stage and a people deserving of independence Israel would fight to the bitter end and inflict grievous losses on the encroacher.

Fortunately nothing happened. Bevin received such an attack in the House of Commons from Britons that he modified his policy. Perhaps a new era of British - Israeli relations had dawned?

## Chapter Thirteen.

### “Armistice Agreements.”

Jerusalem experienced one of its coldest and wettest winters for many years. Now and again a thin mantle of snow covered its ancient and modern buildings and adorned the scene. The surrounding villages and hills were like the approaches to fairy-land and Jerusalem was the palace of the fairy queen. One was reminded of Europe and the Russian Orthodox Church, snow-capped, was like a touch of Russia.

Rain and rain and rain. For the troops it was uncomfortable. Mud and slush and a shortage of raincoats and overcoats. Bitter cold at nights and impossible to huddle around warming fires if one were near the enemy. Lots of hail. Heavy, merciless stones pattering and pounding, sudden, white attackers.

The wet weather did not agree with my health and perforce I became a frequent visitor to the hospitals of the Army Medical Services. I came to know several of them fairly well and left them all with a deep sense of appreciation for the fine, sterling work of most doctors and the untiring, zealous effort and friendliness of the nurses.

The hospital in Jerusalem was gloomy and always lit by electricity. The windows were sand-bagged and sealed and little light trickled through. One never knew whether the sun was shining outside or not. One never could tell whether the skies were clear or misty or cloudy. Our light was artificial, depressing, tiring. Diverse patients, diverse nurses from all corners of the world. Many of the unqualified nurses were recent immigrants and could speak neither English or Hebrew. In trying to make oneself understood many a “faux pas” was made.

In Jerusalem there were three South African army nurses, Sylvia, Merle and Margaret, two Jewish girls and one gentile, all nursing sisters. Accustomed to modern, well-equipped hospitals they contented themselves with such deficiencies as existed in equipment and slaved away caring for the sick. Their hours of duty were long and their hours of leave few. Coming home to the little flat they shared they often fell asleep in sheer exhaustion as soon as they sat down. I firmly believe and maintain that nurses were the hardest working and the hardest worked members of the Israeli army. Understaffed, in over-crowded hospitals, they carried on tending the wounded and sick.

At Tel Litwinsky we had a big modern hospital left by the U.S.A. forces from the World War. Large, airy, clean, wards, freshly painted.

There the food was good, unlike in Jerusalem where we were fed mainly on little pieces of herring and olives.

Leaving Tel Litwinsky after a period in bed involved so complicated and exhausting a procedure for a patient, weak from lying in bed for days on end, that he was almost compelled to become a patient again.

Tel Litwinsky hospital covered a large area. A patient leaving had to walk to the office to get discharge papers, then to the store for his kit, then he had to carry it back. The sister endorsed the discharge, the librarian's signature had to be obtained (irrespective of whether books had been borrowed) and also another storeman's signature. Then back to the main office. This procedure occupied from one to two hours. And after all that he had to make his own way to Tel Aviv for no transport was provided.

On arrival in Tel Aviv he was almost in invalid again. Nurses agreed that the procedure was stupid. But nothing was done to remedy the situations.

If you went to a convalescent home it was different. The authorities were determined to fatten you. Generally they succeeded. Special rations, including eggs and milk and fruit, were provided at three main meals and two teas a day at which attendance was compulsory. In the afternoons there was a compulsory rest period and at night you had to be home early.

We discovered a "Burma Road", however, enabling us to enter and leave without detection and many availed themselves of this entrance and exit. Twice a week we received free tickets to matinee cinema performances. In Haifa free tickets were given to floor-shows and also a chit for one free drink - but only one.

So you ate and rested and saw doctors regularly until one day the doctor considered you sufficiently convalesced and gave you a discharge.

In the early months of 1949 I spent most of my time in hospital or at a convalescent home. In Jerusalem I was in a ward with seven others, all recently returned from captivity in Transjordan. They had been captured in the Old City where they had lived and spoke a dialect of Hebrew which I did not understand. One old man had been in Palestine for more than thirty years and spoke a perfect English but no Hebrew.

When these Sephardi Jews could be persuaded to talk a language I could understand they had an interesting story to relate about their capture, as civilians, and their captivity. At visiting hours their numerous progeny came to see them and they jabbered away.

My health showed no sign of improvement. There was a deterioration. Doctors advised my discharge and the lengthy, involved process of securing this began. I faced inefficiency and masses of red tape. It was annoying and aggravating and made worse by the fact that I was often ill and unable to go to numerous offices to fill in the numerous forms. All this delayed matters considerably.

On leaving hospital one could only return to one's unit via a transit camp and I repeated the process every time I was discharged as a patient.

Meanwhile, on my sick-leaves and convalescences, I saw a great deal more of the country, particularly the Negev. So I had been from Dan to Beersheba. From Jerusalem I had already done several jeep-patrols in the large spaces of territory, which was often no-man's -land, around Hebron, Bethlehem and Beit Jibrin. The area was fluid in its military dispositions but the lines were beginning to crystallise out.

In their spare time Mahal and Gahal were criss-crossing Israel, seeing the country that they had fought for and meeting its people. In Jerusalem I acted as an unofficial guide for many visitors, both military and civilian.

Visiting the settlements and the villages with their people friendly, sincere and quiet, was a welcome tonic to the noise and bustle and materialism of Tel Aviv. And new settlements were arising in strategic areas particularly in the Negev and along the "Burma Road." The new macadamised road to Jerusalem had been dubbed the "Himalaya Road" but officially it was known as the "Road of Courage." With time it cracked badly. Pot-holes and bumps made a trip uncomfortable. There had not been sufficient opportunity for the foundation to settle down before the asphalt had been laid. In Tel Aviv and Jerusalem they jokingly said that it was called the "Road of Courage" because it required courage to travel over all the bumps.

Whatever its discomforts this road was many times superior to the dusty, uncertain "Burma Road."

Once I went to visit some South Africans on a settlement near Nazareth. I caught the bus from Haifa to Nahalal and alighted at the cross-roads leading to Nazareth. An Arab, one of the passengers, joined me and we strode on together, in silence. Neither of us said a word. I knew no Arabic. After a few minutes he spoke. Apparently he asked a question. His voice indicated a query. I only understood the word, "Nazareth?" "He had asked me whether I was going to Nazareth. I shook my head and pointed to the settlement. We walked on in silence. I peeled an orange and shared it with him. Our roads parted and we waved farewell. He was friendly.

The first elections for the first Israeli Parliament of the new State of Israel were held on January 25<sup>th</sup>, 1949 in an atmosphere of great enthusiasm and expectancy. The day of the actual polling was quiet. A public holiday had been proclaimed and all meetings and processions prohibited. So people voted in peace. The weeks before had witnessed propaganda and meetings and heated discussions. The walls and hoardings were plastered with party posters and little boys were constantly pasting on fresh ones. Each of the twenty parties had been given a letter of the alphabet as an identification and their supporters placed these letters everywhere, handed out little slips of paper with the letters and probably hoped that they had thereby convinced all and sundry to support their parties.

No election meetings were allowed in military camps but that did not imply that the soldiers were not interested in politics or the elections.

On the contrary. We had many a discussion and went to many a meeting. I attended meetings of almost every party but did not vote in the elections, although my status as a soldier entitled me to do so.

On February 14<sup>th</sup>. Dr Chaim Weizmann formally opened the "Knesset", or Constituent Assembly, in Jerusalem. It was a gala occasion. I was in hospital but persuaded the doctor to grant me a few hours leave so that I could attend the ceremony. It was a moving event. The culmination of a dream and a mission and a hope.

The crowds stormed the barricades and brushed aside the policemen in the fervour of their rush to cheer Dr Weizmann.

Getting one's discharge from the Israeli army, especially if one were a member of Mahal, was a complicated and tedious process and even doctor's papers made only a little dent in the mass of red-tape.

The Mahal office in Tel Aviv, which had been especially set up to discharge Mahalites, was honeycombed with inefficiency and few had a good word for its organisation.

Obtaining a discharge involved the following procedure:

One had to receive leave to go to Tel Aviv to the Mahal offices to obtain discharge forms. Getting leave often involved days and weeks for "stand-bys" and "alerts" and "all leave cancelled" orders were issued with regularity and one had to wait.

With the forms one returned to the unit. The commanding officer was supposed to sign the forms and give an assurance that one could be spared from the army. Generally commanding officers referred the forms to regimental or even brigade H.Q. More delay. With completed, signed forms one returned to Tel Aviv, if leave could be obtained, handed in the forms to Mahal and one was then sent back to the unit. There one waited for a month or longer until summoned to Tel Aviv to appear before a board which either granted or refused a discharge, provisionally. Then back to the unit to wait again. If passed one's paper went through normal army channels, to the manpower section. Again a long delay. Army clerks were notoriously slow. If the army agreed it went back to Mahal which informed the unit. Then the unit sent one to a transit camp to hand in some kit, then to another camp to hand in more kit and to obtain a discharge.

The Mahal office with its bureaucracy and inefficiency annoyed and embittered people who were always told, "come back to-morrow," or the following day or the following week, for the officials only worked for a few hours a day and often were not even to be found. Obtaining the necessary documents to leave the country was almost as complicated a process. And no knives could cut a quicker path. Being in hospital I found it difficult to make the regular trips up and down to fill in forms.

I was discharged towards the end of April.

To all intents and purposes the war seemed over. The army had discharged all soldiers over thirty and was considering reducing the age-level to twenty-five. The main topic of conversation amongst soldiers was "sichrur", (the Hebrew for "discharge.") Whenever one saw a military friend the first question asked was; "when are you getting your discharge?"

Discharged Mahal received a clothing grant of £15 which could only be spent at a particular shop whose prices were higher than the average. The money was not given but only a chit so the soldier had no option but to shop at the designated merchants.

We also received a gratuity of about £1-10 per month of service, based on a sliding scale, and £5 from Mahal.

The volunteers were deciding whether to settle in Israel or not. Some intended to go home for a brief visit but wanted to return to Israel to settle. Other wished to settle down straightaway and were going on to settlements, evolving schemes for co-operatives or finding employment in a private capacity. The government made every effort to encourage them to stay.

Generally those who had been in Hebrew-speaking units, especially the Palmach, and knew the language decided to remain in Israel.

Mahal felt its fighting role was over. The Arab armies had been decisively defeated and provided great powers did not stir them up peace could be foreseen. Israel was strong with a powerful army and air-force. The Arabs would think twice before provoking her.

Israeli forces had occupied the coast of Elat near the Gulf of Akaba. Israel had signed armistice agreements with Egypt, Transjordan and the Lebanon.

The young state could turn some of its energies to constructive work and to rehabilitating and settling its new immigrants pouring in at the rate of close on a thousand a day.

Speaking in January, 1949, at a ceremony to celebrate the “Ingathering of the Exiles,” the Prime Minister, Mr David Ben Gurion, read a list of more than 50 countries from which Jewish volunteers had come to join in Israel’s fight. He praised the contribution of foreign volunteers in all branches of the war effort.

The “Palestine Post”, the only English-language daily published in Israel carried an editorial headed “Mahal” in its issue of November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1948. It said:

“The ‘Mahal’-the Volunteers from abroad - have come to fight for Israel because it is the birthright of every Jew to share in the venture, even if he wished to return to the country in which he was born and to live there after the fight is ended.

Although the services of some of these men, experts in their own fields, were very desperately needed, no bright inducements could be offered them if their own wish did not bring them here, for the Israel forces are now and poor, indifferently equipped and very short of all the comforts of life: and the pay is the pittance that a citizen army pays when almost every able-bodied man is in the service. They came, and they played a heroic and an invaluable part.

“There is not a unit of the Israel Army that is not proud of its Mahal men, and there is not a squadron of the Air Force where Mahal does not supply a significant part of both fliers and ground engineers.

There is no one part of the Army that was indispensable to victory, and that applies also to Mahal, but without the aid of these men and women the battle would have been longer and harder, and the losses much greater.

“Not all of these volunteers speak Hebrew and that has proved no barrier to their fighting prowess or military skill, but it had proved for some a barrier to the full comradeship of an army in the field, and to the understanding of all that goes on about them.

“As a body, the Yishuv knows and values them, but it is a fact that as individuals many have felt homeless and unrecognized. It is for the Yishuv to remember that these of her soldiers are in need of a special welcome at all times because they have no homes here to which to return on leave, and to let them see Israel fully that they may come to know it as a country not just to die for, but to live in.”