

**Baruch Tirosch (Boutrous)**

Born in 1929 in Tel Aviv

Joined the Palyam in 1945

**This is the Way it Was**

Tel Aviv, a city and a haven for the Hagana. That is what Tel Aviv was in the early 1940's. It enabled the Hagana to expand all over the country and to become **THE FORCE** that protected the Jewish settlements everywhere, as the military arm of the established Jewish institutions of the country. The Hagana mobilized more than 10,000 volunteers in Tel Aviv who trained within the framework of the Gadna and other forms of military and paramilitary units, communications, first aid, etc., so that the Jewish settlements would be able to protect themselves if and when that became necessary. It was from this framework that many of the men volunteered for the rural Jewish police forces and the Palmach and the Palyam (this was true also of the 23 men who went out to sea to attack an enemy position north of the border of Palestine and were never heard of again).

The Hagana organized men from all walks of life and from all elements of Jewish society in Palestine. In times of crisis and stress between the Jews and the British, or between the Jews and the Arabs, the Hagana placed defenders who were able to withstand attacks and protect the settlements. The Hagana was also the basis for the organization of the Givati Brigade (within the framework of the IDF) which defended Tel Aviv against attacks of Arab bands and the Egyptian Army when the War of Independence began. In Tel Aviv the convoys and weapons were organized to break the siege of Jerusalem, and the Declaration of the State of Israel took place in Tel Aviv. When the forces of the Hagana became the new Army of Israel, the youth of Tel Aviv joined its ranks by the thousands.

I was born in Tel Aviv in 1929 and volunteered for the Hagana in 1943. I went to a course for squad leaders in 1944 at Kfar Menachem and served in B Company and C Company of the infantry of Tel Aviv. During 1945 I volunteered for the Palyam and participated in courses for small boat commanders and for naval officers. Most of the time that I spent in the Palyam I served as an instructor for newly mobilized men.

Before the State was established I was sent on a secret mission to Europe to train immigrants before their arrival in Palestine. I also had the honor to accompany one of the immigrant ships to Palestine and also a fair number of ships that brought equipment to Israel. It was my years in the Hagana in Tel Aviv that prepared me for the work that I did in the Palyam.

I would like to devote some stories to all my friends of the Hagana of Tel Aviv from whose ranks came a very large bulk of volunteers that participated in them.

**A spark of understanding and humaneness in the shadow of the Poleg Valley.**

In those dark days when there were so many bloody clashes between Jews and Arabs throughout the country, I recall an interesting event that occurred before the State was declared. Moshav Rishpon and Kibbutz Shefayim, were in those years considered settlements at the end of the world. It was impossible to get to them in a straight line. One had to go by way of Ramat Gan, Ramat Hasharon and Herzlia. One would then go west and north on a terribly paved road in order to reach the police station of Sidna Ali. From there one could continue through a muddy stretch of what resembled quicksand and arrive at the northern side of Shefayim/ Rishpon. After that one would reach the Litvinsky Orchard and after that one arrived at the Valley of Poleg. Very few dared to cross it in order to reach Netanya. That was because there were many armed Bedouin who roamed the area with their flocks of sheep and they would also be guarding their fields of watermelons in the summer months. These fields reached almost to Kfar Saba and Tel Mond, so that it was well nigh impossible to get to Netanya in a straight line.

During the year 1946 I spent most of my time at Shefayim as a junior officer of the Palyam. We helped take immigrants off ships and took part in the attack on the police station at Sidna Ali, in retaliation for the station's part in locating immigrant ships. One day, Yoske, the commander of the Palyam, called and told me to prepare a squad that would go to Kibbutz Tel Yitzchak by way of Wadi Falik, and bring back a large quantity of weapons for company use in securing the landing of immigrants who were soon to arrive. By day I scouted the area several times by myself, and with the youngsters who, with me, were to pass through several times during the night. Before we left the commander told me where the weapons in Tel Yitzchak were hidden. I was also given code words that would identify me as the one who was to receive the weapons.

I was warned in particular to be beware of the Bedouin, and if any were to see me with the weapons, I had better do away with him so that he would not be able to tell others or inform the British. Toward evening, I assembled the squad in a clump of eucalyptus trees at the edge of the kibbutz grounds, and explained the plan of what we were about to do. We had several rifles and submachine guns and started out by the light of a full moon. We crossed the wadi in the shadow of a row of large cactus shrubs and after two uneventful hours reached the fence of Kibbutz Tel Yitzchak. We hid near the fence until I was able to establish contact with the person in charge at the kibbutz.

The weapons were brought to us and we started to pack them and the ammunition, so that we would be able to carry them back. There were Canadian rifles and British Bren guns. We felt the tension and the importance of getting all of this safely back to Shefayim, because it would have been a terrible loss if the Bedouin or British had intercepted us. When everything was packed and on our backs we started back with a full moon high in the sky and bathing everything in

an eerie light. Once again we marched in the shadow of the row of cactus with two scouts ahead of us. We knew there were many Bedouin tents all around us, and we could smell their campfires. Dogs barked on all sides and aided me in steering between the various encampments. We stopped for a short rest after about an hour's walk and I decided to keep moving and not let the men lose their alertness. After midnight, we came close to a large villa, owned by a rich Lebanese, that sat on a rise not far from where Kibbutz Ga'ash sits today.

Suddenly I saw a tall Arab dressed in black standing just a short distance from us. The scouts had not seen him. I knelt and aimed my submachine gun at him, cocked it at the same time, and waited to see what his next move would be. The Arab stood there with his arms folded and without showing the least sign of fear or tension. I then thought to myself that if I shot him I would awaken everyone in the area and would never be able to move rapidly with all the weapons we were carrying. I figured that it would be better to leave the man alone and get back to our base as quickly as possible.. I removed the clip, released the trigger and put the safety catch on. I then put the clip back in its slot while looking at the Arab all the time. He did not move but remained standing with his hands calmly folded.

I gave the whistle for all of us to get moving again and we retreated from the figure of this tall Arab who stood his ground and did not budge. It was not long after that we were back in Shefayim and I called to Gingie, who was in charge of the kibbutz weapons' cache. He examined each item carefully, put everything away, and we were free to get some rest or even some sleep. I still had to get back to the commanding officer and make my report. I tried to find words to explain my actions in the wadi when we met the Arab and Yoske listened intently. After due consideration he agreed with my assessment of the situation; "You acted correctly in this situation. Had you shot him the whole wadi would have been on your back and word would certainly have gotten back to the British," he said.

Days passed and it seems that the Arab must have kept his mouth shut because the British did not come to search for the weapons. Much to our chagrin however, the immigrant ship that was supposed to come into shore nearby was spotted at sea, while still a good distance away, and the matter of bringing the immigrants safely to shore became complicated. There was fighting, and immigrants and some of our people were arrested.

The years have passed and the escapades of Aliya Bet and of the War of Independence have been told to my children many times. But the scene of this tall Arab dressed in black and standing with his arms folded and calmly looking down the barrel of my submachine gun remains vividly in my mind's eye to this very day. One day in the 60's, we and some friends went to see the flowering of the narcissus in the Sharon Valley and we stopped for a rest in the shade of the pine trees north of Shefayim. We had a fire going and coffee was already boiling when suddenly a tall Arab came through the trees and greeted us. We traded greetings and we invited him to have coffee and he graciously accepted.

When he sat down my wife Lillian became very agitated and whispered to me: "That's your Arab, the one you saw that night!" I asked him in a pleasant tone of voice, where he lived and where his family was from, and he answered that nowadays he lives in Tira but years ago all this land had belonged to his family. He said that he was foolish and ran away during the War of Independence and left all his possessions behind. I searched for some words of comfort but he continued and added that today he was richer even than he had been before. The government recognized his right to work much of these lands and he gets a good price from Tnuva for his produce.

I then asked him why he ran away, and if he had had any trouble with the Jews of Rishpon or Shefayim. Never, he said vehemently.

: "They treated me as a friend and visited me in my home more than once." He then recounted that he had gone out one night to look for a colt and he came across a group of young Jews who were carrying weapons through the woods. He stood aside and the leader had looked him over, and must have recognized him as Kassem, because the leader relaxed and the group continued on its way. No Jew who knew him had ever done him harm and he had been foolish to run away. "I would have fared better if I had broken a leg and had to stay!"

I couldn't gather up the courage to tell him my side of that story, but as I searched for words, two of his workers came to call him and he had to leave before I could say anything. We parted with warm words and never did meet again, but I was glad that I had not opened fire that night and was sorry that I did not tell him who I was.