

# Yediot Hashavuah

A WEEKLY SURVEY OF THE CHALUTZIC SCENE

PUBLISHED BY - VAAD HE-CHALUTZ, CANADIAN ZIONIST YOUTH COUNCIL, 2025 UNIVERSITY ST., MONTREAL, QUE.

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In continuation of the series dealing with life in Israel we present in this issue of Yediot Hashavuah two further articles descriptive of Life in the Jewish State today.

## A R M Y   B A S E   --   I S R A E L   S T Y L E

(A Survey)

In Canada, where private initiative is the peculiar expression of the Canadian genius, one would have to go back to the isolated settlements and trading posts for a suitable analogy to the communal living of the Kibbutz. But the twentieth century has complicated life more than was dreamed possible in the days of the trading posts, and the role of the Kibbutz has grown more complicated in proportion. In this article I would like to speak of only one aspect of the Kibbutz, the Kibbutz in war, as it has decisively influenced the course of events of the past year.

First of all, the Kibbutz has provided that network of outposts that has made the defence of the Yishuv possible. The fruits of those years of careful planning have been realised in the present conflict. The ring of settlements strategically located in the upper Huleh have driven back the attacks of the regular Syrian army, while western Galilee was protected against invasion by the isolated Kibbutzim on the Lebanese border.

## FARSIGHTED LAND POLICY

In the Negev the land settlement policy has equally proved its farsightedness. The fixed policy has been laid down that no settlement was to be established that was not within signalling range of at least one other settlement, each guaranteeing the flank of the other. Where lack of funds for purchase and settlement had prevented the completion of this strategic ring, it has now been pounded out by the capture of enemy villages. The Egyptian attack was first launched against the tiny settlement of Yad Mordecai, which was subjected to a continuous barrage of bombs numbering in the tens of thousands. When the defenders realised that the Kibbutz could no longer be held - for in war that must happen, too - a signal was flashed to the nearest settlement. That very night reinforcements broke through the siege lines and withdrew the garrison. This neighbouring



settlement was too far to offer help, but near enough to rescue the settlers.

In the Jordan Valley, the string of settlements provided a defence in depth that absorbed the shock of the Arab Legion attack until it was finally stopped in the Daganah group. At this time a young Jewish officer in the Jordan Valley wrote home to his parents in Petah Tikva, "We don't worry about tanks and armoured cars as long as we have enough supply of "Molotov cocktails". But where are the cocktails against bombing planes?" As soon as the growing Israel air force provided the coverage, the lost ground was regained.

### SELF-SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

The Kibbutzim were not planned to be defence posts, but to become self-supporting communities, growing their own food and supplying their own technical facilities, such as carpentry shops, machinists, and so forth. Therefore, supply problems were at a minimum. This was of very practical significance to the young Israel soldiers, who could taste the difference between a Kibbutz and an army post in terms of milk, eggs, and vegetables, rather than bully beef and stale bread, often bought at a cost of precious lives and vehicles. In point of fact, the main mishaps that occurred in the entire six months of Arab attack until the invasion by the regular Arab armies, occurred on the supply lines.

The Kibbutz as an army base provides a much greater margin of soldiers for its own defence than is possible in any regular army. The flexible work programme of the Kibbutz was rearranged so that work could be maintained while at the same time supplying men for all their outposts. This is in marked contrast to the usual total war economy, where the cleavage between soldier and civilian results inevitably in a manpower shortage. And these soldiers, who are members of their own Kibbutz, will fight as a man fights when his own home is being attacked, as the Arab gangs learned to their amazement.

### TRAINING CENTRES

A major use to which the Kibbutz has been put is as a training centre. This was particularly important when the Haganah was an underground army. At that time groups of young men would visit the Kibbutzim to be trained in the handling of arms. The foundation of the settlement of Birva, for instance, against the stubborn resistance of the British army, tested the mettle of these farm-trained soldiers. Early in the present fighting groups of men shuttled back and forth in steel-plated trucks, their arms hidden under sacks of farm produce, to receive their training. When the British gave up their rule after May 15, a people's army appeared as if by magic that held its own against the attacks of seven Arab armies.



To see the operation of the Kibbutz as an army base, let us consider the example of a typical Kibbutz, Kiryat Anavim. With the outbreak of the present disturbances, the settlement was mobilised for war. Situated just off the strategic Jerusalem-Tel Aviv highway, Kiryat Anavim was a key base for fighting in that area. It provided one of the bases from which the Palmach struck out in a series of operations that eventually conquered and held the road. Yet in the early months of the fighting, it was able to support itself and defend itself for months, even though supply lines could not be maintained. As the first Kibbutz in that area, it also guaranteed the flank of the neighbouring Kibbutzim, Maale Hahamisha and Neve Ilan. This threw a great strain on the settlers, who carried on their work programme while helping to garrison the surrounding hills. But since the settlers provided the garrison troops, the Palmach stationed there was freed exclusively for offensive operations.

During the grim winter season, when road battles were almost a daily occurrence, Kiryat Anavim was like an oasis in the wilderness.

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#### D E S E R T      P A T R O L

(This article was written just before the invasion of the Negev by the regular Egyptian Army. But the Negev was then already under constant attack from Arab hands. The lads and girls of whom this story tells have since midnight of 15th May been defending the Negev also against the regular Egyptian forces.)

I want to tell a story of valour and endurance. It is a tale without a hero and even without heroic incidents, not because there is a lack of such in the tale, but because the way I saw it the tale does not need such embellishments.

My tale is set in the Negev, in the south of Palestine. It is the area which is partly semi-arid and partly desert. It is vast and nearly empty of people and of life. In this region, unfriendly and harsh in its nature, a handful of Jewish outpost settlements have been established with the object of redeeming the desert and making the empty places fertile and habitable. War was declared on these settlements, and therefore equally on the civilising objective, by people who had the chance to do the same for themselves and for the land, but didn't.

The Jewish settlements are widely scattered. My tale concerns the several small groups of young Jewish boys and girls who maintain the lines of communications between these points and who are thus largely responsible for holding this uninviting region. It is in fact the tale of the Palmach Desert Patrols. They consist of armoured cars, sometimes one, usually two. The armouring of these cars is "home-made" - that is to say the cars are ordinary



commercial vehicles which have been armoured in Jewish workshops according to plans supplied by the Haganah. They are not tanks nor even armoured cars according to the minimum requirements of any regular army.

### "NEGEV ANIMALS"

There is one patrol group which calls itself "Hayot Hanegev", which translates badly into English as "Negev Animals". Another patrol group has adopted a wartime name and is known as the "Negev Rats". Other groups have names equally picturesque. Judged by any standards that I know, however, the "Negev Animals" are not animals, nor are the "Negev Rats" rats. They are, on the contrary, groups of educated lads and girls driven by high purpose and motivated by lofty ideals. They spend twelve to fifteen hours a day on the roads in their vehicles, not once a week, but every day, as a matter of routine. They act as escorts to the convoys which carry the settlers of the Negev and bring them all the things they need for life and carry back to the towns the milk and eggs and vegetables which these settlements produce. Time and again these escorts have had to fight the convoy through to safety. They patrol the roads and act as the eyes of the settlers who try, as far as wartime conditions permit, to carry on doing the things for which they came down to the Negev, the things which concern the redemption of the desert. They also patrol and guard the water pipeline which carries the possibilities of life to this desolate region. To travel twelve hours a day every day for months would be hard enough in itself if the journeys were otherwise normal. But their journeys are seldom normal journeys. The Negev used to be nearly empty, and like all lonely people its inhabitants were friendly. Today the Negev is no longer as empty as formerly and its new Arab inhabitants have come there with the specific purpose of waging war. The whole region of the Negev is to them a battlefield, especially the places where the Jews have managed to grow food in the midst of the shifting sand where nobody ever managed to live before.

It is the job of the Desert Patrols in the first instance to meet the menace of the hostile forces whom political ambitions have drafted to the region; forces whose whole task is murder and sabotage, and who care little whether it is redeemed or made more desolate than ever. Day by day these Patrols are on the roads, and usually along rough tracks which not even the most generous estimate could regard as more. Behind every rise in the ground throughout their journeys they face a potential enemy, and every yard of their road might hide a cunningly hidden landmine.

I have travelled with these Patrols by day and night. I have seen the car swerve violently off the road and then stop while men cautiously want back to examine a suspicious spot, and more than once mines have been found this way. It is a tense business and always there are anxious eyes on look-out besides those of the driver and the man sitting next to him in the cabin.



Their daily journeys are not news, because generally their journeyings prevent the happenings that would have been news. They face incessant and incalculable dangers every hour of the day. They are just a handful of young people usually in only two trucks who roamed through the strongholds of an enemy whom they knew would show no mercy. And yet they themselves always insist that their job was essentially creative and not destructive; that there was only one purpose in what they did; that the Negev should be allowed to live and give life. How different is the case of their enemies, the Egyptian army and the bands of Iraqi and Syrian "volunteers" who have been sent to destroy them. They will go elsewhere as soon as the war is over, and they don't give a hoot whether water is brought to the Negev or not, whether the desert will be civilised nor not. Last year the Bedouin of the Negev had to evacuate it because of the drought that made it impossible to find even the sparse living that seems sufficient to keep them from starving. The foreign invaders do not know or care about this, nor do they know that the fertility that the Jews are promising to bring to this region will enable the Bedouin as well as Jews to live there more happily and safely.

#### "ROUTINE "HEROISM"

And so these unknown youths are doing their job, a heroic job carried out as a matter of routine. Usually they are dirty because their fifteen hour day is nothing but a fiction, and in fact their workday stretches the full twenty-four hours round the clock with rest and sleep snatched by the way; and water in the Negev is in any case a precious commodity, and in times of emergency washing has no priority. Usually they are tired, if only they allow themselves to relax and realise it. But always they are the most cheerful, high-spirited, and indomitable people that I have ever met; and as their cars ate up the long and weary miles across the Negev roads and tracks, their voices were raised in unceasing song. I wondered many times what the Arabs in the area thought of the songs that greeted them day by day as the Patrols went by.

The Jews of Palestine have not yet begun to think of presenting their heroes with medals, not because we value heroism less than another people, but because in the people's struggle which we are fighting we believe that every man and woman of our country is called upon to play the role of hero and we would not wish to distinguish between them. But if a citation for valour was to be compiled, there would have to be a special reference in it to the Palmach Desert Patrols in the Negev, not for the minutes of flaming courage when they have been faced with fire and destruction, but for the long, weary, dogged hours when danger threatened their young lives.



## LETTERS FROM ISRAEL

Dan, one of the Jewish settlements in the north-eastern Syrian frontier of Palestine, has had to withstand heavy attacks by the regular Syrian armies. Repeatedly the Damascus radio has broadcast the news that it fell. It has held on grimly to every foot of its soil. In this article, a member of the settlement describes life in Dan in those days.

Shalom Chaverim,

. . . . Even before the regular armies of the Arab States invaded Palestine, Kibbutz Dan was shelled by enemy cannon batteries posted on strongpoints near the Banias river. Our settlements and its buildings offer a good target. The ground is littered with shell splinters. What we achieved after years of toil has been severely damaged. But these shells, which scatter into thousands of splinters, will never break the spirit of the defenders who have been under direct enemy fire for more than six weeks.

Life here has become the typical trench routine. The trenches are not only of the slit kind but mainly underground "bunkers". Nobody lives in the houses any longer, and the deeper you entrench yourself the more likely you are to escape unhurt.

. . . A short while ago these trenches were "despised" because they spoiled the view and many trees had to be uprooted and vineyards and lawns cut. But now they are precious. Few of us go too far away from them. Instinctively you keep in their vicinity if you can, even if this entails long detours.

Day after day, without sunshine and with very little light and air, children of all ages, including infants, also live here. Even the little ones become accustomed to rushing down to the shelters on hearing the word "aviron"(plane). The little ones cannot stand the darkness for long, however, and after a short while start crying "Enough". The older children, however, put up well with the situation. They even get used to holding their celebrations in the shelters, to studying there and to living there for 24 hours daily. It was only after the shelling had been going on for ten days that the children were evacuated from the settlement.

A hurried glance into the world above the trenches. Here and there people are running out to do essential work. The first to leave the trenches are the kitchen workers. Owing to their courage food is being supplied regularly, often under uninterrupted fire. The other kibbutz services are being carried out by women only. Next, the post commanders come out, examine their defences, relieve their personnel and give instructions to rebuild what has been destroyed in the attack. Then follow the workers of the dairy, stables, chicken houses, each hurrying to do his essential work, anxious to exploit every second of the lull.



Electricians and telephone workers are trying to repair damage. The man who draws up the work-sheet (usually an important figure in kibbutz life, but now almost reduced to anonymity) is discussing with the fodder workers whether they can manage to harvest some fodder and bring it in. The man in charge of the garden is rushing to repair the main water pipe, which has been bit by a shell. A stream of water is shooting right up into the skies. While all the sprinklers have stopped circling. People look around anxiously and get the first impression of the damage inflicted on the settlement. But at the moment, when life in the kibbutz seems to be returning to "normal", a sinister sound is heard from the direction of the Banias river and instantly everybody takes cover. Life returns underground.

In the trenches one has time to reflect; what an odd people we are! Has it ever happened among any other nation that soldiers in the front line, under destructive cannon fire, should apply the few minutes of lull for which they had been longing so intensely, to normal everyday "chores". Not only strong nerves seem to be necessary for that but also great will-power and faith. And this is where our strength lies.

..... "The idea of a "shabbath" is no longer known in the settlement. At present one is happy to get a few minutes' respite or, occasionally, an hour or two. No wonder that our people are tired, exhausted, unshaven, and even the routine showers are no longer observed.

It sometimes happens that man and wife meet during a short break in the fighting. He looks at her and wonders: My God, how thin she's got. What a lovely figure she now has! There would be time only to enquire about each other's health, where they slept last night, and when they had last seen their children Ruthy and Dan.

There are times of encouragement, too. That morning, for instance, when our own aircraft appeared over our trenches. For a moment the enemy artillery guns were silent while we watched 'our' plane emptying its cargo on the enemy. Well, it was only a small plane, but it brought us a lot of cheer. And on that day, too, our own artillery went into action for the first time against the enemy.

Shalom,

M.