

The Army Called 'Haganah'

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'Illegal' but recognized, 'secret' but plainly visible, the Jewish 'defense organization' faces its greatest test.

JERUSALEM.

By SAM POPE BREWER

IRGUN HAGANAH—the Jewish “defense organization”—today faces its greatest test. For the next few weeks it will continue to strive to maintain order and to advance Jewish aims in Palestine. Some time after May 15, when the British mandate over Palestine ends, Haganah will take over defense of the Jewish state.

Originally organized as a defense group to protect agricultural settlements when Zionists first began immigrating to Palestine after the first World War, Haganah now includes every Jew in Palestine, or almost every one. Many a quiet shopkeeper or office manager commands a Haganah unit when his work is done. There is one bartender I know who holds an important post; another acquaintance of mine, a waiter, commands the forces of his home neighborhood.

A friend who came to Palestine twenty-five years ago tells me that the first time

he ever held a firearm in his hand was a few nights after his arrival when his roommate handed him a revolver.

“What’s this for?” he asked.

“You’re on guard tonight,” the other replied.

“And that’s how I joined the Haganah,” he says.

THE role of Haganah today is paradoxical. It fights beside the British Army and it is arrested for carrying arms. It guards roadblocks with the police, and accuses the British soldiers of handing its men over to be murdered by the Arabs. It is described in a British official publication as “an illegal organization,” while the Jewish Agency regards it as the base and framework of all police and military forces of the state the Jews hope to build. The British have called Haganah’s

members terrorists but they have indulged in little real terrorism, that is to say, murder and destruction simply for the purpose of impressing their opponents. They have fought the British and blown up British installations but always with a definite purpose to be served.

The worst blots on the Haganah record are the punitive raids in which they have blown up houses where women and children were sleeping. Last August near Jaffa they wiped out a whole family including four small children when they destroyed a house in the night. More recently in northern Galilee and in the Semiramis Hotel explosion in Jerusalem last month, they killed innocent children in bombings of the same type in retaliation for Arab attacks. These outrages they attempt to justify on the grounds that the buildings concerned were used as bases by Arab raiders.

In general, however, even the British

official description of Haganah remarks that “until recently it did not engage in terrorism or activities directed against the Government, although it was involved in the arms traffic.” The report continues: “On the whole, Haganah has maintained the policy of Havlaga” (self-restraint) and in earlier troubles “was mainly free from the imputation of acts of retaliation against the Arabs.”

HAGANAH has had to remain essentially a secret body because the authorities still refuse to recognize its right to exist. Nobody knows its full strength, let alone its membership rolls. But it is no amateur army. It has a nucleus of 30,000 men who served in the British forces. Three thousand of them served in the RAF, including more than forty pilots. More than 300 served in the Commandos and 4,000 in the Jewish Brigade in action in Italy.

The British estimate Haganah’s active membership at anywhere from 60,000 to 80,000. One of its important officers said in December that 70,000 was a fair estimate, but that for “security reasons” he was unable to disclose what portion of those were first-line fighters and how many were merely secondary.

With a total Jewish population of 700,000, about 100,000 would be a reasonable estimate of the maximum available for actual fighting. In view of the special circumstances, notably the selective immigration favoring the young and vigorous, it is possible that even 150,000 could be mobilized. That, however, would paralyze the country and certainly not that many would be really suitable for first-line duties.

The Jewish Agency estimates on the basis of recent registration that about 85,000 Jews between the ages of 17 and 25 are available for all types of service. The same figure is probably a fair guess at the number the Jews could put in the field if they had to—and if they could arm them.

Haganah’s fighting units are divided into three forces—the Palmakh, or picked striking force, the field force and the guard force.

Palmakh (from the Hebrew initials for *Plugat Makhatz*—“striking force”) is the most active element of Haganah and the most interesting. Its strength is a secret, but the best British estimate is roughly 5,000 men. They are all young, tough men without dependents and highly trained. They consider themselves an elite force rather superior to all the rest. There is a certain amount of swagger about Palmakh youths, who are easily spotted by anybody used to seeing them. Until recently they tended to affect big fierce military mustaches, but for security reasons those are now being discouraged.

PALMAKH has the same type of rough-and-tumble training that was given to the British Commandos, and like them it is used for hit-and-run raids. The defensive character of its role lies largely in hitting the enemy first to keep him from attacking.

The main body of Haganah is the Khish (short for *Khail Sadeh*, or field force), which will become the national army field force when the Jewish state is formed. It receives regular field training on the British pattern.

The present duties of Khish, aside from military training, (Continued on Page 51)

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Haganah recruits training at a secret camp.

The Army Called 'Haganah'

(Continued from Page 10)

are confined mostly to reinforcing guard posts. Unlike Palmakh, in which service is full-time, Khish is still on a part-time basis and entirely unpaid except in the case of such individual members as may be required for full-time duty.

The third section of Haganah is Khim (Khail Mishmar or "guard force"), corresponding to the home guard. It is composed of men whose family and other responsibilities keep them tied to home, and its duties are confined to local guard work.

Khim receives small-arms training and instruction in street fighting but little field instruction because its members are not expected to need it.

Palmakh is highly mobile and available anywhere in the country; Khish is mobile locally within certain fixed areas (Palestine is divided into six military districts and those are subdivided), while Khim members serve purely in their own neighborhoods, guarding roadblocks and pillboxes.

BESIDES the actual fighting men, Haganah has technical experts trained in all the branches of the British Army. Before the formation of the Jewish Brigade, it was difficult for the Jews to enter fighting formations. Thousands served in the Medical, Signal, Ordnance and Quartermaster services and know all the technical problems.

Administration is handled by the general staff in Tel-Aviv. Each area commander with a rank equivalent to that of brigadier general is responsible for all three branches of Haganah in his own area and works directly under the staff in Tel-Aviv.

Though discipline and rank are necessary, there is a minimum of military hierarchy in

Haganah. There are no special titles. From the leader of a fourteen-man section to brigadier, each is known simply by the unit he commands: "section leader," "company leader" or "brigade leader" as the case may be. All live and eat on terms of equality, which again is made necessary by the clandestine nature of the organization, and all are paid the same. At present every man on full-time duty gets 35 piastres daily—\$1.40—if fed and lodged by Haganah. If he provides his own food, he gets 80 piastres—\$3.20. In addition men with dependents get special allowances.

THERE have been periods when the British worked closely with Haganah, and in 1937 they began providing military instruction for its members.

Maj. Gen. Orde Wingate of Burma Chindit fame, then a major, suggested that the best means of defending Jewish settlements against Arab raiders was to organize flying squads to go out and meet the raiders before they reached the settlements. With official permission he established headquarters at Ein Harod, about twelve miles southeast of Nazareth, and spent one year there organizing and training the "special night squads."

Though their total strength was only 200 men, these highly trained squads proved extremely effective. Their method was to go out into the hills themselves and ambush raiding bands before they came near enough to harm the settlements. They were the ancestors of the present "Palmakh."

In 1942 when Nazi Marshal Erwin Rommel was at Alamein with the British Army backed up against Alexandria, the British agreed to accept

(Continued on Following Page)

The Army Of 'Haganah'

(Continued from Preceding Page)

Haganah men for special training to do subversive work behind enemy lines in Europe.

IN all, about twenty-five, including some women, were parachuted or infiltrated into German-held territory in Hungary, Rumania, Slovakia and Yugoslavia. They held commissions as British officers and carried out assigned missions against the enemy. They also held a secondary mission from Haganah, it is now revealed, to organize Jews of those countries for their own protection and future Zionist efforts as well as for work against the Germans.

Haganah's excursions into violence and constant clashing with British authority began



Haganah desert patrol.

after the war. Earlier its policy had always been purely defensive. Irgun Zvai Leumi, commonly referred to as Irgun, and the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, better known as the Stern Gang, were but offshoots of Haganah growing out of the desire for a more violent policy than Haganah followed.

WHEN the war ended, Haganah concentrated largely on fostering large-scale illegal immigration from Europe to Palestine. Using the connection its agents had established in Europe during the war, it helped organize the assembly of groups of immigrants, their journey toward embarkation ports and their landing when they reached Palestine.

For the future the military problem of Palestine Jews, they say, is neither men nor knowledge but arms, ammunition and equipment. They admit a shortage in those lines and all possible pressure is being mobilized right now by the Jewish Agency and Zionists in general to get such aid.

Arab sources say no Jewish army, however well organized, can keep from drowning in the Arab sea of the Middle East. The Jews think it can be done—but only if their Haganah obtains sufficient supplies from abroad.