

THE OLD CITY SAGA

By Adina Shirion

Translated from Hebrew: Ami Argaman

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE:

On November 29, 1947, the U.N. passed the Partition Resolution, ending the British Mandate in Palestine as of May 15, 1948, and establishing a Jewish State and an Arab state instead, with Jerusalem to become internationalized under U.N. sovereignty. Since the Palestinian Arabs considered the resolution unjust and rejected it, a civil war was practically inevitable. Shortly afterwards, the Arabs in Jerusalem laid a siege to the Jewish Quarter in the Old City, which was isolated from the rest of the Jewish population in West Jerusalem. The Haganah - the main Jewish pre-statehood underground organization - could no longer send its people in and out of the Quarter at will. The only transportation in and out was via British armored convoys, and the British restricted it to selected, non-military personnel and supplies. My mother, Adina Shirion, a teacher at the time, arrived there in the spring of 1948 via one of those convoys. Following the Quarter's eventual surrender, my mother wrote a long letter to a friend, both in an attempt to "get it out of her system" and in order to dispel some hurtful allegations, which at that time depicted the decision to surrender as ill-conceived and avoidable. This translation is an abbreviated and reformatted version of this letter. I believe that this is an important historical document, particularly because it is subjective and it paints a picture based on the limited perspective of one eyewitness, who was not aware of everything that was happening. The collection of such accounts from various viewpoints, when combined with records and other sources of information, add up eventually to what we call history..

Ami Argaman

We were finally among our people, Israeli troops, on Mount Zion. Shaken, defeated, yet proud all the same. Nobody bothered me any longer, none of the wounded were screaming my name, and no pressing work was waiting for me. At last, I was free to be by myself and cry.

It was twilight, and everything gleamed as long as the sun was still shining. I went into an isolated room and looked at the view. From the window I could see the Jewish neighborhood of Yemin Moshe. A large portion of New Jerusalem, now Jewish Jerusalem, could be seen. I asked myself over and over in disbelief: "is all this really in our hands?"

In the adjacent room the nurse Orah, who for fifteen days of hell on earth adamantly refused to shed a single tear, was finally weeping silently. I, too, made no effort to hold back my tears. Let them roll. With those tears I let go of my demoralization and sorrow of separation.

I remembered all the friends who would never return and the vast destruction in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, for which so much had been sacrificed. People were killed, wounded, or went to prisoner-of-war camps. I remembered the glorious synagogues, now lying in ruins. Who would care for them? I could not forget the Arab mob running amok and putting all that was in its way to the torch. How depressing and humiliating was the surrender.

It was time to go home now. It was all over. Somehow it seemed as if our ordeal had lasted for ages. In fact, it had all started only sixteen days earlier, on May 13, 1948.

THURSDAY, MAY 13

Following five months of siege, everything was ready for Israel's declaration of Independence on May 14, 1948. On May 13, at 5:45 pm, the British suddenly left their positions in the Old City. They were now up for grabs, and whoever controlled them could have a significant advantage in the up-coming Jewish-Arab struggle for control over the Old City. Particularly important were the British positions surrounding the Jewish Quarter. That area was all which

separated the Quarter, a small enclave of about 650 x 650 feet, from Arab positions on two sides, Armenian buildings and Mount Zion on the third, and the Arab Village of Shiloah on the fourth.

From a military point of view, the situation among the Quarter's defenders was rather pathetic. No more than 100 combatants were at hand, few of whom were reasonably well trained; many of them were newly recruited, and all were quite exhausted after the long siege. A brilliant commander, named Avraham, who had helped prepare the area for warfare, fortified the buildings and destroyed obstacles, and was able to mobilize the residents as well, was somehow tricked by the British into taking a leave prior to their departure. They never allowed him back in. The responsibility for defense, therefore, lay in the hands of a young platoon commander barely 24 years old. After he had begged the Haganah headquarters in the New City for help, they sent him a young 19 year old assistant who was subsequently wounded. I did not see much of the commander-in-charge in the Control and Command room during the fighting. Otherwise there were Motke, a young zone commander who took upon himself many responsibilities early on, basically commanding the entire operation, but became rather subdued towards the end; another zone commander was Avraham Orenstein, son of one of the quarter's main Rabbis, who continued to fight efficiently and was dedicated to the end, even after both his parents were killed; and two wonderful squad commanders, Emanuel - the heart and soul of the old city - and Nissan. Emanuel was killed early, while Nissan was wounded in his leg. But after spending a week in the hospital Nissan began hopping on one leg from one position to the next. One of the teachers, 20 year old Aharonchic, had had some experience in the British army and therefore joined the command staff. In short, all our commanders were young and quite inexperienced.

Of weapons there were miserably few. In addition to some rifles and "Sten" submachine guns, we had some "Mausers" and small revolvers, two "Tommies", one "Bren" machine gun, one "Louis" which Judith Weingarten, daughter of the Quarter's community leader, smuggled in at the last minute in her luggage, and two 2" mortars. Ammunition was terribly scarce. In addition, we had a few molotov cocktails and some home made grenades and explosives made out of empty food cans and dynamite. That was all. Two more "Brens" and some rifles were captured later during the fighting from the Arabs. With these weapons we had to face a modern, British-supplied and well trained Jordanian Legion, with tanks and cannons.

In addition, we were responsible for the lives of 1500 residents of the Quarter, many of them sickly women, the elderly and small children. While there were many difficult battles in Israel during the war, none had this kind of a predicament. Totally surrounded once the fighting began, we could neither evacuate the residents nor retreat tactically, if necessary. In the final analysis, that additional problem proved no less a burden on our commanders than did the enemy's obvious superiority in manpower and arms.

Many of the youth among the Old City residents were trained, if rather haphazardly, prior to the break-out of hostilities; their training paid off, inasmuch as they proved themselves the most persistent - and courageous - fighters. Women and young teenagers were helping out, some as active combatants, others as messengers, food and ammunition deliverers, aides in the makeshift hospitals, or whatever was required of them. One thing that we did not lack, though, was food. While the New City was practically starving, we had stored plenty of food in advance and never ran out of it. A handful of women, most of them simple and illiterate, worked hard and with great dedication, under primitive conditions, to ensure that at least nobody had to suffer from hunger.

Our people were more prepared for the British departure than the Arabs. As soon as the soldiers left, they moved in and within a few hours were in control of all the no-man's land areas surrounding the Quarter encountering only scant resistance from the Arabs. The victory, however, was short lived, since there were not enough combatants or weapons and ammunition to hold on to all these positions. We were also talked into leaving one position, located inside an Armenian church. That position, contrary to the promises made to us, was later used by the Arabs against us.

Later that night, at 11 p.m., we were told that a delegation from the New City was about to arrive and negotiate a cease fire. Our excitement was great, but eventually only two French diplomats arrived, and all they did was to make us halt our fire when we shouldn't have, but they achieved nothing in the way of cease fire.

I was posted in the Old City as a teacher by the Jewish Agency. That evening I sat with the other teachers, thirsty for news and eager to be called to help. I had that strange desire to "taste" a battle, to participate in the fighting (A few encounters ended that obsession quickly enough). Except for one man, none of us was called and we were deeply insulted. Later, my roommate and I

complained about that to Emanuel who stopped in our apartment for a cup of coffee. Given that his men were all exhausted, he gladly accepted our offer and took us to one of the most forward and dangerous positions - called "Porat Yosef" - for guard duty. Miraculously, not a single bullet was shot at us while we guarded. "We are immune from fire!" we teasingly informed the commander, "If you ever have a problem handling attacks, just call on us. We'll put an end to it."

FRIDAY, MAY 14

During the day we still held classes, although only a handful of students showed up. At night my roommate and I were assigned to the "Warsaw Position", recently captured following the British departure. We stayed there and helped Aharonchic, the commander, to organize the position, which was abandoned and left in shambles by the British, and to prepare it for defense. It was all so thrilling - we felt like a real soldiers! The men, though, did not share my enthusiasm. Tired beyond belief, they just wanted to catch some sleep.

My guard duty began at midnight. I lay on my belly in a second floor room partially destroyed by earlier explosions. An Arab position was located 40 feet away. Another guard was positioned on the first floor and a third one was patrolling around. "If they try to move on us, shoot them" I was told. I was supposed to shoot at advancing Arabs! I grasped the Sten in the dark, trying to recall all I had learned in my at-arms classes. "Stay cool," I told myself, "Do not get confused at the crucial moment!" The thought that the people were counting on me was scary. As it happened, we were shot at often, but no advance was attempted by the Arabs, so I did not have to shoot anybody.

SATURDAY, MAY 15

In the morning, we observed Aharonchic utilizing the knowledge he had acquired in the British army to fortify and rebuild the position. We used the whole day to sweep, clean and organize the entire place. We were bombarded endlessly, but the Arabs made no real attempts to

advance toward us.

In the evening we were transferred to another position, near the Armenian Quarter, where the men, including the young commander, were totally exhausted and needed my help in guard duties. This was the community leader Mr. Weingarten's house, and had been used as a British position prior to their departure. So far I had heard a lot of shooting, yet had seen no real action. I must have driven the commander crazy. Finally, he granted my request and ordered one soldier to shoot twice at some Arab snipers, just to satisfy my curiosity.

SUNDAY MAY 16

If it was action I wanted to see, I received more than I had asked for on Sunday. The Arabs began advancing, backed by shells and grenades. At times they would even try to make conversation with us, to lure us into the street by offering to sell us bread or tomatoes; then they climbed on rooftops, throwing home-made grenades and canned-dynamite at us. I also saw Arabs charging towards us from the same position in the Armenian church which we had forfeited two days earlier in consideration of religious sentiments. At one point an explosion caused the plaster from the ceiling to fall on us, fortunately without serious results. We stood fast in our half-fortified positions, holding our fire and saving our limited ammunition; we were ordered to shoot only when we noticed advancing Arabs.

Several residents still stayed in the adjacent buildings, and they were panicking. "Raise a white flag, surrender and be done with it," they demanded. Some commanders were indeed inclined to do so. Headquarters in the New City warned us, however, that surrender might spell disaster for us. The Jordanian Legion had not entered the battle yet, and the local irregulars could not be trusted and were liable to massacre us if we laid down our guns.

Militarily, our position was bad. The young commander and his men were fatigued, the weapons and ammunition were scarce, and we were being attacked from several directions at all times. My roommate and I, the two women, were the most refreshed. We managed all non-military matters, food distribution, sleeping arrangements, and coordination of guard duties. We sent young 14 and 15 year old messengers, courageous, loyal and very familiar with the terrain, to ask the commanders for help, which of course was not available. Every so often one of the commanders would appear and try to encourage us with a pep talk. More helpful were visits by the operators of the "Lewis" and the "Bren", who had to rush from one position to the next. In the afternoon Jacob, our sapper¹, blew up a house located between us and the Arabs to help us detect them in time. However they, too, knew the area well, and were using an assortment of passageways, such as little tunnels and basements, and their sappers created additional trails for their advances.

¹ Military explosives expert

At some point a rumor spread that Jacob the Sapper had been killed. We almost panicked. How will we manage without a sapper? But Jacob, big and strong, appeared suddenly, healthy and unharmed.

MONDAY, MAY 17

The early part of Monday was marked by heavy, non-stop mortar bombardment. Afterwards, the Arabs charged into an adjacent neighborhood, and before long, we were surrounded from three sides. Now, only a narrow corridor connected us with the rest of our forces. We had to drop our original plans for a "gradual, room-by-room retreat if necessary." When the order to retreat came, I found myself guarding one window, unaware that everyone else had retreated. Suddenly it dawned on me that my blocking the Arabs' advance was essential for saving everybody's life. The thought petrified me. Fortunately, Nissan, the Deputy Section Commander, entered the room to make sure that no weapons were left behind. I begged him not to leave me there alone, and later we retreated together. We abandoned our position quickly, taking the remaining residents, including women, elderly, and children, with us, by way of ladders, narrow alleys, and over a 10 foot high wall.

The Arabs stayed on the attack, pushing us gradually from Habad Street to the outskirts of the neighborhood and finally to the Jewish Street - the heart of the Jewish Quarter. We took fire not only from a well placed Arab "Bren," but due to lack of coordination, we received "friendly fire" from our own people. "Motke, we are Jews!" we yelled at their commander, but to no avail. The ferocious noise muffled our voices. Finally we joined forces and transferred the residents to the "Istambulian" synagogue.

The residents were nothing but trouble for us, disorderly, undisciplined and sometimes rowdy. Controlling them was an impossible task. They sat trembling with fear, reading from the psalms, mothers chasing their kids, and many of them demanding surrender. "We have always lived in peace with the Arabs," they maintained. Some of them were frankly antagonistic to the whole Zionist idea. And indeed, the responsibility for their lives was unbearable. Even if we were willing to sacrifice our lives, how could we demand the same of them?

Word came from our headquarters to transfer the residents to "Misgav Ladach" Hospital and to raise the Red Cross flag there. Dumbfounded, I was trying to stall. How could we take this rabble to the hospital while the battle was still raging? They would disrupt the work there! Finally the order was changed and we were to move them to "Batey Machseh"². The sight of these terrified, wretchedly helpless residents, clutching their last belongings and stumbling to safety was so pathetic, I could no longer despise them. I helped to move them there. A few insisted on staying, even though the Red Cross flag did nothing to save them from the Arabs' fire; at this point they cared not if they died.

Meanwhile the fighting was intensifying in the Jewish Street. The Arabs were burning every place they moved into, and soon enough a dangerous conflagration raged and moved towards us, with no one willing or able to take care of it. I asked Albert, a friendly if rather eccentric Englishman who had remained with us after the British departure, to see what he could do. He promised me to take care of it. The fire eventually stopped, although I never found out how. Since I had no gun, I helped out by delivering bandages and ammunition to the front positions and assisted in carrying wounded fighters to the hospital. Then, with another friend, I took water and food, through treacherous alleyways, to remote positions. When the fighting gradually tapered off as darkness set in, I decided to go visit Nissan, the commander, in the hospital. I had heard that he was wounded in the leg. I offered to relieve the extremely tired nurse's aide there, a teacher herself, and was subsequently asked by the nurses to stay and help them. That was the end of my brief venture into the battlefield. I became a hospital staff member.

THE HOSPITAL

This was the one institution which kept a high level of performance during the fighting. The work there continued in an orderly, logical fashion and with amazing efficiency, unusual devotion, and exemplary discipline under very difficult circumstances. The second floor, too prone to shelling and sharpshooting had to be evacuated, and the patients were moved to the first floor. This did not really fit the hospital's needs. The Synagogue Hall was converted into an "emergency" room, so to

² Literally, "Shelter Houses"

speak, although at times it looked more like a slaughter house.

Dr. Laufer, a mature 40 year old veteran of several battles in the British Army, experienced, strong-minded and knowledgeable, directed the hospital. He was very demanding of his staff, yet quite protective of them too. He would not let us take unnecessary risks, for we were "essentials". He set the treatment priorities, first, to save lives; second, to prevent deformities, if possible; and third, to ease the patients' agony. Hence, if the safety of the patients required, the doctors did not hesitate to make the wounded walk, lay them in the balcony, or refrain from changing dressings and other such procedures, to save the scarce supplies for the patients who needed them the most. The operating room was used mainly at night, when the shooting subsided. Dr. Laufer and Dr. Riss performed miracles there, with diminishing supplies, without minimal sanitary conditions and without electricity. They used small flashlights for illumination. Only absolutely necessary surgeries were performed, in order to save supplies and to free the doctors to administer first aid to incoming patients. Tzviah, the operating room nurse, worked tirelessly in between surgeries, cleaning, sterilizing, and preparing supplies and patients for the next operation.

In addition to Tzviah, we had only two professional nurses. Orah, the public health nurse, who took upon herself the duties of a head nurse under these new circumstances, and Masha Weingarten, daughter of the Quarter's community leader. Orah was a paragon of mental strength and resourcefulness. Masha exhibited rare physical strength and energy, and kept her good sense of humor throughout our ordeal, laughing, smiling, encouraging, somehow able to find the funny side of things when just about everybody else seemed to be giving in to despair. Nobody could match their admirable conduct. They knew how to take charge, to be on top of every situation, to do everything correctly and at the right moment. And they had a calm, sympathetic expression on their faces at all times. They never let the work or their tensions get the best of them.

In addition, some local women and teachers, including myself eventually, were recruited to help as nursing aides, and some of the local men served as orderlies and stretcher carriers. The tough situation brought out the best and the worst in our staff. Some were selfish, cowardly parasites, others were elevated to spiritual levels worthy only of saints, totally ignoring their own needs and devoting themselves entirely to their comrades.

I myself had never worked with patients in a hospital before, and had never felt inclined towards this kind of work. But, Since I was not really trained as a combatant, this was the most important thing I could do. When I first joined the staff, I was taken aback by the revolting sight of the wounded and their blood. However, I had to adjust. I overcame my initial rejection, suppressed my embarrassment and became warmer and closer to my patients, reminding myself that above all, I had to assess their needs and take care of them. I tried to portray a confident, reassuring image, to keep smiling no matter what, to project my optimism to others. "Everything will turn out alright" became my personal slogan. What else was there to say? In reality, we did not know whether we were going to come out of there alive, be killed by a shell, by a bullet, or be stabbed by an Arab's dagger. I learned that I could get people to help and contribute to the needs of my patients by talking with a soft, non-judgmental tone of voice. I addressed people by using diminutives and terms of endearments, and did not mind apologizing when, through no fault of mine, I could not fulfill their wishes. I feared neither death nor injury; in fact I was reprimanded more than once for taking unnecessary risks. My only apprehension stemmed from the feeling of responsibility to the welfare of the patients, and I felt that my supportive behavior somewhat compensated for my lack of professional knowledge.

MONDAY, MAY 17 (Continued)

When I first began to work at the hospital, I was stunned by the sight of the Synagogue Hall, converted into an improvised emergency room. The patients lay everywhere, on mattresses, on the floor, in no particular order; many of the wounds were not yet dressed, and children were darting around, crying and yelling for their wounded parents. I ran to my room and brought some blankets for them. The other teacher-turned-nursing-aide and I ran out to the kitchen, between bullets, ducking to elude sharpshooters, to bring some oil for lighting the room. Chaos ruled the day, and I depended on others to tell me what to do, since the hospital was still quite alien and intimidating to me.

Fierce battles were being fought outside, and the wounded were streaming in. Still not familiar with exactly what it was that I was supposed to do to help, I kept checking on the arriving patients. When they brought Meir, the teacher, my heart sank. I dared not ask about his condition,

which seemed grim. Finally, when I gathered enough courage to do so, he was lying on the floor, fully covered. I felt something pushing violently against my heart, a burst of pain ---

Meir, German born, sensitive, cultural, educated, interesting, by far my closest friend in the Old City... Meir who was earlier offered another job outside Jerusalem, but then was practically forced to return to the Old City... Meir was gone.

I went back to my original patients' room, wanting to cry; yet all I could manage were a few moans. I had not slept for over fifty traumatic hours. Normally, I would have collapsed by now, but after a few moans I picked myself up, knowing that I had to be strong and stable for the sake of the wounded.

TUESDAY, MAY 18

In the morning I began to work in the hospital. While there was nothing to be done about the crowded conditions, we at least moved the unfortunate patients out of the way to clean the floor. This was no mean trick. I was already exhausted, and marks of sleeplessness were etched on my face, yet I felt a sense of accomplishment. I became familiar with some of the patients; although I made it a point to treat all of them equally, I could not help feeling closer to some of them, whom I termed "my private patients". Like the commander Nissan, for example. These patients, no matter how great their pain, understood the circumstances and did not make unreasonable demands. To the contrary - they tried to help as much as they could.

In the yard and inside on the first floor, the residents made the working conditions, difficult as they were to begin with, virtually impossible. They also kept on demanding that we surrender, in response to an Arab loudspeaker that had been promising us protection if we do so. The doctors and nurses complained in the command room, and the residents were asked to find another hiding place. They would not budge, nor did they move until one commander threatened, "If you all do not leave, I'll throw a grenade into the yard!"

In the streets, the fighting continued. Our defenders were getting both fatigued and

demoralized. At this point people were losing faith in the promises we continued to receive from the City Headquarters of help and reinforcements. Some would have given up, if it had not been for the example set by women fighters, none of whom - unlike some men - had given in to despair. Not one had lost her self control, fainted, or was shell-shocked.

Next to my room, along with two severely wounded teenage girls, lay Emanuel. I knew that he had been wounded earlier, even prior to working in the hospital, yet I could not get myself to go see him. Once during the day, nurse Orah asked me to keep an eye on him. The sight was horrifying. He was unconscious; his eyes, like most of his head and body, were bandaged. One arm had been amputated, the remaining hand was missing three fingers. This man had once been so energetic, lively, merry, innovative and eager for activity, always smiling and happy. All that was left of this fabulous fellow was a broken piece of humanity, lying on his bed, breathing heavily, at times moving slightly as he moaned deeply. That was all... Frankly, I was petrified of the responsibility of watching him, but the nurse told me to call her if he became restless. Nicely said, but what does "restless" mean in his condition?

Rika, Emanuel's girlfriend, was watching him at all times. In the evening, I decided to take it upon myself to relieve her, and I convinced her to get some sleep in the other room. My duties were to watch for any change in his state, and to prevent his legs from jerking while he was fed by a special device dripping a nutritional solution through needles stuck into his thighs. Every so often I tried to pour a little tea with a spoon into a hole under his scorched nose, which seemed to be his mouth. Unbelievably tired myself, I tried to stay awake by delving into my memories of Emanuel...

Emanuel, who came to the Old City originally as a youth counselor, but soon became occupied with the defensive effort... Emanuel, who used to keep up our spirits by leading the singing every Friday night, especially during the Passover "Seder"... Emanuel, who trained Jewish immigrants from Kurdistan and made fierce, well trained soldiers out of them... Emanuel, the only one who managed to recruit Rabbinical-school students and to convert them into combatants... Emanuel, who clashed with British soldiers when they tried to seize arms from Jewish defenders; afterwards, they dared not do so again... Emanuel, who told us about his adventure when he mistakenly ended up inside the hostile Moslem Quarter, speaking

with the same calm voice and confident smile which he used when he explained to us about the defensive plans for the Jewish Quarter... Emanuel, the handsome fellow who made sure to "greet" every new girl upon her arrival in the Old City... Emanuel, who said one time, with his regular, secure tone of voice and his customary smile, "Each one of us is just as good a candidate for death as the next one!"... Emanuel who knew everybody, loved everyone and was adored by all... Emanuel, whom I had last seen when he appeared with his "Bren" in our position, shot a few rounds and rushed back to his own position... Emanuel who was wounded when an explosive which he tried to detonate blew up in his face... Oh, Emanuel, Emanuel! Where is your voice, what happened to your singing? Where is the enthusiasm, the inspiration, the lovely smile? What will you do if you regain consciousness - blind, half burnt and lame? Is not death preferable to such life?

At midnight I felt that my strength was abandoning me. However, Rika was too tired, and I did not wish to wake her up, and the other two nursing aides who worked with me, refused to relieve me. I rested for a few minutes, gathered my strength and continued.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 19

At about 3 a.m. I could hear footsteps in the adjacent rooms. Kitchen workers were woken up to prepare coffee and refreshment for the Palmach³ reinforcements who were on their way. Ferocious fighting could be heard from the street, including explosions from the "Davidka" mortar, which was known more for its tremendous noise than for any efficiency, and I could not help feeling elated. Finally! After all the broken promises, they came to save us! The reports we had received had overestimated the number of our rescuers, and I thought that they were really going to conquer the entire Old City and end this nightmare once and for all. "Do you hear? The

³ Palmach was the military arm of the Haganah, and by far the largest and the best trained military organization during the pre-statehood stage. Upon the establishment of the State, all underground organizations technically integrated into the Israel Defense Force (IDF). Practically, however, at least in the very beginning, each one of them was operating quite separately.

reinforcements are coming," I said to Emanuel who remained inert. Then, suddenly, he began to jerk his legs violently, attempting in vain to utter something out of his scorched mouth. I called for help, yet there seemed to be no response from the other room. For a moment, I was concerned that something might have happened to them, but actually they were all busy greeting the reinforcements. Finally, some people came in, and I asked someone to wake Rika while I ran to call a doctor. Then I collapsed crying on a chair in "my" room, crying. Suddenly, Orah burst into my room with a friend of hers, one of the Palmach men. Excited, we peppered him with questions and inquiries. We really believed that our ordeal was over. Now everything was under control. Our own army was in charge!

Reality returned when I came out of my room and heard Rika yelling. I stepped into Emanuel's room and saw her throwing herself on the bed, waving her hands and shrieking, "No! Don't! I don't want!" Orah, with tears in her own eyes, was trying to hold and console her. My tears had dried already, and I experienced a strange mix of emotions. The long-awaited reinforcements had made it at last, but Emanuel - the heart and soul, the pride and joy of the Old City - was dead. I went back to my room, when I realized that the two girls, who had slept throughout the entire scene, were left with Emanuel's body in their room. I had no energy left to do anything about it. But then I forced myself to get up and take care of things. I had to go on working!

Before dawn, we realized that our celebration had been premature. The Palmach men vanished. They left without even evacuating the dead and the wounded as promised. Behind them, they left 80 Home Guard men - mainly middle aged, poorly trained and unmotivated soldiers, who felt that they were cheated into this unwanted mission. Those who did not desert, were used to relieve some of our defenders in the guard posts and provide them with much needed rest. Otherwise, we now had a few more weapons, including machine guns and more ammunition, some much needed medical supplies, including plasma and dressings which we had begun to run out of, and - what seemed at the time most important of all - Mordechai, an experienced commander, who was quite familiar with the Old City. He stayed with us and took over.

When Jacob, one of the orderlies, saw me in the morning, I must have looked terrible. He made me sit down and served me coffee and a caffeine pill. I began moving slowly and working intermittently, taking short naps in between. The deafening sound of shooting outside was nerve-

racking. Unaware at first that the Palmach had actually left, I thought they were trying to take over the entire Old City. I muttered to myself, "Enough already! They don't have to finish everything at once! Why don't they take a break and give our ears a rest? I can--not--stand--it--any--more!" A few times I honestly thought that I was going to give up, but when I saw how overworked the nurses were, I felt ashamed of my weakness and immediately offered to help them.

Late in the evening, fire erupted in the building next door, where my own room and my belongings were. Fires like this were not uncommon, because the Arabs burned buildings throughout their advance. This one was particularly dangerous, since it could easily spread towards the hospital and burn us all alive. And yet, nobody seemed able to do anything about it. We had neither the manpower, materials, nor the time to deal with it, and the commanders I approached, just looked helplessly at the flames and hoped it would die on its own. Fortunately, the wind turned the fire away from us, and finally it subsided. I assumed that my belongings had certainly been consumed, and in a way, I felt relief, because I did not want to fare better than others. Late in the evening, Orah, who had switched shifts with Masha to get some sleep, ordered me to go to the room that held the patients I had been working with, and to sleep a little.

After a short sleep, I was assigned by Dr. Riss to keep an eye on a new patient with a wound in one of his lungs. He was just coming out of surgery. His condition was quite grim and the doctors did not have much hope for his survival, but they were doing all they could to try and save him. Much as I hated to burden the other patients, I had to wake some of them up and take away their pillows, so that he could stay in a semi-upright position. My job was to prevent him from moving, to feel his pulse and to call a nurse to medicate him whenever his skin was cooling down. Looking closely at his face, I recognized him. It was Mordechai, the commander who came in with the reinforcements. We did not know each other personally, but I was quite familiar with him because I had once served under his command, prior to being sent to the Old City. So he, too, even if he made it, was lost as a commander with his experience and expertise. Once again we were left with young, inexperienced command staff. I stayed with him for the entire lonely, endless night, and once in a while called a nurse whenever his face had cooled down. In an adjacent room the wounded were screaming, because the 14 year old girl left in charge of their room kept falling asleep. Yet I could not help. I had to stay with Mordechai at all times. All I could do was wait for the night to end.

THURSDAY MAY 20

The night seemed endless, but finally, morning light appeared. Now, at least, I could talk to somebody. Tzvia washed Mordechai and the doctors continued their efforts to save him, infusing him with plasma under horrendous conditions. Suddenly he began showing improvement. An explosion broke the windows; he was startled and instructed us to remove all glass from the panes and to tape them. He started to talk to other patients and even recognized me. I was delighted to see him so lively; it was almost like witnessing a man resurrected from the dead.

Early in the day the Jordanian Legion entered the Old City and joined the fighting. We no longer faced rowdy irregulars, but rather a well equipped, disciplined, British-trained army with tanks, cannons and heavy arms. The Arabs, now confident of their advantage, attacked our strategic position in "Nissan Beck" synagogue, and were initially successful. However, if some men were resigning to defeat, Judith Jaharan, a native of the Old City and a medic in our position there, was not at all of a mind to quit. Proving a fearless fighter, she stormed the Arab position by herself, inspiring the embarrassed men to follow her, and grabbed the Legion's flag from the bewildered Arab soldiers. Indeed, she was a role model for women-combatants everywhere.

Elsewhere, the bombardments intensified, and our casualties mounted. The wounded were flowing into the hospital, and the doctors were concerned that soon there would not be enough space for all of them. After long deliberations, they decided to transfer the sick and the wounded who did not require close medical supervision to the second floor of "Batey Machseh". They needed somebody to go with those patients, and since I was not happy with the woman I worked with in the hospital - I volunteered.

In my new place I was much more independent, and, of course, had many more responsibilities to go with this new freedom. I had to take care of the needs of all the patients, send the two nice fourteen year old girls who helped me - at times under bombardments - to the hospital for food, and then distribute it and wash the dishes in the little kitchenette which was made available to me there. I had to confiscate dishes from abandoned dwellings to accommodate my

patients (something I was very uncomfortable with), and even had to contend with constant interruptions by visitors who insisted on looking in on the patients at all hours. I also tried my best to keep the place clean. However, physically I felt much stronger than before, since I established a routine which finally enabled me to sleep a little at night. During the first two nights I slept from 10 p.m. until midnight, while the two girls stayed up. Then I watched the patients until morning. Otherwise, I would take a cat nap here and there during the day whenever possible. Afterwards, Orah assured me that since my patients did not require constant supervision, I could sleep all night long. She did not need to convince me. I was so tired! every night I slept on the floor, in a different corner of the room, sparing the mattresses for the patients. We all slept whenever and wherever it was possible. When one fellow voiced his amazement that a young woman did not mind letting him sleep next to her, another man quipped, "Do you really think she has nothing better to worry about right now?" Chances were that when she woke up, she would find somebody else sleeping there anyway. Nevertheless, sleeping at night made me much calmer and a lot more efficient during the day.

FRIDAY MAY 21

Early in the morning I decided to keep myself awake by taking a little stroll on the balcony and I wandered into the radio room. Motke and Aharonchic were there. Motke was communicating with a commander from outside the walls, who had just informed him that another attempt at penetrating the siege had failed and that he intended to try again the next night. Motke tried in vain to explain to him that we could not wait until the night, and then retorted: "If you come tonight, you won't find us anymore! you will no.....t fin.....d us any mo.....re!" The two young commanders, both of whom we all considered quite cool and resourceful, were agitated and virtually in tears. Perhaps the only calm person in the room was myself. Little did I understand about our military woes, but one thing was clear to me all the same: If these guys give up, we are doomed. I rushed to recruit another teacher, someone I knew Aharonchic respected greatly, and then invited them to my kitchen to wash up and drink some fruit soup. Their spirits were slowly recovering. I made up my mind to declare a war on depression!

Later, I saw another commander, his hand wounded, pacing shell-shocked around the Command room. Per Motke's request, I took him to my ward and tried to pacify and relax him,

while he was raving like a madman about being left out by our army. I told him that I was born with good luck, and since I was there, everything was bound to end up fine. He finally fell asleep, with the help of some pills and cognac. This was a rough day. Fridays, when the Moslems are incited in their mosques, are prone to mischief. The Arabs attempted several times to penetrate our lines. From my balcony I could see the dome of the glorious synagogue "Nissan Beck" cracked in two. Finally the Arabs entered it and blew it up from the inside, leaving nothing but its foundation intact.

From my balcony I could also observe no less than 25 dreadful funerals of our best men. I knew that dear friends, including Meir and Emanuel, were among them. Nobody but the terrified stretcher-bearers were there to escort the dead on their final journey amidst the falling shells. I returned to my patients, determined not to reveal what was happening inside my soul. Once again, as the bombardment intensified, I had to deal with the shell-shocked soldier, and to assure Yoske - one of my "favorite" patients, who almost never bothered anybody in spite of the excruciating pain he suffered from his fractured leg - that if the time came to withdraw, I would not forget that he could not walk and be there to help him. Not that I really knew what would I do if we were really attacked directly, or how we could defend ourselves. Nonetheless, the patients had to feel confident that I was in charge!

SATURDAY, MAY 22

After staying awake at night for the last time, I went back before dawn to the radio room. There we waited impatiently for Motke and his men who went to meet a force that was supposed to break the siege and save us. The penetrators were supposed to climb the walls with ladders, while our boys were to assist them with their own ladders inside. But this attempt also failed, and Motke returned furious and frustrated, losing one of his best men for naught.

The rest of the day, however, was the quietest of them all. We finally enjoyed a break from the constant bombardment. I tried to rest a little, but to no avail. Evidently I was too charged up. Then, once I took the opportunity to look at myself, I realized that for nine days now, although I tried my best to keep some minimal hygiene for the patients, I never bothered to as much as wash my face. I was as filthy as they come. My hair was thick with pieces of paint and plaster, and as for

my clothes and shoes - I'd better say nothing! It was time to do something. I asked one girl to relieve me for a while and went to wash myself and my clothes. I had to stand in line, since everybody seemed to be going on a cleaning spree. Somebody told me that in fact my original room had not been burnt in the fire of May 19, and I went there - despite the building's exposure to sharpshooting snipers - and took my belongings, so that I could change my shirt. "Terrific!" approved Motke when he saw me all changed and cleaned, "let's all look like soldiers!" And he proceeded to send all his men to wash, change and straighten up, the healthy and able assisting the wounded and impaired. We all felt refreshed and our spirits picked up.

SUNDAY, MAY 23

Heavy bombardment resumed early in the morning, and our ceiling broke from a direct hit by a shell. The room was covered with plaster and debris, but miraculously, nobody was hurt. The nerve-racked soldier woke up screaming, "Oh, my head!" But then, he referred to himself as crazy. I rushed to the command room for instructions and was told just to wait. Later, when Dr. Riss came to visit the patients, he ordered me to move them all to the first floor, because it was a little safer.

I spent almost the entire day confiscating rooms from the first floor residents, preparing them, cleaning, fortifying the windows and moving the patients there. A few workers from among the residents were assigned to me to break walls and build fortifications, yet each time we were bombarded they would flee, and I had to roam the place, locate them and drag them back to work again. Finally, in the evening, all the patients were on the first floor.

During the day, our people made some small advances, and a first-aid station we had lost on May 17, was once again in our hands. Orah went there to take all she could find for the hospital - particularly milk powder for babies. In the hospital, there was nothing left to feed them with. Apparently she also found a few other things, and in the evening she came to visit us and brought gifts: For the patients, sheets, chocolate and cigarettes, and for me - a white apron! I was so proud of my new "uniform," I had to go out and show them off to everybody.

MONDAY, MAY 24

In the morning, the bombardment intensified even more. In that afternoon, I rushed to help an old woman wounded in the basement of one of the buildings. The stairs were too narrow for a stretcher, and since almost every bone in her body seemed either fractured or damaged, two men and I held on to her dress and so carried her upstairs. Then we put her on a stretcher and ran, under heavy shelling, through narrow alleyways, over rocks, pebbles, hills and other hurdles to the hospital. I wanted to slow down, but the two men were too scared. Exhausted, we left the stretcher in a house on the way and ran to the hospital to summon help. There, Orah, after scolding me for risking myself, took some bandages and in defiance of her own safety orders ran with us towards the patient. She tried to treat her there, but soon gave up, and once an explosion broke the window there, she rushed back to the hospital. Finally we used a short lull in the shooting and ran, carrying the patient to the hospital. There we handed her over to the doctors.

After visiting my favorite patients, Nissan and Mordechai, I was set to go back to "Batey Machseh". Only then did I realize that the two fellows who shared the experience with me were shaken up. Fascinating, because, except for the physical difficulties, the fear itself did not seem to have such an impact on me.

TUESDAY, MAY 25

As the fighting intensified, more patients were transferred to Batey Machseh. At some point the doctors considered moving the entire hospital there, because the original building was dangerously close to Arab positions; but the idea was postponed for the time being. Instead, additional fortifications were built around the hospital, partially with the help of mobile patients. But I had to open a second room on the bottom floor, and again I went through the required routine - evacuating the residents, cleaning, fortifying, chasing after the working men, confiscating linen... When it came to the patients' needs, I would stop at nothing.

Headquarters in the City promised reinforcements "very soon", as usual, but we were losing faith in their promises. Therefore, we decided to produce our own "reinforcements." When one of

the families had a baby girl, she was named "Tigboret"⁴. In the evening, an attempt was made at least to parachute some ammunition to replenish our diminishing supplies. Young messengers lit a fire at night to mark the designated area for the plane to drop its cargo by parachute, but the supplies landed in a zone not accessible to us.

Later that evening, Dr. Riss came for rounds and ordered me to bath two patients and change their dressings. Where should I find either hot water or new dressings? That was left up to me to improvise. For the patients I could show persistence, I did not mind begging, nagging, demanding, even pilfering. Finally, I obtained dressings from the hospital and some heating oil from the Command room. A neighbor used it to heat water for me. Then, in the dark - the wind kept extinguishing the candle I had lit - I tried to perform this revolting task for the first time in my life. Only after Motke intervened on my behalf did I receive a lantern, so that I could at least see what I was doing. As usual, circumstances forced me to overcome my inhibitions and soon both patients were washed and their dressings changed.

WEDNESDAY, MAY 26

The situation in the battlefield was becoming desperate. We were rapidly running out of ammunition, not to mention the strength of our combatants. The Arabs were advancing slowly but surely. Another attempt to parachute supplies for us in the evening failed. The plane which had been sent was forced back by heavy gunfire. That night was the Jewish festival of Lag Baomer, which traditionally is marked by camp fires. Our fire, designed to mark our location for the pilot, must have been the only one in Jerusalem that year!

Late in the evening a decision was made that the main hospital could no longer remain safely in "Misgav Ladach", too close for comfort to Arab lines. Dr. Riss and Dr. Laufer came to Batey Machseh, and ordered me to prepare to absorb the entire hospital that same night. The whole transfer had to be completed before morning, when heavy bombardments were likely to resume. Our young messengers were evicted from their two rooms, but those would hardly suffice for such an influx of patients. Therefore, we had to clear the balcony as soon as possible. I recruited Malka -

⁴ Means "Reinforcements" in Hebrew.

another teacher - and two other women, and together we moved all the furniture there to a corner of the balcony, then mopped and cleaned. Now we were waiting for the patients, hoping that they would arrive before the morning light.

THURSDAY, MAY 27

Finally we saw them coming. Rows of tormented mobile patients, making their way through the rough terrain. We laid them down anywhere we could on the balcony; unfortunately, we did not even have mattresses for them. Then came the more severely wounded, carried on stretchers. We had to take them off the stretchers hurriedly and lay them wherever possible, so that the stretchers could be taken back to bring more patients. They suffered greatly, yet there was little we could do for them. After a while we received some mattresses from the original hospital and even real beds from some residents; I also had to take some from "my" patients, whose wounds were relatively light, and give to the more critically wounded patients.

By morning light, the entire hospital was in "Batey Machseh". The doctors made rounds and operated on newly arrived patients, even in daylight. The nurses and their aides could not find their way around in the new place, and they all came to me. They were now on my turf; it was my domain, and the responsibility, too, was all on my shoulders. I had to make sure that food was brought from the kitchen [upon appeasing the kitchen workers, who had been left behind in the turmoil, and in protest refused to prepare breakfast!], ensure that dishes were washed and returned for use, that we got enough water for the patients and that the patients were all served their meals. For those who could not tolerate solid food, I prepared tea and helped them sip it. My hands were certainly full. We also moved all the patients inside, even into basements from which we had to evacuate the residents. To clear more space, some of the mobile wounded soldiers were sent out and were used as reservists for the combatants in the various positions. The last two patients were removed from the balcony just as heavy bombardments began and shrapnel hit the balcony.

Meanwhile, things were getting worse and worse for our crumbling defensive efforts. Now even our home made grenades and mortar shells were all gone, not to mention "Bren" ammunition.

Regular bullets were scarce, too. Young teenagers, including girls, had to be sent to the front positions to help our defenders. The girls proved strong and determined. In time of crisis, a young woman's spiritual as well as physical stamina can outlast that of a man. Having nothing else left to cling to, we convinced ourselves that this time, the tone of the City Headquarters' promises for reinforcements was more serious. Tonight they are going to make it! What else was left for us to do but to believe it was so? People gathered around the hospital and some even broke into singing and dancing. Tonight, tonight our ordeal may finally be over. This time help is really on the way.

FRIDAY, MAY 28

The night passed, morning came and there was nothing new under the sun. We were as much under siege as ever. Our ammunition was virtually exhausted, with no more than thirty-five able bodied and healthy combatants left to defend us. The Arabs were very close by, already in control of the "Nissan Beck" strategic position, and approaching the "Istambulian" synagogue, where most of the residents were concentrated. The continuing promises from the City Headquarters for "certain" reinforcements coming the next night, counted at this point for no more than an annoying tease. By night, all of us, including the helpless residents, would have been slaughtered already. The command staff met briefly in the morning and reached the inevitable conclusion. We had no choice but to surrender.

Two Rabbis were sent to negotiate surrender terms with the Arabs, but some of our boys in the front positions, suspicious of the Rabbis' intent, stopped them. Only when a Command Staff member and the community Leader Mr. Weingarten joined them, were they allowed to pass the lines. Meanwhile, a strange atmosphere of resignation and uncertainty struck us. Soldiers left their positions, trying to gather information about what was happening. One rumor followed the next, but I tried to ignore them all. There was still much work to be done. Patients continued to arrive and they all needed to be fed and cared for, physically as well as mentally. Our negotiators tried to convince the Arabs to let us lay down our arms and leave, yet they insisted on taking prisoners so that they could have something to show for their efforts. Finally an agreement was reached: We would clear the neighborhood, the men - among them elderly and youth, for the Jordanians were embarrassed to return with only 35 prisoners - would go to POW camps, and the women, the non-combatant residents and the wounded will be sent to the Jewish lines on Mount Zion.

Once we were told that the agreement was signed, we tried to use much of our stored food. What was there to conserve anymore? I was devastated and could not come to grips with the idea. The healthy men left, marching in an orderly fashion, like proud soldiers, to prison. In a way, I regretted I was not a man so that I could share their ordeal with them. Orah rallied us to clean and organize the hospital, so that the Arabs would not find us in a humiliating state. At this point we no longer had our young messengers, so we dressed four fellows with white aprons and registered them as "sanitary workers". I was even able to find a woman who knew how to heat tea on logs, to somewhat quench the patients' thirst, despite the fact that it was already dark and the Sabbath had begun. I assured her that such tea was a life saver for some of them, and therefore justified desecration of Sabbath rules. Meanwhile, the Arab mob was running amok, looting, plundering and burning everything. The Jordanian Legionnaires surrounded the hospital and promised to protect us, and even chased the mob away every so often. Yet, things became quite dangerous, and we had to move patients from the basement to the balcony, already overloaded with patients lying anywhere, even on the bare floor. There was only so much the Legionnaires could do, and the fires were closing in on us. The unburied dead, left in one of the rooms, were imminently in danger of being burned.

The Legionnaires, whom we had not allowed earlier in the hospital, were walking now around inside, and I did not mind. Let them see how badly off we were, how low we had to sink before we gave up. Mr. Weingarten discussed the safety issue with them, and Dr. Laufer pointed out to them that if the mob massacred us, it would not look very good on their records. It was decided to leave the dead and try to save the living. We were to move to the Legion's Headquarters at the Armenian Convent, where we could supposedly be safer. Frankly, at this point I felt so low that I could not have cared less if a bomb had fallen and blown up the entire building --- inhabitants and all. To everyone's amazement, I even managed to take a short nap before the move. The first convoy of "mobile" patients - this definition included those who could barely limp, since we were short of stretchers and of people to carry them - left on its way to the Convent, headed by Judith Weingarten. I joined a convoy of stretchers, which the Arab soldiers were ordered to help carry. Holding a stretcher while hurrying through narrow passageways and streets littered with rocks and pebbles was not simple. and after Esthy, my patient fell from the stretcher once during a sharp turn, I resorted to carrying a mattress instead. All the while, the Arab mob was running from one building

to the next, putting everything to the torch.

On reaching the convent's yard, we left the patients for the Jordanian soldiers there to take them upstairs, while we grabbed new stretchers, and along with one of their officers rushed back to the hospital to bring more patients to safety. On the way, to our dismay, the officer stopped to reprimand some of the looters. Who had time for that? Finally we reached the hospital and again formed a convoy, with me carrying a mattress. Back at the Convent, I was humiliated to see some of the miserable old residents bowing to the Legionnaires and begging them for food. The Legionnaires, on their part, treated us quite fairly, providing us with food and water. They were particularly sympathetic to the elderly and the children. When it came to carrying stretchers, they were a little lazy, in spite of their strict orders, but who could blame them for that?

Wasting no time I rushed back to the hospital. On my way I ran into another semi-mobile convoy, and was horrified to see Mordechai, with his punctured lung, walking on his own, wrapped with a white blanket and looking like the Angel of Death himself taking an evening walk. I proceeded to support him, while keeping an eye on another wounded, Shear-Yishuv⁵, who was hopping on his one healthy leg, assisted by two Legionnaires who were not all too gentle with him. Walking, and even worse, climbing up to the third floor inside the Convent was extremely hard for Mordechai, who was constantly gasping for air. Yet we made it, and finding no vacant mattress, I had to leave him leaning on a sack of sand. Even Aharonchic, now wounded with a bandage over his eye, was going up and down the stairs, carrying stretchers. Downstairs, however, I met Judith Weingarten who not only decided that she was too tired to continue to help, but also threatened to ask the Arabs not to bring the patients upstairs, unless we made sure that the suitcases with her belonging arrived safely. We had to pacify her for the patients' sake. Later, when her sister Masha heard about that incident, she was absolutely flabbergasted.

Back we went, bringing new stretchers with us, and I was wandering on the way what would I do if I found the hospital aflame. Would I jump into the fire? But we arrived on time, and I joined another woman and one man, all of us carrying mattresses, escorting four Legionnaires who

⁵ Shear-Yishuv Cohen became Chief Rabbi of the City of Haifa, and in 1994, during the signing ceremony of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty, was honored with reading a portion from the Bible.

carried Jacob the Sapper, wounded in both his legs, on a stretcher. He was so heavy for them that they left him by the entrance to the Convent yard, and I had to implore an English-speaking Arab officer to find people that would take him inside. Upstairs, my heart was torn at the sight of Mordechai, now lying on a mattress and using the sand sack as a pillow - with a wounded lung! And then Yoske was dragged in, with his broken leg, the one I had taken such good care of, hanging unsupported and moving from side to side. Obviously in great pain, he begged me to stay with him, yet I had to refuse. There were more patients to save from the encroaching fire.

Half-way back to the hospital we found a stretcher with a severely wounded patient left on the roadside. I got three legionnaires to help me carry it, and shortly afterwards a fourth one graciously offered to relieve me. Yet another Legionnaire showed up and decided to take advantage of the darkness --- For the patient's sake, I avoided raising a fuss. I just maneuvered myself out of his grasp, hastened my pace and finally got rid of him and his dirty fingers.

I returned to the hospital one more time to help transfer the last five patients. We made it! The dead were burned, but the living were saved. Only after the last patient was removed, did the doctors and nurses themselves leave, barely escaping the fire at the last minute. I had to stay by myself with seven sleeping patients who were still left down at the Convent yard, quite uncomfortable and apprehensive about being there alone with all the Arabs around. Finally Orah came down with Malka the medic and a two orderlies. Carrying the remaining patients up three flights of stairs was extremely difficult, especially since at one point we had to pass through a narrow gate where only two of us could carry each stretcher. Under any other circumstances, it simply could have not been done. Yet we did it. With the fire closing in on us, we could do anything and everything. Once we heard commotion from Orah's direction. Apparently, an Arab youth was harassing her, and she smacked him on the cheek. A Legionnaire came to her aid and smacked him on the other cheek. Finally, everyone was safe inside the Convent.

SATURDAY, MAY 29

At 5 am we went upstairs to find the patients, most of them sleeping, in a disarray. Then, to top off all our troubles that night, we realized that Esthy was dying ---

Esthy... how sweet she was! Esthy, who joined us back in April as a substitute English teacher, and I helped her fit in with us, seeing her so confused and disoriented on her first night... Esthy, who was appointed zone-secretary when the fighting began, and rushed among the positions, ignoring shrieking bullets and even a slight injury, bringing supplies, encouraging, rallying back deserters, even replacing our sandwiches when she found them dirty... Her experience in England during the Blitz taught her never to overlook the basics, under any circumstances... Esthy, whom once I found crying in the yard, and took to my room to lie on my bed. Shortly afterwards, she came back, cool and collected as ever, to continue her work... Esthy, who was in a position that was completely blown up by the Arabs, and suffered critical wounds, paralyzed from the waist down, and the doctors, although realizing that her chances to survive were slim, did all they could for her... Esthy, who in her dying moments still made sure to caution Aharonchic about an English soldier who was staying with us... Then she just laid there moaning... And finally she was moaning no more.

My heart was crumbling inside me. Esthy's face was calm and beautiful now. Orah came, looked at her, lifted the blanket and covered her face. It was all over, and it was so cruel! Even a passing Arab officer nodded sadly when, in an answer to his question, I told him she was dead.

I was crushed. The pain, the humiliation, everything overwhelmed me. I could not help myself anymore, and tears were streaming down my face. I was not the only one crying, but Orah kept calm, and asked us to hide in one of the rooms lest the Arabs would see us in our weakness. Although we did not care anymore, we knew she was right and honored her request.

However, there was not much time for grieving. We still had 119 patients, most of them wounded in battle. Most of the medical equipment had been lost in the haste of the transfer, so we did not even have a bed pan. We had to physically support some patients on their way to the bathroom, and we used a clay bottle as a urinal and a dust pan for a bed pan! The filthy conditions did not bother us anymore, and we had nothing to clean with anyway. Even the tenacious, never-say-die Masha gave up on bathing the patients. I took a little nap and afterwards felt so ashamed that I sent somebody else to rest instead. We received some dry crackers as breakfast for the patients, and a loaf of bread, eggs and cheese for lunch. Yet some of them could not eat anything,

and we had to beg the Weingarten family to share the tea [which they were served exclusively] with the patients.

Early in the afternoon, a Red Cross medical delegation began inspecting all the patients with our medical staff, to determine who should be released and who would go to prison. At first we thought that all the wounded would be freed, but that was not to be. The Jordanians agreed to let only the most severely wounded patients go. Aharonchic pretended to be dying, to no avail. Jacob the Sapper, too, with both his legs injured, was hoping to avoid POW camp to get a chance to recuperate, return to battle, and avenge our local defeat. But he was disappointed. Our doctors fought like lions for every patient; unfortunately, their credibility was put to question when one of the unconscious patients, described by them as critical, woke up just when the delegation approached him. Finally, a list of 51 patients going to prison was announced⁶. The judgement was not always correct. Ironically, whereas some of the ones going to prison were quite severely wounded, others, who were released, were quick to recover.

It was time to say farewells. The nurses changed dressings, and we took letters home from them. Separations are always hard for me, but this one was impossible. The thought that we had to leave severely wounded and helpless patients to the enemy's mercy was unbearable for me. Caring for them daily had bonded us and now made saying goodbye so much harder. In spite of Orah's scolding, I could not help bursting into tears again. To avoid the Arabs, I went into one of the rooms and ended up chastising an elderly patient for asking for some water. Mordechai looked at me sorrowfully and commented, "Even you lost your composure." However, all I could do at that point was to cry bitterly.

Nevertheless I did get myself together, and proceeded to serve all the prison-bound patients lemonade I had received from two British-looking Legionnaires. To the astonishment of some Arabs who gathered by the door, the prisoners all began singing the partisans' song, with sadness and hope at the same time. Once again I could not hold back my tears. To this day, I can hear the prisoners singing that song.

⁶ Later we found that the prisoners were treated quite fairly in Jordan, and the patients received good and adequate medical care.

Now I had to help move released patients towards Mount Zion. We had to hurry, before a special cease fire, called especially for this purpose, would expire. We needed to free some stretchers, and so we moved two dead bodies from them, those of Esthy and Yitzhak the "Bren Man".

Yitzhak had acquired his "title" for not putting down his Bren for one minute during the fighting... A native of the Old City, he was a source of inspiration for us when everybody else seemed to have given up...Always running from one position to the next, bringing his fire-power with him...Delightful, brave and strong, Yitzhak epitomized our resistance. When he was injured on the last day, we could sense clearly that our battle had been lost. There was nobody to count on anymore... He lay unconscious in the Convent for a long time, then suddenly became restless, received an injection and shortly afterwards died...

I helped take a few more elderly patients towards Zion gate, then came back to see the prison-bound patients. Once their destiny had been decided, they cheered up, sang, and one of them even played a recorder. The Arabs might have defeated us, but they could not destroy our spirits.

The Jordanians insisted that one of our doctors should join the patients. Initially our doctors refused, maintaining that since in their opinion, the condition of some of the prison-bound patients was too severe, they could not take responsibility for their health. However, once the Jordanians promised to fulfil all of our doctors' medical demands, and to provide good medical care, Dr. Riss announced that he would go with them. The news spread rapidly and the patients cheered for him.

The Weingarten family joined the wounded in prison, and two female nursing aides volunteered to do so too. I was tempted to go as well, but I knew that my parents, being orthodox Jews, would never forgive me if they find out that I went there at my free will. It was time to say goodbye... We left the patients, passed Zion Gate and soon met our soldiers on Mount Zion... It was time to go home now.

POSTSCRIPT

For quite a few days after I returned home, falling asleep was rather difficult. The memory of the night I had spent next to the dying Emanuel came to haunt me. I also suffered from a terrible physical weakness, and more than anything else I feared being lonely. I constantly tried to stay with friends, visit the wounded patients in various hospitals, discuss our ordeal again and again, and ponder upon its implications. Soon I recovered physically as well as mentally, and my answer to all the questions that have been bothering us, is that we could not have done better than we did, without being slaughtered along with 1500 innocent residents. If nothing else, we attracted a large number of Jordanian Legionnaires for a considerable amount of time, thus easing the pressure on the rest of Jewish Jerusalem.

So rest in peace, our dead. Our battle was not fought in vain. Your sacrifice was not futile. And remember, we shall overcome, we shall return and rescue the Old City. We may not be able to find its glorious synagogues anymore, but it will be a tremendous center of liberty and antiquity, a holy place, sanctified even more by our blood. It will be a site for Jews from all over the world to go on a pilgrimage. The Old City will be ours again!