

TERROR

IN TEL AVIV

BY
EDWARD P. MORGAN



A Jew resists arrest by three British soldiers. In the background another Jew is being held, while soldiers and civilians witness the dramatic incident

A Collier's correspondent keeps a secret rendezvous with the Irgun. Here is a behind-the-scenes report on the Jewish underground and violence in Palestine

THE tall young man slipped quietly through a side door into a little beachside hotel in Tel Aviv. There were a few people sitting in the lounge, taking a cigarette or a last swallow of breakfast coffee and reading the Palestine Post. The headlines told them that the terrorists had been busy again.

The young man was bareheaded and sunburned. He wore khaki shorts and a cotton shirt, open at the throat. Under his arm he carried a worn leather brief case. He went to the desk, spoke to the clerk and then walked straight to my chair.

"Hello," he said. "I telephoned you last night." I ordered some more coffee and asked him to sit down. He pulled a small envelope from the brief case. "Here is our latest communiqué," he said. He kept his voice low. "We'll have more details on the operations tomorrow. Meanwhile, I think one of our officers can see you tonight. I'll come back for you at eight. It will be dark then and it is better if we meet outside, in the street." He sipped his coffee slowly but as soon as he had finished he picked up the brief case. "Incidentally, you can call me David," he added, as he headed for the door. So my first contact with the Jewish terrorists in Palestine had been as unostentatious (I hoped) as a call from an insurance salesman. I slit open the envelope.

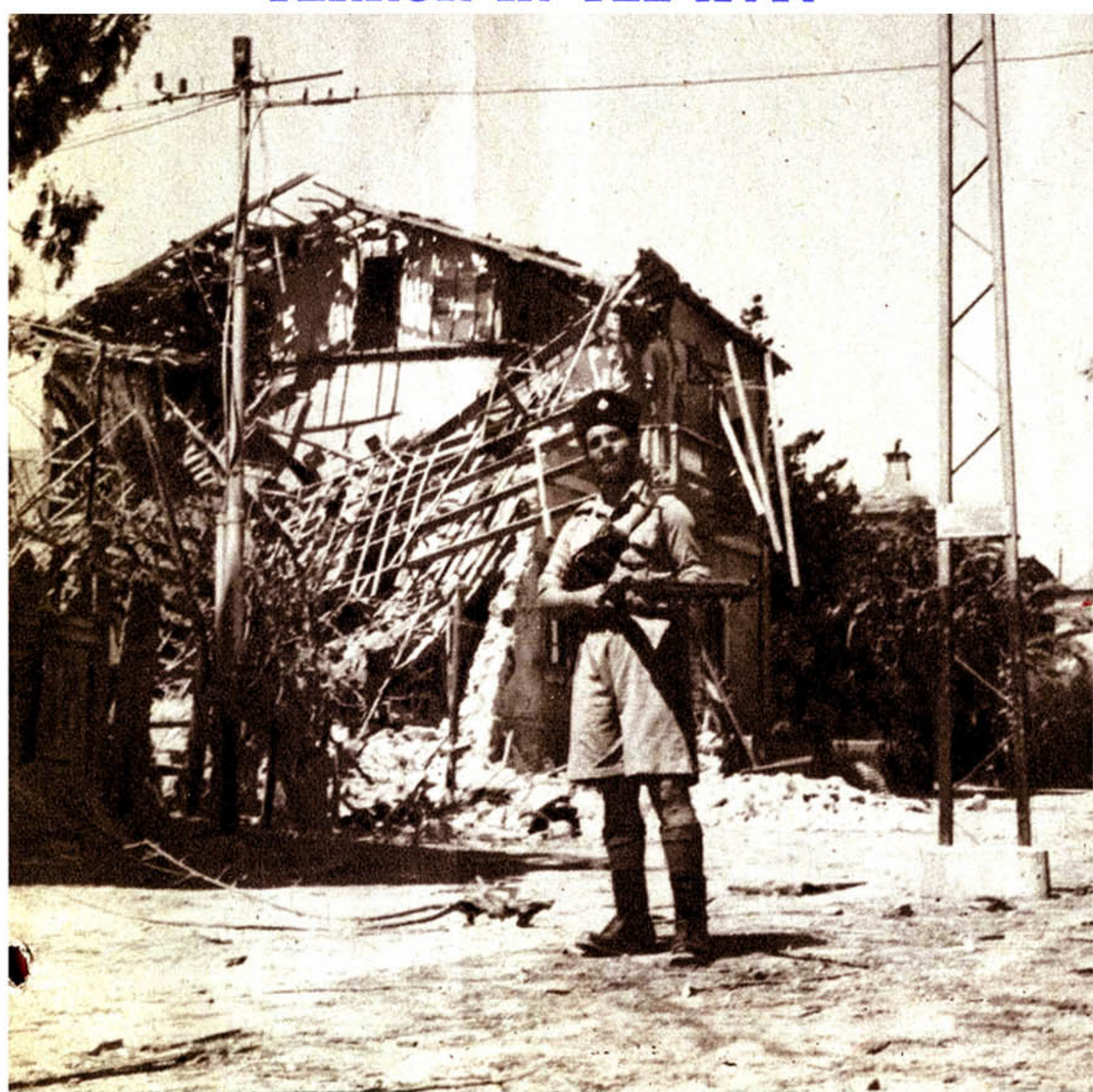
The communiqué had been laboriously typed in English on a scrap of white paper. "Only 12 hours after the attack on the railway network and the petrol pipe lines in the Haifa area," it ran, "our battle units again commenced a widespread attack against the surface communication lines of the enemy throughout the country. . . ."

It was signed, in bold capitals, "IRGUN ZEVAI LEUMI"—National Military Organization.

That night I walked over to the beach promenade a few minutes early, to keep my rendezvous with David. Ahead was the Mediterranean. The crests of dark waves creamed the shore. Behind me the streets brimmed with traffic. On the hotel terrace people were dining in the warm soft air.

"Good evening," David said, close to my ear. He had materialized out of nowhere. "It's all set," he went on. "Two of our officers are waiting for you. We won't take off from here, though; there are some plain-clothes men around. Walk back to the

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An Arab constable guards the ruins of a British intelligence officer's house, blown up by terrorists. In the blast the officer was killed

avenue I am facing. I'll pick you up on the corner by the café."

I stood watching the sea a little longer. Then I flipped my cigarette away and strolled up to the corner. The rear door of the taxi was open and David beckoned me inside. We threaded quickly through traffic and presently dodged into a courtyard. We got out and walked through an arcade into another street. Here another car was standing at the curb. We ducked in and the driver zoomed away as if he had just discovered jet propulsion. "Hi, Dick Tracy," I said to myself as I leaned back.

After a few minutes we came to a grade crossing. There was obviously something wrong. The gates were down across the railway tracks and an empty bus stood in front of them. Another car had drawn up on the wrong side of the street and just off the intersection to our left, a white ambulance was parked. A man sat behind the wheel. People were scuttling along the sidewalk and at the crossing a boy was waving his arms as if signaling to everybody to get out of the way. "There must have been an accident," I said.

It was then the explosion let go. The blast hit us in the face like a fist and the street trembled but we could see nothing. "I think *they* may be working on the railroads again tonight," David said, and I remembered the communiqué. He spoke to the driver and we wheeled past the ambulance, drove a few blocks and stopped—almost in front of a police station.

People were running for cover now, flattening themselves in doorways, disappearing around corners. In the distance a siren unwound its angry snarl and I thought I heard a rifle shot. About then I realized I'd left all my identity cards in the hotel; that would make it tough if I were caught out in a curfew. My Dick Tracy knee joints began turning to jelly and I was about to dispatch my regrets to the Irgun officers when David motioned me into the shadow of a building where a little man was fumbling at a door latch with a ring of keys. The door opened and we groped our way upstairs into a small room. It was drenched in darkness except for a wavering light from the street which seeped in through the cracks in the closed shutters.

"Welcome," a voice said pleasantly in English. Gradually my eyes shaped the silhouettes of two men behind a large desk. An armchair loomed up to accommodate me, directly in front of the desk. David sat down in a far corner.

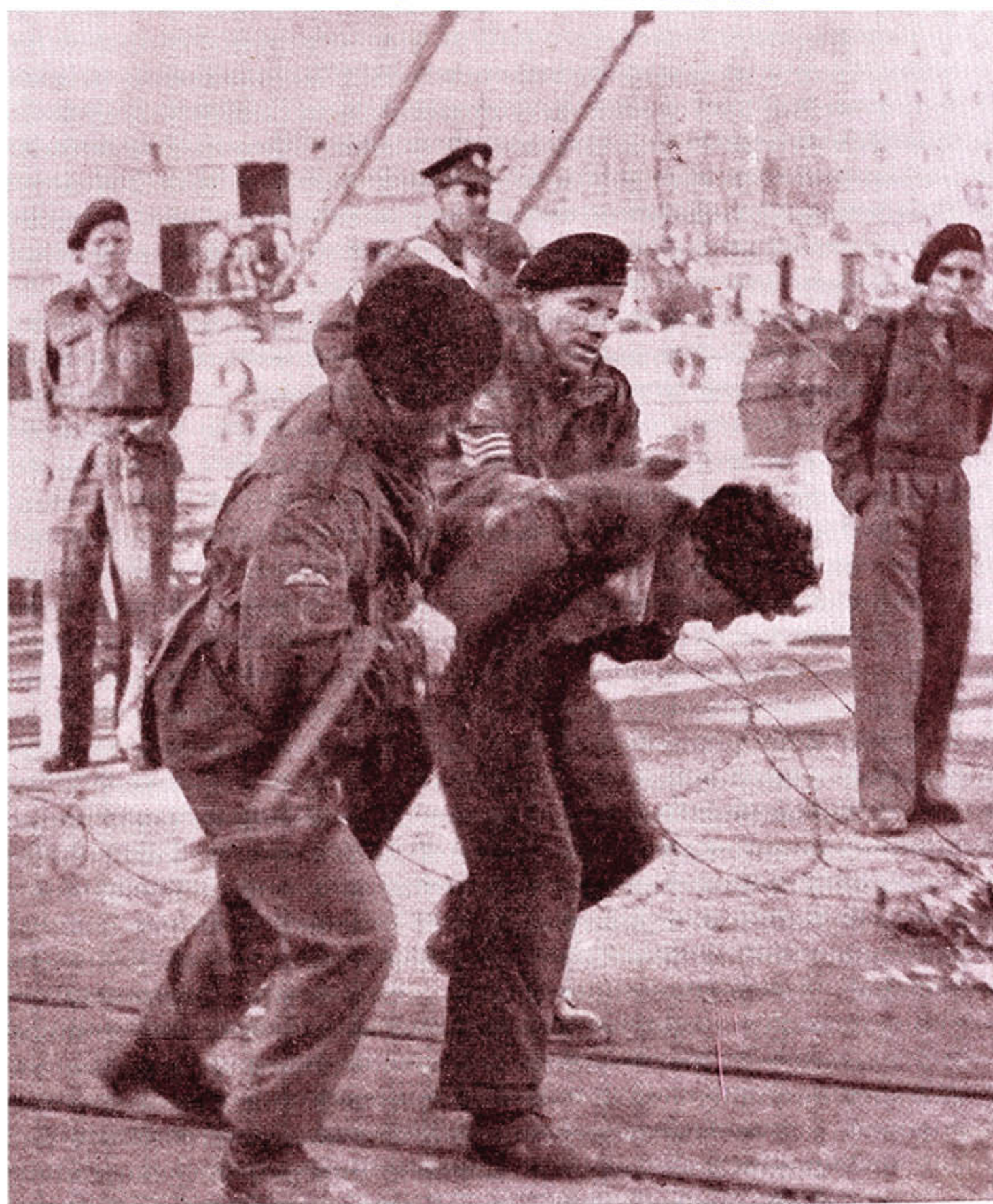
"We must apologize for receiving you in this way," the voice was saying. "It isn't that we don't have confidence in you, but it is a precaution we must take. It is an unbroken rule for meetings of this kind—the darkness, I mean."

Climbing the stairs I had jabbed a cigarette into my mouth but couldn't find my lighter. Now was no time to ask for a match; I let the cold cigarette hang limply from my lips. (The Hollywood touch, I mocked myself.)

The man nearest me spoke in Hebrew. "We greet you," the interpreter translated, "as one from a friendly nation which won its independence from the same oppressor against whom we fight."

(Continued)

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The British stubbornly fight terror with more terror. Here a refugee is being forced off an immigrant ship after tear gas failed to rout him. Protests over deportation have little effect on British policy

All's Fair in War—and This Was War

To the world at large, I reflected, the Irgun might seem to be a band of Jewish terrorists who robbed banks and diamond factories, mined highways, wrecked railway bridges, blew up hotels and killed British soldiers. But to themselves, such operations were all legitimate because they were, in their own words, "at war" with His Majesty's government, fighting with tommy guns, bombs and even home-made flame throwers, for an independent Jewish state.

There are three Jewish resistance groups in Palestine but they don't operate as a solid front, and often clash among themselves. The biggest of these is the Haganah, the Jewish home army, once said to be more than 70,000 strong but now shrunk to perhaps 50,000. Organized originally to defend settlements against Arab attacks, the Haganah is now outside the law. The Irgun, which split with the Haganah 10 years ago on both tactics and ideological issues, has perhaps 5,000 members, highly schooled in the tricks of terrorism and guerrilla warfare.

Hundreds of Jews in both forces served in the British army during the war. The British actually trained some units of each for special missions (including sabotage assignments) and as auxiliary combat soldiers in case of a possible invasion of Palestine. The Stern Gang, which in turn split with the IZL, in 1940, is the smallest but most violent outfit of all. British intelligence sets the Gang's strength at about 500, maximum.

Some of the Haganah's rules have a Robin Hood twist. They sanction sabotage but oppose physical violence. If their men are fired on during a raid their orders are to retreat without returning fire. The Irgunists go in and come out shooting, but the Stern Gang is contemptuous of their "gentlemanly" ways. "When the Irgunists blow up a building," a Stern leader has said scornfully, "they telephone a warning in advance. We don't use the telephone. We are not interested in being polite."

All three groups demand removal of restrictions on Jewish immigration. Moderate Jews who influence the policies of the Haganah have shown inclinations to compromise with the British, but the fact that Mr. Bevin has belatedly decided to hand the Palestine mandate over to the United Nations has not visibly changed the sentiments of the terrorists. The Haganah may quarrel with the more brutal techniques of terrorism but the ironic fact is that events have driven many of Haganah's own men, in a fury of frustration, into the ranks of Irgun. "If we're going to be illegal," their reasoning seems to run, "we might as well not quibble over bloodshed."

As we talked, the two terrorists made guarded admissions that the Irgun had a sizable war chest, fed by funds from various sources, including America. (Judging by the propaganda of certain Jewish Revisionist groups in the U.S. demanding "continuation and strengthening of the resistance . . . which

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stands today like an iron wall between Britain and her plans for the liquidation of Zionism," the American contributions were becoming more important.) There was confirmation that Irgun arms came from secret "homemade" factories and from raids on British military installations—"requisitioning," they sardonically called the latter operation.

Hard facts, however, were soon crowded out by exalted references to patriots of history and instruments of freedom. George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Tom Paine and the Declaration of Independence were elbowed insistently into the conversation. Every time a footstep sounded on the stairs, or a shout rose from the street outside, or a car sped past, little wires of fear and excitement tightened in me but the two men talked on of ideologies as if nothing whatever had happened. It was like having seen a kidnaping in church and then being compelled to sit, squirming, through the sermon while the janitor stowed away the victim.

"We fought the Nazis as the common enemy," they were saying while the street noises rose and fell like a gusty wind. "Now our first enemy is the British, and we will continue to fight them no matter what happens. We see no menace to ourselves but them. We want a Jewish state on both sides of the Jordan. (That meant they wanted not only all of Palestine but the British puppet kingdom of Trans-Jordan as well.) We deny any Jew the right to compromise with partition. Partition can only be a graveyard for the Jews."

Weren't they, in the long run, in danger of creating the same kind of supernationalism that the Nazis themselves built on bigotry, hatred and terror?

"Propaganda," they answered hotly. "We are fighting for our existence. Reluctantly we have come to the conclusion that force is the only weapon we have left. We only want a home for the Jews."

They also tried to indict the British for the Nazi extermination of six million Jews in Europe, by the strange argument that if there had been free immigration to Palestine during the war, all the victims could have been saved.

It gradually became clear that these men implicitly believed everything they were saying. Here were the zealots at work. This little interlude had not been specially staged for me. This was the way these men thought and lived, in a darkened room, with the half light of reality seeping in only through the holes in the shutters. "Victims of a cellar psychology," a high official of the Jewish agency had told me. "They work underground and see only the feet of people passing by. They have lost their sense of proportion."

Yet the work of a relative handful of terrorists like these men, talking calmly over a desk top while remnants of a fresh outrage lay somewhere outside their shaded window, had driven the British government to another extreme. The only answer London seemed capable of contriving was a kind of terrorism in uniform. This served to alienate a majority of the Jewish community and consolidate the underground, with the adhesiveness of shared risks and martyrdom.

In general there are two kinds of Jews in the Irgun. The first are boisterous, fearless kids in their teens, native sons of Palestine nurtured on a passionate nationalism and a love of excitement, who have broken the bonds of parental control in startling similarity to the arrogance of the Hitler *Jugend*.

The other day a 15-year-old boy told his mother he was "going out for a little while." He was gone for three days, presumably on a mission with the underground. His mother was afraid to say anything.

The mixture of coolness and fanaticism in these youths is hard to penetrate. Picture if you can a scholarly looking boy who has just come from a philosophy class at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He is crouched on a hillside, hidden in the underbrush, holding a push button in his hand. A military

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truck approaches on the highway below. He squeezes the button, and a mine blows the truck into scrap metal. The boy scrambles away to safety. He'll still get some homework done tonight.

(It's not just a lust for adventure that bites these boys. A father, a German Jew, told how his son had been picked up by the C.I.D. for allegedly distributing antienlistment leaflets during the war. He was held for 72 hours and given a bloody third degree. A civil court finally cleared him. "But how much did his innocence mean then?" the father asked. "How could I convince him of the folly of revenge via the underground?")

The second type of Jew in the Irgun is the seasoned guerrilla who has escaped from the gas chambers of Europe by wit and courage. To such men cunning and treachery have necessarily become the trade-mark of survival. Menahem Beigin, a Polish Jew in his late thirties and leader of the Irgun, is one of these. His family was wiped out in the war. (He is married now and has one child.) He came to Palestine with General Anders' Polish army but was released in 1943 to work among Polish refugees. He went underground a year later. The police have little on him because he's never been arrested. They have neither his fingerprints nor an accurate photograph.

Leaders Pass Screening

It's never been confirmed, but the story goes that when the British army literally locked up the city of Tel Aviv for four days last July after the King David Hotel bombing and screened 100,000 Jews in "Operation Shark," both Beigin and Nathan Friedman-Yellin, chief of the Stern Gang, passed the screening with fake credentials.

Beigin, a smart chess player and a bookworm, is said to have sent his men to see the movie *For Whom The Bell Tolls* to study how Robert Jordan blew up the bridge. Like Hemingway, Beigin favors small parties for sabotage.

As the interview with Beigin's men wore on, my mind kept spinning back to the scene at the grade crossing. Was it possible, I asked, that they were so well organized that they could evacuate busses, divert traffic and get an ambulance on the scene *before* something happened? They wouldn't say what had been done or who had done it.

But it seemed clear that even if this were a Stern and not an Irgun job, they had been tipped off in advance and that David had timed our arrival at the crossing deliberately for my benefit, although taking care to remain a safe distance from the main action—whatever it was. "We take as many precautions to safeguard civilians as we can," they said. "The lives of British officials, however, do not matter to us. They show no consideration for us and we show none for them."

We had talked nearly an hour and a half and I was late for an appointment with a Jewish newspaperman I'd nicknamed Big Ben. I thanked them for the interview. David, who had said nothing the whole time, rose, exchanged a few words in Hebrew with his superiors, clicked his heels in salute and showed me out. I found a taxi back to the hotel.

Stern Gang Takes Its Toll

"I was beginning to worry about you," Ben said. "The Stern Gang has been blowing up the town." From fragments of information we pieced together the main story. At 8:10, four terrorists dressed as British soldiers got out of a taxi in front of the Food Control office on Jaffa Road. They opened fire on the

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office guards, killing an Arab constable, while a second taxi disgorged four more terrorists who ran down Nechushtan Street at the side of the building toward the home of the area intelligence officer, carrying a heavy charge of explosives.

Someone on the balcony of the house engaged them with a tommy gun but they managed to plant the charge inside the house and then all eight terrorists escaped. The blast, which tore the house in two, was what David and I had heard at the crossing. There had been diversionary attacks with scare bombs on railway bridges and level crossings at scattered points through the city, without damage. The intelligence officer, a British major, and his Rumanian wife were believed to have been home entertaining another officer, but it was not yet certain what had happened to them. You could guess.

"There is sure to be a curfew," Ben said. Almost as he spoke an armored car rumbled up the beach drive. An officer with the blue cap of the Palestine police force stood in the cockpit. His voice came over the car's loud-speaker like ice cubes rattling in a bucket. "Hello! Hello! Hello!" it said. "Curfew! Curfew! Everybody off the streets at once. Get inside. Shut your doors. Do not move. Hello! Hello! Hello!" The warning was repeated in Hebrew.

A fleet of three-ton trucks rolled up to the curb, and platoons of British Second Parachute Brigade troops tumbled out and into formation for sentry duty. Their fixed bayonets gleamed in the streaming moonlight. Their maroon berets blossomed above their khaki desert battle dress like some strange cactus flower.

The streets were swiftly cleared. An angry sergeant major barked commands to his men. "Get those bloody bastards off the balconies," he said. "They'd just as soon shoot you in the back as look at you. Get 'em inside." A young couple, clasping hands tightly, scurried around a corner, heading dutifully home. A door slammed. There was a sound like the rattle of a machine gun. A Tommy on the corner gripped his carbine and wheeled around. Then he relaxed a little and swore softly to himself as he watched a Venetian blind fall across a window.

Inside the hotel the proprietor and his wife, a kindly couple who had left Breslau in 1932 ("a year before Hitler," he sometimes liked to recall), sat staring mournfully around the lobby.

"This is not good," he said. "Ninety per cent, no, ninety-five per cent, of the Jews in Palestine are against violence."

Then why didn't the community crack down on the terrorists?

"The British make it almost impossible," he replied. "As a matter of fact the Haganah lately has moved to stop outrages against the Jews themselves, extortion, robbery and that sort of thing. But how can the Haganah take reprisals against the Irgun or the Stern Gang for attacks on the British when London sticks to the 1939 White Paper policy restricting immigration? The British don't seem to understand we can't turn informers under those conditions. Give us a real hope for the future and then the *Yishuv* (Jewish community) can deal with terrorism."

There was a loud banging at the front door. The proprietor unlocked it cautiously and a young redheaded American burst into the room.

"Well, I had a hell of a time at the road blocks but I made it," he said. He was the station manager of an air line at Lydda. "Get Jenny up, will you, and tell her to get her clothes on. I'm taking her back to the airport tonight. Got to have my staff with me. This curfew may last four days. A lot of damned nonsense. But if they think they're going to put a

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hitch in the operation of a world air line, they're crazy."

He picked up the phone. "I want R.A.F., Lydda," he shouted. "Give me the duty officer . . . Look, this is Mason, station manager, World Airlines. Look, I'm coming through with my staff. In a white jeep. Will you please radio your patrols to let us pass? . . . Yes, I'll drive slowly. A white jeep. We're coming through. Right away . . . Thanks."

Jenny, the secretary, had come down but said honestly she was afraid to go. "We've no passes," she said. "And even if the soldiers don't shoot, the terrorists might. Besides, I heard the roads were mined. Let's wait until daylight. You can sleep here."

"Nothing will happen at all," Mason said, impatiently. "This thing will get tighter in the morning and I've got an air line to run."

"Please don't go," she said. But he did. The problem of Palestine, in all its delicate complications and twisted pattern of violence, was nothing but a business proposition to a U.S. citizen, whose white jeep and green passport would, by God, get him through any man's road block or he'd know the reason why.

Alcohol for Soldiers Is Taboo

A soldier appeared at the side door and asked politely for a glass of water. "Give them anything they want to drink," the proprietress called to the night boy. "Anything except alcohol. Don't give them any alcohol."

"What's happened this time, mate?" the soldier asked me at the door.

"I was just going to ask what you knew," I said.

"They never tell us anything," he replied.

Twenty minutes later, Mason came back. "Okay," he said with a sheepish grin. "I've had it. I'll take that extra bed if you've still got it. They wouldn't let me through. Tanks on the road."

The telephone rang. It was for Ben. I could see the blood drain from his face as he listened. "Is that all?" he said. "Thanks," and he hung up.

He sank into an armchair and brushed his hands nervously through his kinky hair. "The major is dead," he said finally. "He was the one who fired the machine gun from the balcony. He ducked back inside just as the charge went off and the roof fell on him. His wife and the other fellow are badly hurt."

"He was a good friend of mine, you know. The hell of it is, I saw him earlier in the evening and was going to ask him out, thinking we'd come around and have a drink with you later. But I knew he was busy packing so I didn't bother. His duty was up and they were going back to a farm in Surrey next week."

Everybody had a round of brandy and then Ben and I went out into the street. A jeep was parked on the curb and a British captain stood beside it, brushing a flashlight over a map of the city. Ben held out his green Palestine press card.

"Sir," he said, "if you're going anywhere near Rothschild Boulevard, could you give me a lift? I've got to get home."

The captain looked at the press card and then took us in with squinting eyes. He nodded.

Ben climbed into the back and the jeep drove off, its taillight bleeding a crimson reflection onto the pavement.

Collier's

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