

Haganah

Haganah evolved from the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine which was administered by Great Britain. Article 4 of the League of Nations Mandate for Palestine recognized a public body for the purpose of advising and cooperating with the Administration of Palestine in such economic, social and other matters as may affect the establishment of the Jewish national home...and...to assist and take part in the development of the country."

Although the Haganah had no legal status and was not recognized by the British mandatory authority, it was tolerated by the British because its "aims were defensive."

Concurrent with the 1936-39 Arab Revolt, Haganah Command tightened its control over its combatants and Special Night Squads were organized in conjunction with the British to retaliate against the Arabs. The Jewish squads were equipped and trained by the British under Captain Charles Orde Wingate. Initially, 2800 Jews were enrolled as constables by the British to combat the Arab insurgents. This number eventually rose to 5000 at the peak of the violence. In 1936, Haganah strength was 10,000, including reserves.

Three separate organizations within Haganah appeared in the late 1930's: Mosad, Shai and Palmach.

“ The Mosad was centered in Paris. Its primary concern was the immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe to Palestine via Mediterranean ports. As WWII became imminent, other factors were to come into play which were to increase Mosad's activities.

Shai was Haganah counter-intelligence. Although operating primarily against the British in Palestine, it also gathered intelligence on Arab opponents. By 1947, Shai had infiltrated every aspect of the Mandatory Administration with a force of over 2000 members.

Palmach was the striking arm of Haganah. Comprised of about 3000 men, women and youths, the Palmach were regular, salaried commandos. These left-wing Zionists were led by Moshe Sneh, who was succeeded in 1946 by Itzhak Sadeh. The Palmach led the British invasion in 1941 to flush the Vichy government out of Syria and Lebanon.

In addition to these three main arms of Haganah, there was Ta'as, the illegal arms industry. Scattered throughout Palestine in cottage-style industries, Ta'as built bombs, grenades, made ammunition, refurbished firearms and "acquired" arms from various sources.

The events of 1936-1939, the Peel Commission report and the White Paper of 1939 combined to cause an explosion in the Jewish community. The White Paper had served to reduce immigration just when it was most needed to relieve European Jewry from the impact of Hitler's attacks against

the Jews in Germany and Austria. The immediate Zionist reaction was an increase in clandestine immigration and an expansion of Haganah. The primary mission of Haganah became the support of immigration, and Haganah's targets became any force which prevented or worked against immigration.

Uprising against the British

In March and April of 1939, three boats from Germany were sent down the Danube to the Black Sea. The Jews on these boats were sent by the Gestapo in order to relieve Germany of their presence. They were prevented from entering Palestine by the British White Paper and were returned to Germany. The tremendous frustration of the Yishuv gave rise to continual attacks and demolitions against the British presence in Palestine. Police stations were attacked and law courts were blown up. In the summer, Haganah destroyed the pipeline between the Kirkuk and Mosul fields of the Iraqi Petroleum Company and the port cities of Haifa and Tripoli.

“ On August 8, 1938, Sinbad II, a 60-ton British coast guard vessel enforcing the blockade on Jewish immigration was sunk by a bomb planted by a Haganah crew-member. At least one British sailor was killed. The five months of illegal immigration, which ended in June 1939, brought in 15,000 "illegals." Of these, 4500 were brought in by Haganah, 3500 by private means and 7000 by the Revisionists.

Haganah did attack British installations during the war, but only when British operations interfered with the illegal immigration activity. Sabotage in refugee camps and bombing of radar sites (used to locate refugee ships) were frequent. The World Zionist Organization and the Jewish Agency wanted to prevent, at all costs, a feeling in Great Britain that the Jews were fifth columnists stabbing Great Britain in the back while Britain was at war with the common enemy--Hitler.

One anti-British incident during the war, the destruction of the refugee ship Patria, was clouded in controversy. In November 1940, 3500 illegal immigrants from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia arrived in Haifa Bay on three ships, the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Milos. The British authorities decided to deport 1900 of the immigrants aboard the Patria. Haganah felt that such a precedent was dangerous and could not be allowed to occur.

On November 25, 1940, a mine blew a hole in the side of the Patria which burned and sank quickly. Two hundred and fifty refugees were killed aboard the ship or were drowned when it sank. The Jewish Agency immediately claimed it was a mass suicide in protest of the deportation.

“ In reality, it was a planned attempt to damage the Patria thereby preventing its scheduled sailing. A miscalculation on the part of the Haganah demolition man, Munya Mardor, caused decidedly more damage than was intended. Mardor feels that the prime cause of the tragedy was the poor condition of the Patria which resulted in the bomb damaging the ship much more than was planned.

The sinking of the Patria and its subsequent loss of life was to return to both Britain and the Jewish Agency in 1944 as motivation for the assassins of Lord Moyne.

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