Chapter One

CHILDHOOD AND SOLDIERING

SOME MARRIAGES, I am told, are made in heaven. I cannot testify that some otherworldly force guided my parents toward their first meeting. But the crossing of their paths was in itself such an unlikely event that it's almost a wonder I am here to relate the subsequent story of my life. My parents first met in 1920 in Jerusalem, a city in which neither of them resided. They were just barely residents of Palestine, for that matter. My mother was in Jerusalem visiting her uncle when a mob of local Arabs attacked the Jewish Quarter of the Old City. Unable to remain idle, she made her way to the quarter and offered her aid as a nurse, which was far from her vocation. My father, whose last permanent address was Chicago and listed occupation was "tailor," had recently been demobilized in Palestine as a member of the Jewish Legion. Like many of his former comrades-in-arms, he rushed to Jerusalem to participate in the Jewish Quarter's defense. It was there that the erstwhile soldier and the ersatz nurse met.

Both my parents had followed tortuous paths before meeting in Jerusalem, where they became active participants in the Jewish people's struggle for national rebirth. Mother had been in Palestine for a year by then, though she had come to the country purely by chance. She had been born in Russia and raised in a wealthy, traditional home abounding with children (ten, in fact). Her mother had died when she was a child, and in quest of a broad education she defied her father and insisted upon attending a Christian girls' secondary school in Homel. After graduating she moved with my grandfather to Petrograd (now Leningrad), where she worked in his flourishing lumber business.

Very early on, Mother had been attracted to political activism,

and the Russian Revolution found her directing a munitions factory. When subsequent attempts were made to dismiss her, the workers went out on strike, and the Communist regime was forced to bow to their will. It was undoubtedly the pressure of this atmosphere that made her decide to leave the Soviet Union, but she certainly did not plan to go to Palestine. On the contrary, even though her uncle, the writer Mordechai Ben Hillel Hacohen, lived in Jerusalem and was one of the leaders of the Jewish community in Palestine (Yishuv), my mother had been strongly influenced by the Bund (a left-wing anti-Zionist Jewish party) and had decided to head for one of the Scandinavian countries or the United States.

In Odessa she encountered a group of young Zionists who were about to board the *Rosslen*, the first ship to sail from Russia to Palestine after the war. For reasons that have never been made clear to me, she decided — somewhat impetuously, I imagine — to join them. This was how she landed up at the collective settlement Kvutzat Kinneret, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, in 1919. After months of arduous physical labor (to which she was unaccustomed), putting up with language difficulties, and a bout of illness, she had earned a short vacation and naturally turned to her uncle Mordechai in Jerusalem, who was very devoted to her. During her stay, the disturbances broke out, and that was when she met my father.

The path that led him to that meeting had been quite different. Born to a poor family in a small Ukrainian town, he had lost his father at an early age and at fourteen went out to work in a bakery to try and support the family. Like my mother, he was attracted to novel and revolutionary ideas from an early age and took part in a strike led by the Social Democrats, who formed underground cells that included fifteen- and sixteen-year-old boys. In 1905 he fled a wave of pogroms, and after wandering from town to town he finally made his way to the United States, arriving in Chicago lonely and destitute.

Father's first job was selling newspapers, but once he learned English he moved into tailoring. Eager to study, he also registered at the University of Chicago and took classes at night. Soon he became active in the Jewish Tailors' Union and joined the

Poalei Zion party, which brought him to Socialist Zionism. Living in the United States gave him an opportunity to acquire an education and a grounding in the concepts of democracy. His stories about America used to fascinate me, and he might well have settled there. But the publication of the Balfour Declaration toward the end of World War I and Britain's call to enlist in the Jewish Legion and help liberate Palestine from the Turks fired his imagination. The first recruiting office rejected him because of some defect in his feet. He decided to try his luck at another, and to conceal his identity he dropped the name Rubitzov and introduced himself as Rabin. In a way, I suppose you could say that a British recruiting office is responsible for the name I bear. Years later David Ben-Gurion was to tell me: "I recruited your father for the Jewish Legion, and that's why you were born in Palestine." Father would neither confirm nor deny it.

Be that as it may, after twelve years in the United States, my father was posted to Canada, and from there he sailed to Britain to join the Thirty-eighth Battalion (referred to as the "American Battalion" since it was made up largely of volunteers from the United States). They were joined by the exiled Palestinians, including David Ben-Gurion and Yitzhak Ben-Zvi, who later became prominent leaders of the Yishuv and the state. The battalion embarked for Egypt, where one of my father's officers, Vladimir Ze'ev Jabotinsky (later to become head of the Zionist Revisionists), was his first Hebrew teacher. Father held him in great respect and affection, though he disagreed with Jabotinsky's political views.

Ironically enough, the battalion reached Palestine at the end of the war and barely saw action. But when the attack on the Jewish Quarter broke out, my father and some of his comrades rushed to its aid. One thing led to another, and he married my mother in 1921. After being discharged, he took a job with the British mandatory government's postal and telegraph services in Haifa, and my mother worked as an accountant for a timber dealer there. Yet shortly before my birth she returned to Jerusalem to be near her relatives, and so it happened that I was born in Jerusalem on March 1, 1922.

A year later we moved to Tel Aviv, where my father worked for

the recently founded Electric Corporation and my mother was an accountant for the Solel Boneh building contractors. (Many years later, when Golda Meir told me that she had been a cashier at Solel Boneh, I said, "So was my mother." "No," she corrected me, "I was the cashier; your mother was the accountant.") Ours was a workers' home, and aside from their jobs, my parents were both deeply involved in public activities, for which they made it a firm rule not to accept payment. Mother was a member of Tel Aviv's Municipal Council, while Father was active in the Metal Workers' Union (whose meetings were held at our home) and a member of the Electric Corporation's workers' committee. I, on the other hand, was a withdrawn, bashful child — traits that some people claim I retain to this day. With both my parents so involved outside the home, our sense of "togetherness" suffered somewhat. Only Friday evenings were reserved exclusively for the family.

Ours was not a religious home, but it was imbued with a pride in being Jewish. Rachel (born three years after me) and I were trained from an early age to assume responsibilities at home: making beds, washing dishes, and sweeping floors. We lived under a Spartan regime, in the best sense of the term. The family fostered respect for property, and no form of waste was ever tolerated. My parents lived with a sense of mission that permeated the atmosphere at home. One did not work merely to satisfy material needs; work was valuable in itself. Public activity was not a way of furthering personal interests; it was a duty owed to the community. Under the circumstances, it was only natural that after kindergarten I was sent to the School for Workers' Children.

The school was a bare wooden structure built in the center of a deserted area. Mother had no time to ease me through those first days of school, or perhaps she believed it was better for me to find my own way. At any rate, I found myself standing there confused and on the brink of tears. My character (which I seem to have inherited from her) always showed a tendency toward withdrawal, but soon I was deeply involved in school — though then, as now, I did not show my feelings or share them with others.

The workers' school was unique in placing education before in-

struction, inculcating values before imparting book learning. Responsibility, involvement, concern for the welfare of the school and its pupils were of cardinal importance. We cooked our own meals, washed our dishes, cultivated a vegetable garden, and worked in the carpentry shop. From eight to four every school day, the building was a hive of activity, and I was kept fully employed.

At the same time, there was another, somewhat grim aspect of my childhood. My mother suffered from a heart ailment, and I was dogged by the fear that it would bring her to her grave. Whenever she had a heart attack, I would run as fast as I could to call the doctor, terrified that I would return to find her dead. Rachel and I lived in the shadow of this dread throughout our childhood, and we were very careful not to upset her. Later, she was found to be suffering from cancer as well. She herself was soberly aware of her condition, but my father could not come to terms with it. He spared no effort or cost, contracting large debts in an attempt to have her cured, or at least to alleviate her suffering.

After eight years at the workers' school and two years at a regional intermediary school, I began to dream of going on to the Kadouri Agricultural School, which was then a center for youngsters who planned to establish new agricultural settlements. I should explain that as a city boy I had never really developed a private passion for agriculture. But the return to the soil — and especially the establishment of collectives — was something of a national passion in those days, especially for youngsters who had been raised on the principles of the Labor movement. It was our way of laying claim to the land in the most literal fashion possible. So I took the school entrance examinations and passed, but only conditionally: I would have to take a further set of examinations. My pride wounded, I threw myself into preparing for the exams scheduled in the summer of 1937. Our neighbor, an engineer, agreed to tutor me in mathematics, and I was captivated by the logic of mathematical structures. The second time around I scored high grades, and soon thereafter packed my belongings for the trip to Kadouri.

It was quite a challenge adjusting to life at the Kadouri boarding school. Twenty of us lived in a large hall that looked like a military barracks but made up in atmosphere for what it lacked in privacy. We lived by the honor code (the teachers would leave the classroom during an examination) and followed a strict schedule packed with responsibilities. At the same time, no one felt coerced. In fact, we enjoyed a sense of freedom, because administration of internal matters was entrusted to the students' committee.

One day I was urgently summoned home, where Father awaited me with tears in his eyes. I rushed to Tel Aviv's Hadassah Hospital praying that I would find my mother conscious and able to recognize me so that I could bid her farewell. I think she did recognize me, though she did not speak. I wanted to believe that she knew I was on my way and had called up her last ounce of strength to hold on. Her eyes were open, but she remained silent. I did not want to cry in front of her but I just couldn't help myself, and all my grief flooded out.

After the seven days of mourning, I returned to the Kadouri School with the feeling that I had crossed over the threshold of manhood. Part of my home no longer existed, and I had to strike out on my own path. I became withdrawn again and dedicated myself almost exclusively to work and lessons, finishing my first year as the top student in the class.

A new dimension was added to life at Kadouri when we were initiated into military matters. In 1936 Palestine was rocked by an Arab general strike and bloody riots, and the explosive atmosphere continued until the outbreak of the world war. There were even several Arab attacks on the school. Being the youngest pupils, at first we served as messengers between the defense positions. Then we were trained in the use of arms. Our instructor was Yigal Allon, one of Kadouri's first graduates and by then the highly respected "King of Galilee." (In time, he and I would go a long way together as soldiers and as politicians.)

At the end of my first year, when Kadouri was closed by order of the British authorities, I moved to Kibbutz Ginossar on the Sea of Galilee, where I worked in agriculture and took an active part

in guard duty and in setting ambushes. Eventually I was sworn in as an auxiliary policeman. After some six months, I moved on to Kvutzat Hasharon in the heart of the Jezreel Valley, where we were notified that studies at Kadouri would be resumed in October. A month before I returned to school, World War II broke out.

It was not very easy to concentrate on studies with the world in the grip of a mighty conflict. For the most part the war was remote, yet it was constantly in my thoughts. Nonetheless, I forced myself to stick to my lessons, and at my graduation ceremony the British High Commissioner handed me my diploma as prize pupil of the class. He also solemnly notified me that the mandatory government had awarded me a prize: seven and a half Palestinian pounds, on condition that the money go toward the purchase of agricultural equipment. (Since I failed to fulfill the condition, I have yet to collect that debt from the British government.) More to the point, the school's principal had gone to great trouble to arrange a mandatory government scholarship for me to study hydraulic engineering at Berkeley. I was in a quandary, as such an opportunity could not be turned down lightly. But I was simply incapable of leaving the country, and my friends, during wartime. I managed to resolve the dilemma by promising myself that I would go off to study immediately after the war. That choice turned out to be a precedent that would repeat itself many times over the years for the same or similar reasons. Studying is one of the few dreams I have never brought to fruition.

After graduation, I joined a communal training group at Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan, north of Haifa. Composed of graduates of the Labor youth movement, it was destined, after an appropriate training period, to establish a new kibbutz of its own. I was fond of my companions and the kibbutz way of life, but under the circumstances I chafed within the confines of a life of work, nocturnal discussions, and kibbutz entertainment. Then, at supper one evening in the kibbutz dining hall, the pastoral routine came to an abrupt end for me when I was approached by the local Haganah commander.

The Haganah was the underground military arm of the Jewish

Agency in Palestine. Relations between the British mandatory authorities and our "state within a state," as the Yishuv leadership was more than once described, tended to be schizophrenic at best. Over the twenty-odd years of the Mandate, and especially in the 1939 White Paper — which severely limited Jewish immigration and settlement in Palestine — the British had definitely reversed their policy of fostering a homeland for the Jews. And needless to say, it was illegal for us to possess arms. Yet with most of Europe in Nazi hands, Rommel's forces advancing through North Africa, and the Arab world flaunting its sympathies toward Germany, the mandatory authorities began to mellow toward the idea of having a trained Jewish cadre at their disposal. In 1941, as the Axis forces grew closer to our borders, the Jewish Agency decided to establish special units of permanently mobilized volunteers within the framework of the Haganah. The new units were known as the Palmach (an acronym from the Hebrew words for "assault companies"), and it was to this organization that our local Haganah commander was inviting me to volunteer.

I did so without hesitation and only afterward began to ask questions. But his answers were evasive, and I was sworn to secrecy until I could be interviewed further and have my suitability for membership confirmed. I will never know what prompted him to approach me that evening in the kibbutz dining hall, but the fact of the matter remains that the invitation to join the Palmach changed the course of my life.

Not immediately, though. For weeks I waited in silence before being invited back to the local commander's room, where I first met Moshe Dayan. He asked about the types of weapons I could use, and I told him that I was acquainted with the revolver, rifle, and hand grenade but nothing heavier or more sophisticated. Another couple of questions and then he muttered crisply, "You're suitable." Again weeks passed and nothing happened.

Then, at the end of May 1941, there were rumors that German units had reached Lebanon, with the knowledge and consent of the Vichy government, and the long-awaited order arrived. By dusk the next day, I was in Kibbutz Hanita, on the Lebanese border, together with about twenty equally puzzled but eager young

men. In the kibbutz reading room we were met by a group of top-echelon Haganah leaders, including Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Sadeh, and Ya'akov Dori.

Dori was the first to address us and told of the forthcoming British invasion of Greater Syria, including Lebanon, to prevent Axis forces from using the area as a springboard for invading Palestine from the north and south simultaneously. In response to a British request, the Haganah had decided to cooperate in the campaign, and that is why we had been brought to the border area. I was elated. At last I was about to take part in a battle on a global scale.

In truth, that fantasy was a gross exaggeration. We were divided up into two- and three-man sections and began foot patrols along the border until early June. Then my unit was informed that our task was to cross the border in advance of the Australian forces and cut the telephone lines to prevent the Vichy French from rushing reinforcements to the area. Not exactly battlefield high drama. Furthermore, we drew scant encouragement from a string of warnings: "You men are not soldiers, and if you're taken prisoner you won't fall under the protection of the Geneva Convention. But you don't have to worry about that, because the forces in this sector are Senegalese, and they don't take prisoners." There was another morsel of cheer: "You will have no contact with the Australians. Upon completing your tasks you must return to Palestine as quickly as possible, keeping away from the Australians' line of advance, because they're in the habit of shooting first and asking questions later."

At nightfall we crossed into Lebanon. The route to our objective and back was about thirty miles — to be covered on foot, of course. As the youngest, I was given the job of climbing up the telephone poles. We had received our climbing irons only that day and hadn't had time to practice. Unable to use the irons, I took off my boots (which was the way I was used to climbing), shinnied up the pole, and cut the first wire, only to find that the pole was held upright by the tension of the wires. The pole swayed, and I found myself on the ground. But for lack of choice, up again I climbed, cut the wire, made my way down, and re-

peated the operation on the second pole. Mission completed, we buried the pieces of wire and made our way back to Hanita by a shortcut, covering the distance quickly. The story of the Haganah's participation in the invasion of Syria might never have been remembered, even as a footnote to history, had it not been for the fact that on that same night, in a clash with a Vichy French force, Moshe Dayan lost his eye.

The Palmach became my full-time occupation from that night until its units were disbanded to become an integral part of the Israel Defense Forces. Throughout the world war, however, membership in the Palmach — indeed, the very justice of its existence — proved to be a source of controversy. Under the shadow of Rommel's advancing forces, the Yishuv leadership called for men to volunteer for the British army, and tens of thousands responded. We in the Palmach held that enlistment in the British army must not come at the expense of an independent Jewish force. Though the likely course of future events was not yet clear, we sensed that the world war would be followed by a set of decisive confrontations in Palestine — both with the British and with the Arabs — and that only the existence of an independent Jewish force could tilt the scales in our favor. The decision of which framework to join was a personal one, of course, and I would be lying if I tried to deny that the appeal of a British uniform — with its shiny boots and smart beret — was not tempting. In contrast, the Palmachnik in his careless, shabby outfit — one part farmer, one part soldier, and one part underground agent sworn to maintain secrecy even before his friends — required strength of character to stick it out.

Even the meager glory derived through association with the British was short-lived. By the beginning of 1943, with Rommel's defeat by the Eighth Army, the British lost interest in cooperating with us; and before long our men were again being arrested for possessing arms. The termination of cooperation with the British sparked a debate about the future of the Palmach and altered our way of life. A good number of people in the Yishuv leadership believed that the Palmach had completed its mission and should now be disbanded, or at least no longer maintained as a mobilized

force. On the other hand, the Palmach's supporters from the settlement movement insisted that it was imperative to preserve a standing Jewish force. Thus with the assistance of the kibbutz movement, the Haganah command launched a daring experiment by forming youth-movement graduates into Palmach units stationed in the kibbutzim. This system created a working army whose soldiers earned their own keep. Every month, two weeks of hard work paid for ten to twelve days of training. The atmosphere was free, on the surface, but at bottom we were bound to the kind of discipline necessary for any military unit to function. Our legendary life-style — singing and telling yarns around the campfire — helped to forge the personal and social bonds that unified the platoon.

As 1943 wore on and more and more reports arrived about the Holocaust that had overtaken European Jewry, the controversy flared again. By then, the number of Palestinian Jewish volunteers in the British army exceeded thirty thousand, while the mobilized units of the Palmach numbered less than one thousand. I too believed that the Yishuv was obliged to take part in the war against the Nazis. But I was convinced that once the war had ended, we would have to fight for our lives in Palestine, and only an independent Jewish force could undertake such a battle. The argument raged within the Palmach as well. Here and there, officers and men left our ranks — whether for personal or ideological reasons — and joined the Jewish units of the British army. It was not easy to keep up morale or to induce the boys to continue their monotonous service, with its hard work in the fields and none of the glamour of army service in uniform. Only deep faith and inner conviction kept the Palmach together.

During and despite the arguments, the Palmach began to develop its own doctrine of combat and to train its members. I participated in a section leaders' and platoon leaders' course in addition to the agricultural work on the various kibbutzim to which I was posted. After I had been promoted to platoon leader, an incident occurred that almost ended my military career. My platoon, as one of the best in the Palmach in supplying covering fire, was to present a fire display before a Haganah senior officers'

course. We arrived at the appointed place, conducted the preliminary exercises, and then laid on the display, during which one of the mortar shells failed to fire. It was laid aside, and after the display I decided to filch it. My platoon had mortars but not a single shell for them, and this was a serious defect I felt obliged to correct. From the kibbutz the platoon walked back to Haifa on foot, with the mortar shell wrapped up among my personal effects in my shoulder bag. In Haifa I sent the platoon back to our base by train and I took the bus. If the British should catch me, it was my intention to take the blame on my own shoulders and not involve the platoon in the "crime."

The shell and I arrived safely, and I was thoroughly satisfied with myself. A week later, however, my company commander approached me. "There's a shell missing," he said. "Did you take it?" Like the apocryphal George Washington faced with the evidence of his cherry-tree crime, I could not tell a lie. After being reprimanded on the spot, I was notified a few days later that I was to be court-martialed. The judges were Palmach commander Yitzhak Sadeh and a senior Haganah officer, Yosef Avidar.

For days I walked around in a trance and couldn't sleep at night. Finally I was summoned to a clandestine Haganah office in Haifa, where Avidar's stern expression made my heart stop, though Yitzhak Sadeh was less fearsome. I again confessed the deed and was allowed to explain my motives and mode of operation, after which I was asked to wait outside. The minutes ticked past like an eternity. When Avidar finally pronounced sentence — no promotion for at least one year — I left with a sense of relief, having prepared myself for far worse. As for the shell, it was almost forgotten. But in 1947, when I was serving as the Palmach's chief of operations and we made up an inventory, it turned out that "my" shell was the only one the Palmach possessed!

Early in 1945, the Palmach was reorganized in battalion formations. My punishment was overlooked, and I was posted to the First Battalion as battalion chief instructor — in other words, second-in-command. Then the Palmach inaugurated a national section-leaders' course and I was placed in command.

In June 1945, when World War II came to an end, "illegal" im-

migration from Europe became a top priority. The Yishuv was torn by a fierce disagreement over how to confront the British. Unlike the Irgun Zevai Leumi (Etzel) and Lohamei Herut Yisrael (Lehi), which had broken away from the institutionalized Yishuv leadership, we believed that our struggle against the British must be linked to two issues — immigration and settlement rights — in defiance of the 1939 White Paper. In October 1945, I was called to First Battalion headquarters and informed that the Yishuv leadership had approved the first operation in the "linked campaign" against the British. Two hundred "illegal" immigrants were detained in a camp at Athlit, on the Mediterranean shore south of Haifa, and we had received information that the British intended to deport them to a destination far from Palestine. The Palmach's First Battalion was instructed to force its way into the camp and liberate the immigrants. The plan was to take them to a nearby kibbutz, whence they would be dispersed throughout the country. We accepted the plan with considerable apprehension. These people were survivors of the Holocaust, the few snatched from the conflagration. We would never be able to forgive ourselves if any harm were to befall them.

I was deputy commander of the operation, and our force consisted of two hundred of the Palmach's finest troops. We took advantage of the fact that the British had permitted welfare workers and teachers to enter the camp by infiltrating a group of Palmach physical-training instructors. Their mission was to organize the immigrants and overpower the Arab auxiliaries guarding the perimeter so that the raiding force could break in.

I commanded the assault force that set out on a moonless night and halted about a hundred yards from the fence of the brightly lit camp. We cut the wire, and before reaching the second, inner fence we ran into our "teachers," who reported that they had managed to break the firing pins in the Arab auxiliaries' rifles. The Arabs cocked their guns, pressed the triggers, and nothing happened. Quickly we forced our way in and hurried past the immigrants' quarters to the British billets. There was no sign of an alert. The plan had succeeded beyond expectations: the British were fast asleep.

Once the immigrants assembled, the pullout commenced in the incomprehensible and menacing silence. Our battalion commander ordered me to remain in the camp for about half an hour until the immigrants could reach the trucks. It was a bizarre sensation. The camp was brightly lit and silent, and a Jewish auxiliary policeman walked right past us, determined to see nothing.

At a quarter to two we withdrew, running as fast as we could to catch the trucks. (In fact we reached them before the immigrants did.) But our detailed planning had overlooked two difficulties, one psychological, the other physical. The immigrants refused to be parted from their bundles, the only possessions they had left; and the infants and toddlers, who had to be carried, hampered their parents' movements. The battalion commander decided to take off with those immigrants who had reached the assembly point and ordered me to wait for the rest and bring them to Kibbutz Bet Oren, on the Carmel ridge. Then a passing British truck opened fire and was silenced, resulting in the death of a British sergeant (the only casualty in the whole operation). To mislead the British, the commander sent the trucks in one direction and led his batch of immigrants off in another. I began to muster the hundred or so survivors whose fate was now in my hands and moved off with about sixty soldiers from various platoons. We made slow progress scaling the Carmel, and I ordered the troops to carry the children on their shoulders. I picked a child up myself. It was an odd feeling to carry a terrified Jewish child — a child of the Holocaust — who was now paralyzed with fear. As my shoulders bore the hopes of the Jewish people, I suddenly felt a warm, damp sensation down my back. Under the circumstances, I could hardly halt.

Dawn broke as we crawled along, and it would be full light before we could reach Bet Oren. We prepared to hide in the woods throughout the day, and I sent two of my people to reconnoiter the vicinity of the kibbutz. They reported having found a gap in the British encirclement of the settlement and thought we could manage to get through. I decided to try. We filtered through as quickly as possible, then dispersed the immigrants and hid our weapons in previously prepared caches. The British

brought up reinforcements and tried to break through the kibbutz gate, but in the meantime thousands of civilians from Haifa streamed out to Bet Oren and the kibbutz to which the battalion commander had led his group. The British put up roadblocks, but they were reluctant to open fire on such a multitude. By afternoon the whole area was teeming with people, and the immigrants were swallowed up in a human sea. The British conceded defeat.

My next assignment was to take part in an assault against one of the British police stations headquartering the Police Mobile Force — the unit responsible for the worst attacks on the Yishuv. But in the course of preparing for the operation, I acquired a motorcycle, and it proved to be my undoing. I was cheerfully roaring along on my cycle when I noticed a truck from the Nesher cement factory coming toward me. Opposite the factory, the truck made a sharp left turn, and I knew that I would not have time to brake. The next thing I remember was the wisecracks of an acquaintance who just happened to pass by the scene of the accident and was beside me when I came to at Haifa's Rothschild Hospital. "We found your left ankle," he comforted me. "It was just by your knee." After three weeks in the hospital, I was sent home hobbling on crutches. All I could do was follow the Palmach's operations from an armchair, cursing my fate.

On Saturday, June 29, 1946, I was awakened at dawn by the roar of vehicles in the street. Soon there was a sharp knock at the door and a British paratroop captain (we called them "anemones") asked, "Rabin?" My father nodded in the affirmative, whereupon three squads of paratroopers burst into the flat, armed with Brens and submachine guns. Another platoon had surrounded the house with barbed-wire barricades. This was an imposing military operation! Together with my father and a visitor who was staying with us, I was dragged out to a British army truck and barely managed to clamber aboard. We were taken to a nearby school, where I saw Moshe Sharett, the head of the Jewish Agency's Political Department. He, too, had been arrested. In fact, as only later became clear to us, so had most of the members of the Jewish Agency Executive (fortunately Ben-Gurion was abroad at the time) and thousands of people suspected of belonging to the Pal-

mach. The operation became known in the annals of our modern history as "Black Saturday."

At first we were taken to a tent camp at Latrun, halfway between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and two days later we were driven to large warehouses in the Rafah area, at the southern end of what is now the Gaza Strip. During the next few days some sixteen hundred to two thousand Jewish detainees were brought to the camp from all over the country. I was particularly troubled by my father's detention, for which I was to blame. He was in a state of distress because he had been hauled off before he could get to his false teeth, and consequently he could scarcely eat a thing. Fortunately, two weeks later he was released, and after a month our visitor was also freed.

In the camp, we began to get ourselves organized. Dr. Chaim Sheba, who had been sent by the Jewish Agency to take care of us, examined me and had me sent to the camp hospital. Later he tried to procure my release, but the head of British intelligence retorted, "He'll remain in detention even if he breaks both legs!" Still, at Dr. Sheba's request I was taken to the Gaza military hospital for treatment. As I was wheeled to the X-ray chamber, each window was guarded by two British soldiers with submachine guns. "Not bad," I was told by the examining physician. "Come back in another month."

At the end of that month, I was taken back to Gaza to have my cast removed. I found my leg misshapen and lifeless. A British doctor taught me exercises to restore my muscles, and I spent every spare moment at them. But I remained depressed, seeing my life ahead as that of a semicripple and convinced that my leg would never again function properly. I decided to change course. If I was useless in a military capacity, I would set out to study as soon as I was released. So I asked to have textbooks sent to me and spent my days brushing up and learning new material.

Meanwhile we caught wind of rumors that the Palmach was planning to attack the camp from the sea and liberate the detainees. Obviously, with one leg out of order, I would be an impediment and a burden to my companions, and the thought disturbed me greatly. In November, however, the British decided to release us.