



**Sacred Cows: Chapter 57. The Tank in Dgania – The Version of the Syrian Commander and Why the Complete Story of the War of Independence Has Not Yet Been Written.**

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In the photo: Shalom Hochbaum on the tank in Dgania, second from the top. Dgania archive.

## **Introduction**

With no maps, no radios, no metal wire cutters, soldiers who don't know how to operate a submachine gun, and one stupid tank. This is how the Syrian army went into battle in 1948, in the most important battle for both sides, the Battle of the Dgania (Dgania Alef and Dgania Bet) in the Jordan Valley, which became one of the most prominent myths of the War of Independence in the Israeli collective memory.

This chapter deals with the story of this battle and the ethos of 'the few against many' in 1948 from a new angle, with testimonies from the other side – including the testimony of the commander of the Syrian forces that attacked the Dgania, which is published here for the first time.

It will be presented by our guest, the Orientalist, Yitzhak (Ini) Abadi, who will also analyze the course of the war and the intentions of the Arab side, in his unconventional manner, relying on primary sources from the Arab side.

The dispute over the balance of power between the Jewish forces and the Arab forces that invaded in 1948, is discussed in this podcast in detail in chapters 29 and 40 and continues unabated, making it look as if the backers of the different versions hold each other by the throat and refuse to let go.

Abadi, a resident of Dgania Alef, is furious at how most Israeli historians tell the story of the Battle of Dgania and the story of the (1948) war in general, and almost completely ignore Arab sources. A blatant expression of this malaise, in his eyes, is a new book about the war in the Jordan Valley, written by Assaf Agin, from Dgania Bet, who presents a position opposite to Abadi and who sees the Battle of Dgania as a testimony of the heroic war of 'the few against many' in 1948. Agin, who was our guest in episode forty titled "Assaf Agin's Last Battle to Save the David versus Goliath Myth," passed away about a year and a half ago.

The interview with Abadi took place in Kibbutz Dgania Alef, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, near the road where the mythological Syrian tank was stopped. This is how the narrative of the battle on Dgania in 1948 became a battle between the members of the two Dgania, version 2021.

Listen, read, judge, and share!



Dgania Alef. Interview with Abadi on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, March 2021

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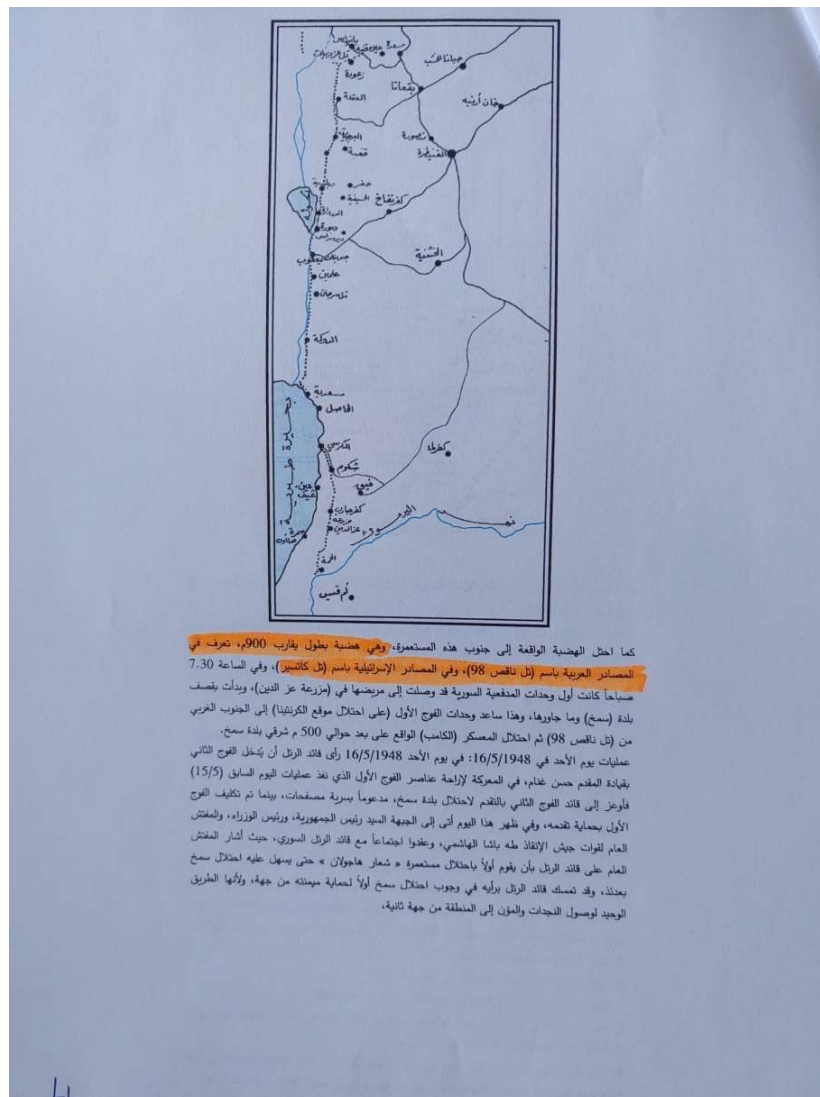
“History is written by the victors,” said Julius Caesar.

“A wise man, when reading history, will constantly refute it,” said Voltaire.

From the testimony of Lt. Col. Amir Shalash, commander of the 3rd Infantry Battalion in the attack on Dgania, which he commanded (Translated from Arabic by Ini Abadi):

"The mission of the 3rd Infantry Battalion is to attack Kibbutz Dgania Alef and then Kibbutz Kinneret. The attack is supposed to commence at 4:30 in the morning on the dot, following the destruction of the two kibbutzim by the air force and the artillery, which is positioned on the plateau of Mazraat Ez-Din, which will commence at 04:00 on the dot.

According to the plan, the tanks will advance and deploy in front of the 3rd Infantry Battalion, and the Marmon-type armored vehicles, in front of the 1st battalion. The first battalion also had a group of volunteers under the command of Captain Qasim al-Kha'il, but on the night of the attack, their personal weapons were taken away from them and replaced with submachine guns. These submachine guns were still wrapped in the original packaging. This weapon was unfamiliar to the volunteers. They did not know how to disassemble, assemble, and use it."



From The Ministry of Defense of the Syrian Republic. "The Role of the Syrian Army in the Palestine War," including the testimony of the Syrian Major.



## **The Battle for The Tank, Dgania Alef Version:**

**Let's frame the stories, which you are finding through access to Syrian primary sources.**

Abadi: Not only Syrians. I want to ask you about the battle of Dgania, on May 20, 1948, in which they failed. Why? They had armored tanks and artillery, why did they fail? After all, there was no reason in the world for them not to win that battle.

**In terms of the bakance of power?**

Abadi: Listen, they had nine Renault tanks and another similar group of Marmon Harrington armored vehicles. What happened to the tanks? What the hell was going on there?

**We are told that they were stopped with Molotov cocktails.**

Abadi: Maybe you should stop with this nonsense.

**Wait, is this a myth?**

Abadi: It is completely idiotic.



One stupid tank

Abadi's reason for this interview can be found close to home, in the two Dganias. In a new book by Assaf Agin, a member of Dgania Bet, who was interviewed here on the eve of

Independence Day 2019, in chapter 40 “Assaf Agin’s Last Battle to Save the Myth of David versus Goliath.”

The new book, *Valley at War: The Battle to Halt the Arab Invasion to the Jordan Valley, May 1948*, is based on the narrative that Assaf Agin discussed during the interview I had with him in the Sacred Cows podcast. The book supports the validity of the narrative of ‘the few against many’ in the battle of Dgania and the War of Independence in general, with data and testimonies. Assaf Agin passed away from a serious illness about a year and a half ago, but his claims continue to drive Ini Abadi, a member of the neighboring kibbutz, crazy. Perhaps this is the contemporary battle of the Dgania? The interview with Abadi was held at his home on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.

Abadi: This is another stupid, pointless, irresponsible, and unserious book, about what happened near the fence of Dgania. That was not a war. A war is a fight against the other side, with the other side. What happened here? Two books have been published about the tank, one by Assaf Inbari and one by Yuval Shion.

The two people whom Abadi mentions here authored books about the Battle of Dgania with the same name: *The Tank*. The book by Yuval Shion, a member of Kibbutz Dgania Alef, was published in 1998. The book by Assaf Inbari, a son of Kibbutz Afikim, was published in 2018. The books present the various versions that have evolved over the years about how the Syrian tank was stopped, whether it was by a grenade, a PIAT (Anti-Tank launcher), or a Molotov cocktail tossed by Shalom Hochbaum, a Holocaust survivor, one of the defenders of Dgania. Each of the claimants to the crown wanted to own one of the greatest heroic myths of the War of Independence – How the Syrian army was stopped by the resourcefulness of one fighter.

And something a little personal from me. Shalom Hochbaum stars in my childhood memory. My mother met him in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and after the war they met again in Kibbutz Dgania Alef. Over the years, he visited our home in the Lower Galilee several times. He was a childhood hero. Hochbaum died by suicide in 1976.

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Abadi: Both of the authors are complete idiots. Why? Because they don't think at all and have no material to back up their claims.

During the first break in the fighting, when we returned to Dgania, I was a 13-year-old boy. We went with Shalom Hochbaum to the tank, and he showed it to us. Go to the tank and look at what I am telling you. The tank faces westward, and its entire right side faces north. If you pay attention, you can see that all the rubber (the tires) parts are missing. The parts on which the chain hangs. There is no rubber on the right side. But on the left side, all the rubber is still there, even today. Do you know what happened there?

**What?**

Abadi: Shalom Hochbaum and 4 other friends met over there. They didn't plan it. There were no Molotov cocktails in Dgania (laughs). A Molotov cocktail is a bottle that has a self-ignition mechanism. At the same time, when I tell you all these details, you can also go to the archive, and you will see a huge picture hanging on the wall, with the 4 guys from Dgania standing and Shalom holding a bottle in his hand.

**Yes...**

Abadi: When I was here during the first break in the fighting, I would sneak along with my friend, Moishe'le Noon, steal bottles, and go to Umm Junny to try and toss them. What happened there? The battle was on May 20th. Two days before (on May 18th), members of Dgania walked around the kibbutz and collected empty bottles of oil. There were no plastic bottles then, only glass. That is why there were different bottles. They filled them up with gasoline and took the inner tubes of a bicycle, tore them into stripes, and put them inside the gasoline. At the time, the inner tubes of bicycles were made of rubber and not from synthetic materials like today. The gasoline destroyed the rubber. They went to the lab in Beit Yerach, took potassium paper, and wrapped the bottles with a rubber band. Go see it. Between the rubber band and the potassium paper, they put a test tube with hydrochloric acid, assuming that when they throw the bottle, the glass of the test tube which is very thin will shatter, the acid will spill onto the paper, the paper will catch on fire, the bottle will break, the gasoline will spill onto the burning paper, and so on.

**And none of that happened?**

Abadi: That bottle did not understand the operating instructions. What happened was that when we tossed the bottle, the rubber band was too loose, so the paper fell off and nothing happened (laughs). Or the bottle broke. Or the test tube did not break. The paper got soaked in gasoline, and the test tube did not do its job. The bottle had to catch on fire before it broke.

**It didn't work during practice, either?**

Abadi: It didn't! So, what does Shalom (Hochbaum) say? I came, poured the gasoline on the tire, and lit it.

**With a match?**

Abadi: With a lighter.

One of the claims in both books was that the hole on the top of the tank was from a PIAT. Go see it with your own eyes. How come on the left side of the tank, all the rubber is in place to this day, but on the right side, there is no trace of rubber, not even one piece?

**He went to the tank, poured the gasoline on the tire, and lit it with a lighter?**

Abadi: And he lit it.

**Okay**

Abadi: Then the tank caught fire.

**Why is this so important, compared to the version of the Molotov cocktail? Why is this even important to the larger story?**

Abadi: The great story has three claimants to the crown: one of them is 'He used the PIAT'. And not just that, but from the waist. I was a PIAT operator. In my time, there were still PIATs in the IDF. If you don't dig into the ground with your feet and hands, you will get smacked so hard, because there is a car suspension spring in it, it would've shot you up in the air. No one ever shot a PIAT from the waist, believe me.

Look at the hole in the turret, at the top. It is a vertical hole. With a PIAT, you cannot shoot from that angle. And not only that. Show me one place between the vegetation and the fence, where the tank had been standing since that fateful day, that is high enough for you to shoot like that on the turret. Idiots! The tank came with a hole it got in World War II.

**So, are we done with the PIAT and the Molotov cocktail versions?**

Abadi: of course.

**So, what's left?**

Abadi: Shalom. (Hochbaum. Y.B.)

**Yes?**

Abadi: I poured the bottle and lit it.

**Which is the correct version?**

Abadi: Yes! Only Shalom's version is left.

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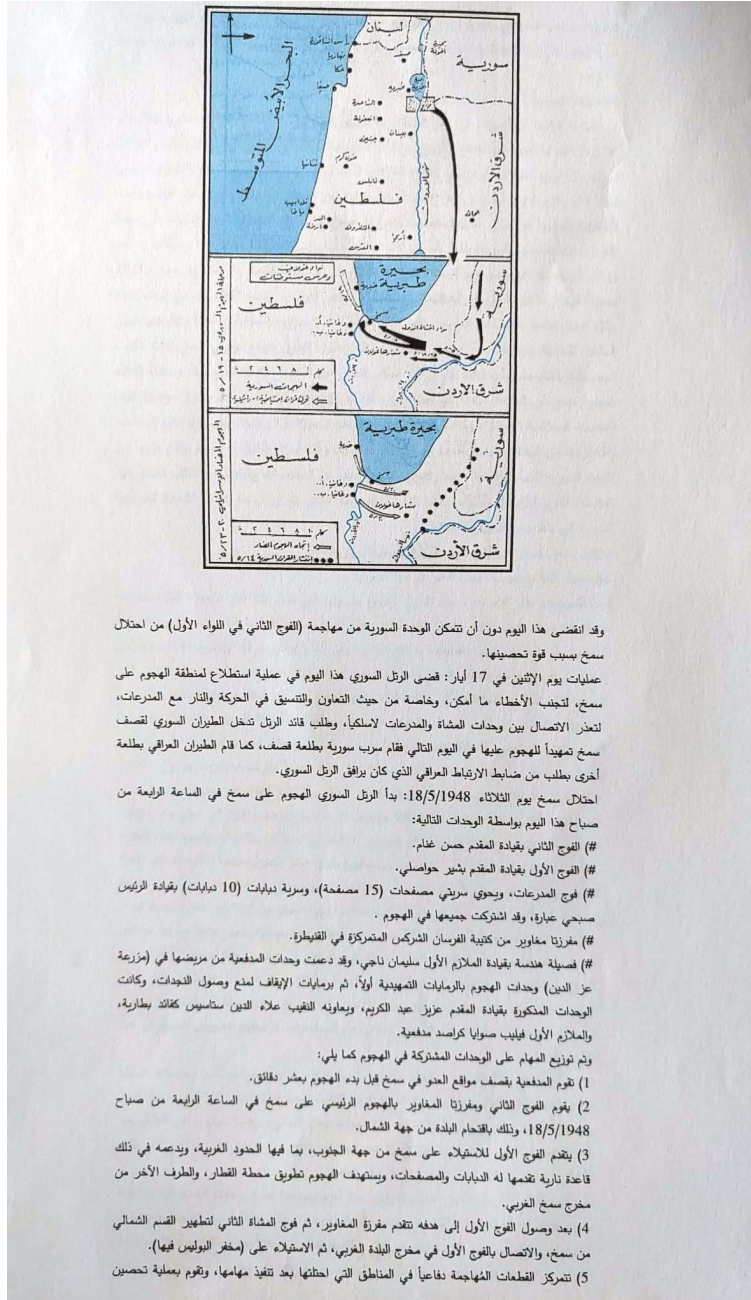
The battle for Dgania, the Syrian commander's version:



**Continuation of the testimony of the Syrian commander about the attack on Dgania, by Lt. Col. Amir Shalash:**

We had no information about the enemy at all: all that was in front of us was a wall of cypress and pine trees, which included a barbed-wire fence. It was impossible to see beyond them, they covered the positions of the two Dgania (Dgania Alef and Bet). We didn't know if the two kibbutzim were located in the front or behind the Jordan River, and we didn't have a map that would show us the positions of the two kibbutzim that were our targets for the attack.

That night, a car arrived from the Communication Corps unit, carrying new, large types of radio devices. We were told that with this equipment we would be able to communicate with the brigade headquarters, and with the general headquarters in Damascus. Two soldiers from the battalion were assigned to work with the new equipment and were asked to operate it. However, these two soldiers didn't know how to operate any communication device at all, because this was the first time that they had seen such equipment. The person in charge who brought the equipment tried to operate it and called the headquarters. Suddenly, the enemy entered the communication network and began broadcasting in Arabic. It showed clearly that the enemy already knew our frequencies. So, it was only natural that we wouldn't operate the equipment at all.”



وقد انقضى هذا اليوم دون أن تتمكن الوحدة السورية من مهاجمة (القوة الثاني في اللواء الأول) من احتلال  
 سمخ بسبب قوة تحصينها.

عمليات يوم الإثنين في 17 أيار: قضى الرتل السوري هذا اليوم في عملية استطلاع لمنطقة الهجوم على  
 سمخ، لتجنب الأخطاء ما أمكن، وخاصة من حيث التعاون والتنسيق في الحركة والنار مع المدرعات،  
 لتعذر الاتصال بين وحدات المشاة والمدرعات لاسلكياً، وطلب قائد الرتل تنخل الطيران السوري لقصف  
 سمخ تمهيداً للهجوم عليها في اليوم التالي، قام سرب سورية بطلعة لقصف، كما قام الطيران العراقي بطلعة  
 أخرى بطلب من ضابط الارتباط العراقي الذي كان يرافق الرتل السوري.

احتلال سمخ يوم الثلاثاء 18/5/1948: بدأ الرتل السوري الهجوم على سمخ في الساعة الرابعة من  
 صباح هذا اليوم بواسطة الوحدات التالية:

# الفوج الثاني بقيادة المقدم حسن غنام.

# الفوج الأول بقيادة المقدم بشير حواصل.

# فوج المدرعات، ويحيى سريتي مصفحات (15 مصفحة)، وسرية دبابات (10 دبابات) بقيادة الرئيس  
 صبحي عيارة، وقد اشتركت جميعها في الهجوم.

# مفرزة مغاور من كتيبة الفرسان الشركس المتمركزة في القنيطرة.

# فصيلة هندسة بقيادة الملازم الأول سليمان ناجي، وقد دعمت وحدات المدفعية من مريضها في (مزرعة  
 عز الدين) وحدات الهجوم بالرميات التمهيدية أولاً، ثم برميات الإيقاف لمنع وصول اللجج، وكانت  
 الوحدات المذكورة بقيادة المقدم عزيز عبد الكريم، وبعاونه النقيب علاء الدين ستامس ككائد بطارية،  
 والملازم الأول فيليب صوايا كراصد مدفعية.

وتم توزيع المهام على الوحدات المشتركة في الهجوم كما يلي:

- (1) تقوم المدفعية بقصف مواقع العدو في سمخ قبل بدء الهجوم بعشر دقائق.
- (2) يقوم الفوج الثاني ومفرزة المغاور بالهجوم الرئيسي على سمخ في الساعة الرابعة من صباح  
 18/5/1948، وذلك باقتحام البلدة من جهة الشمال.
- (3) يتقدم الفوج الأول للاستيلاء على سمخ من جهة الجنوب، بما فيها الحدود الغربية، ويدعسه في ذلك  
 قاعدة ذرية تقمها له الدبابات والمصفحات، ويستهدف الهجوم تطويق محطة القطار، والطرف الآخر من  
 مخرج سمخ الغربي.
- (4) بعد وصول الفوج الأول إلى هدفه تتقدم مفرزة المغاور، ثم فوج المشاة الثاني لتطهير القسم الشمالي  
 من سمخ، والاتصال بالفوج الأول في مخرج البلدة الغربي، ثم الاستيلاء على (مخفر البوليس فيها).
- (5) تتركز القطعات المهاجمة دفاعياً في المناطق التي احتلتها بعد تنفيذ مهامها، وتقوم بعملية تحصين

Ministry of Defense of the Syrian Republic. "The Role of the Syrian Army in the Palestine War."

Abadi: If you won't read the testimony of the battalion commander who attacked Dgania on May 20th, you simply won't understand.

**But again, why is the story of the versions about the tank so important to the big story?**

Abadi: Because when I read a book about World War II, every responsible author writes what happened in the Dunkirk invasion, and also what the Germans did, what they intended, what they had, and all that. Otherwise, it's not a book about war.

**Okay. But if we accept the version that what ignited the Syrian tank...**

Abadi: So What? Well, alright, the tank caught fire. But what about the two Syrian battalions? What do the battalion commanders say? Why didn't they advance?

**What stopped the two Syrian battalions?**

Abadi: Well, you'll never know unless you read the testimonies of the battalion commanders.

**What do the battalion commanders say?**

Abadi: Wait, I want to tell you something else. After Dgania, the Syrians crossed the Bnot Ya'akov's Bridge and captured (moshav) Mishmar HaYarden – the people of the Upper Galilee did not come to their aid, because they were from Beitar youth movement (the national Zionist revisionist youth movement ). The Syrians advanced from Mishmar HaYarden for another 1.8 km and settled in Khirbet Yarden for 13 months. They settle in Khirbet Yarden with a brigade, 700 meters from (kibbutz) Ayelet HaShahar. Hazor did not exist then. But the town of Rosh Pina was there. Why didn't they fire one shell at Rosh Pina? Why didn't they shell Ayelet HaShahar? What were they waiting for?

**How does the Hebrew historiography explain this?**

Abadi: They don't explain. There are no explanations.

**Okay.**

Abadi: The literature about the War of Independence, in all its forms, never understood what the invading armies wanted in the war. 'The few against many' is an idiocy like no other. Before the invasion on May 15th, there was Plan D. Thirty thousand men were recruited to the fighting force. A standing army. What 'the few against many' (are you talking about)? How many men participated in the invasion? No one says.

**Most historians today agree that in the later stages of the War of Independence, the Jewish fighting force was three times larger than the Arab forces.**

Abadi: At the later stage of the war. I am talking about the days before the invasion and before the Declaration of Independence. I am talking about Plan D, Operation Nachshon. So, the Syrians have been sitting around for 13 months. Maybe you can tell me what was their intention? Why didn't they shoot? 13 months, Yizhar. I'm not talking about 13 days or 13 hours; I am talking about 13 months. Until Mordechai Maklef came to them and signed an agreement. (Maklef headed the Israeli delegation for talks with Lebanon and Syria and in 1952 was appointed the third Chief-of-Staff of the IDF.).

**Until the ceasefire agreement actually?**

Abadi: Yes. Why did the Syrians withdraw from their original plan? What was their motive? What did they think? Why didn't they attack? Why did they wait for Mordechai Maklef? Maybe you can tell me? Otherwise, what kind of story about the War of Independence do you have? You don't have a story. You cheat. You are blinding the eyes of the innocents.

**Yes?**

Abadi: What did the Syrians want from this war? One day, the Egyptian army invaded. Why did they invade? When did they invade? With whom did they invade? Okay, they came from two axes, Yizhar.

**Yes, we talked about it...**

Abadi: The Egyptians were in Gaza. There is not a single Jew in Gaza. Tell me, if this is an intention to finish the Jews, why are they in Gaza? There is not a single Jew there. Maybe (there are Jews) in Kfar Darom.

**Well, Napoleon also passed through the Gaza Strip on his way to Acre.**

Abadi: But he had an enemy. Here in Gaza, there are no Jews.

**But Gaza is on the way...**

Abadi: To where?

**To Tel Aviv.**

Abadi: They planned to go to Tel Aviv, nice! That's exactly right. You too are a student of the War of Independence literature. And then what? You blow up the bridge and you call it "Ad Halom Bridge (Hebrew: until here bridge)." Listen, Yizhar. They had APCs (armored personnel carriers.), and there was no water in that ravine. They could have crossed it to the other side with a shovel (laughs). But they did not continue to Tel Aviv.

What happened to the Egyptian army? Show me something in a book about the War of Independence. Something... They disappeared; they evaporated in the "Ad Halom Bridge." What was it? They went there to get to Tarkemiya Road, and where did they go? They arrived at the Elah Valley (near Jerusalem.). What happened in the Elah Valley? Battles between them (the Egyptians) and the Arab Legion (Jordanians). The Son of a Bitch.

**To stop Abdullah, the "Hashemite SOB" from setting foot in the Mediterranean?**

Abadi: This second axis of the Muslim Brotherhood's army came from Abu Ageila to Be'er Sheva. Yizhar. It was after May 15th, which means, yesterday the state was founded. What are you doing there? There is not a single Jew in Be'er Sheva. Not even one. They (the Muslim Brotherhood's army) climbed Mount Hebron. They arrived in the West Bank. But there were no Jews there, either. Tell me, what were they doing there? They passed by

(kibbutz) Ramat Rachel but they didn't attack Ramat Rachel. They went down to the Elah Valley, connected with the Egyptians who came from the coast and conquered Deir Rifaat and Beit Jamal. From whom? From the (Jordanian) Legion.

And what about the Iraqi army? After all, these are two brothers. What about Britain? What was the intention? You need to rewrite the events of the War of Independence. It's just stupid. And this has been happening for 70 years.

**But the Syrians had no business with Abdullah.**

Abadi: What did the Syrians want, when they made that move? Their goal was to stop the Hashemite House that went along with Britain. In Jordan, since 1922, there has been a king, an Emir, and a British vassal, who lived off the British Kingdom's coffers. In Iraq, King Faisal has been a British vassal since 1922. Iran, a British protectorate. It is impossible to move from Europe to the Far East without paying taxes to Britain. I can impose such a tax on you, that it will not be worth buying your goods, and so they will buy British goods because British ships do not have to pay taxes to Britain. And so, I keep the monopoly and the sales that make me rich. I am Britain, and I want to protect my advantage, so I revive the idea of Greater Syria under the crown of the Hashemite Kingdom.

**“Until the invasion in 1948, the Egyptian army did not fire a single bullet during military training.” Eliezer Be’eri, in *Government and The Military Officers in The Arab World*.**

Abadi: Let’s go back to Syria. Before they attacked Dgania, they were in Bint Jabil, in Lebanon. What did they want? To reach Safed, and from there to Acre, and to annex the north of the country to Damascus, which is situated on the border of the Hashemite Kingdom. How old is it (Israel)? Two years and a quarter. They will eat it up before breakfast.

**Was it in the plans?**

Abadi: It is obvious that they intended to take over the north of the country. On May 15th, the day Israel was founded, it was Saturday, and the Syrians arrived in Tel Katzir. When I read the testimonies, I understand why.

**What do you understand? The commander of the Syrian battalion will not tell you about Syria's global interests.**

Abadi: No, but I will tell you some things he testified about before the National Security Academy. (He said) that there was a total of 3 companies of 50 men each, and the headquarters of the battalion which numbered 30 more men. The decision to attack Dgania by

the 3rd battalion was made by the brigade commander who called the commanders of the three battalions to a meeting at the camp.

**Where?**

Abadi: The camp of the frontier forces. Today it is in (kibbutz) Ma'agan.

**On the Eden Line?**

Abadi: What is the Eden Line?

**The local Maginot Line, the fortifications line that the British had built.**

Abadi: That's right. Named after Anthony Eden, who was an outstanding officer in the British Army in World War II, and after that, he was Foreign Minister.

**What is the local connection here?**

Abadi: It was his idea. During World War II, Nazi Germany occupied Syria and Lebanon and placed the Vichy regime there. There was fear that the Germans would attack Eretz Israel in this area and descend from the south of the Golan to the Yarmouch.

**Where exactly does the line pass?**

Abadi: On the hill called The Settlement Hill, the highest point in (kibbutz) Tel Katzir. They built concrete posts there with roofs against shelling and an underground hospital. On the northern edge, they built a concrete post overlooking (kibbutz) Haon which was not there yet. And they also dug an antitank trench, from the new (cattle) quarantine to the Yarmouch. I used to hunt wild boar in that trench. There was an antitank trench there that was always with water, so the wild boar used to have fun there.

**Does this line still exist today?**

Abadi: Of course.

**Why haven't we heard of it?**

Abadi: Because you...

**'Because you are an ignorant boor' you're saying?**

Abadi: I dug in it and trampled in it. I used to hunt wild boars there at night.

**Okay. Did the Syrian battalion that attacked Dgania go through the Eden Line?**

Abadi: It descended from Amrat Ezz a-Din (A Syrian outpost that sits nowadays on the lands of Mevo Hama. Y.B.). They left their canons there. The brigade headquarters was located at Tel Katzir. At 4 p.m., per the instructions of the brigade commander, the three battalions met at the camp, and the operation order was given. "You, the commander of the 3rd battalion, will attack Dgania Alef. You, the commander of the 1st battalion, will attack Dgania Bet. You will have tanks at your disposal, and the second force that will attack Dgania Bet will have Marmon Harrington APCs.



And it was agreed that at 4 a.m. the forces would be ready for attack. The attack would begin at 4:30. Between 4 and 4:30., the Syrian artillery from Amrat Ezz a-Din camp will soften up Dgania Alef and Dgania Bet, and the Syrian Air Force planes will attack the two 'Mista'amrat', the kibbutzim. We were prepared at 4. The shelling never came.

**Are you speaking now as someone from Dgania when you say, “We were prepared at 4?”**

Abadi: No, I speak as a Syrian. I am the battalion commander: “We prepared. When they told me that I had to attack Dgania Alef, Tzemach was already occupied, because it was May 19th.”

**Zemach is an Arab town.**

Abadi: Yes, “But we took over and held it first. And the police, too. Two days before it was conquered. I went up on the roof to observe the target.”

**Is that what the Syrian battalion commander says?**

Abadi: Yes. “I climbed up to the roof to observe the target, and you won't believe what I saw. There was no kibbutz. Only a wall of cypress and pine trees, and in front of them a barbed-wire fence.”

**What was his explanation of this phenomenon?**

Abadi: He didn't see it. You really can't see it. He thought he was going to attack the kibbutz. He pictured houses. He thought they would shoot at him from windows... But he didn't see a kibbutz. And he says, “I don't know. I couldn't tell if the river was in front of the kibbutz or behind it.”

**The Jordan River?**

Abadi: “And I want to tell you in my testimony that we did not have a map of the Jordan Valley. I was waiting for the shelling. It didn't come. Why? It became clear to me that at night, the Minister of Defense, Sharabati, gave an order to shorten the range, to go down from Amrat Ezz a-Din to Tel Katzir with the artillery.” So, they went down there. But then what? Someone came and said: “Listen, there is a Jewish commando in Ein Gev. They will attack you. So, they returned the cannons to Amrat Ezz a-Din and then there was no more shelling.” They took back the cannons out of fear of the Jewish commando that was deployed in Ein Gev. What Jewish commando? (laughing). At 9 (in the morning) the shelling began. The Air Force did not appear. Not at 4 and not at 9.

**So, eventually, the cannons did fire?**

Abadi: At 9 in the morning. After they arrived back at the Azz a-Din post, they fired. But the Air Force did not show up. So, the commander of the brigade who is sitting in Tel Katzir –

there is an Iraqi officer next to him who came to help them – they told him, ‘You provide air support’. So, they sent a plane.

**Iraqi?**

Abadi: An Iraqi plane that dropped leaflets. I have an original leaflet. And I was always sure it was a Syrian plane. It is a leaflet with three columns: one in wonderful Arabic, one in messed up Hebrew, and one in wonderful German.

**For whom is the German version?**

Abadi: They dropped them above Dgania.

**Especially for the Yeckim (German speakers g.b.) of Dgania or what?**

Abadi: No, they are written in both Arabic and Hebrew. I was sure my entire life that one of the rabbis in Damascus translated the leaflet from Arabic into Hebrew. That translation is the stuff of legend.

**In the sacred language?**

Abadi: Now I know it was not some Syrian Halachic sage, but an Iraqi one. The planes did not leave from Syria but from Jordan. Instead of bombs, they dropped leaflets on Dgania.

**What was written in the leaflets?**

Abadi: We have nothing against you. The Zionists are to blame. Let's be friends again like we were before.

**Not a call to leave?**

Abadi: No! “Join us, the Jews of Iraq, the Jews of Syria...” At the time, there was no Aliyah from Iraq.

Listen, it is astonishing. Listen to what happened. He (the Syrian commander. g.b.) says, “As we started to move forward according to the plan, the tanks were to deploy in front of me, but the tanks broke down. Only three out of the nine remained – that was all the Syrian armor, nine tanks. And then we didn't have the artillery cover that should have gone before us. Only three (tanks) remained.” These were indeed the three (tanks) that showed up.

**So, Shalom Hochbaum poured the gasoline on the first tank?**

Abadi: Wait a minute. The Syrian battalion commander describes it exactly. He doesn't need the testimonies of Inbari, or all the other idiots, real idiots... They deployed at 9, instead of at 4:30, and started the attack at 9. And listen, the shelling was ferocious.

**They were fired on from Dgania?**

Abadi: Ferocious.

I know what happened here. There was nothing here. Because in the trenches of Dgania, there were people not only from Dgania but also, it is terrible to say, there were people from

Dgania Bet, from Kineret the moshava, from Kibbutz Kineret, from Afikim. The commander was from Afikim, not from Dgania. I know exactly what they had – 20 British No. 4 rifles, 20 French carbines, all from World War II, 10 pistols, and a hunting gun.

**That's all?**

Abadi: That's what they had.

**But there were cannons on the Poriya Ridge, weren't there?**

Abadi: Will you stop already? The Napoleonchicks... (Hebrew nickname for French mountain cannons, caliber 65 mm, model 1906 g.b.). They offered them to us, but we didn't want them. They do not belong in the Battle of Dgania. We did not want to introduce a foreign element...

In general, in Dgania, they were completely cut off. There was no intelligence division at the time (Aman). The IDF did not have intelligence. There was no intelligence. Nothing. But since then, we have material for historians. Not for the fighters, but for the historians. No one has read it. Listen to me, no one has read it.

**Are you talking about the materials of the other side, of the Arabs?**

Abadi: Of course. War is never one-sided, there are always at least two sides, if not more.

**Yes.**

Abadi: So, you have to see what the intentions are and what they say. "A fierce shelling began, and we moved from an attack position to defense."

**What does "defense" mean?**

Abadi: They sit and dig in. And he (the Syrian commander) adds, "I want to tell you something else. In addition to the battalion, there was also an unorganized force, Eir Tant'eimi, volunteers, who had a commander, but their weapons were taken away from them in the evening, and they got new submachine guns. No one knew how to disassemble them, no one knew how to use them." It's a fact. But wait, I want to tell you something else. "A truck arrived from the Communications Corps in Damascus, with radios. We didn't have radios."

**And they didn't know how to operate them.**

Abadi: "The man who brought them asked for two soldiers from my battalion, I gave him two soldiers. He tried to teach them how to operate the devices. You can call both the brigade headquarters and the general headquarters in Damascus. Okay? While we were looking at this wonder, we heard the Jews in Dgania entering the network and speaking in Arabic. We realized that these devices were useless, so we turned them off. We didn't know how to operate them."

**And who were the speakers, did he invent them, or what?**

Abadi: I don't know. Either he invented it, or someone else, you know, something was heard, and no one knew where it came from. But it is written, in black on white. "At 9 in the morning, we entered our dug-in positions, because there was a fierce shelling. The tank in Dgania came through the paved road and saw that Gate 60 was open. He said it was a trap and he was not entering. He stopped on the side of the road. And where the Jordan River flows, before Dgania or behind Dgania, I didn't know. But I want to tell you something else, we discovered that Dgania was sitting on the Eden Line." (laughs) This battalion commander, like the entire brigade, they have never even once in their lives practiced an attack on a fortified target. He was certain that...

**But the Eden Line is located several kilometers to the east.**

Abadi: Dgania on the Eden Line? That's really something... These are fortified trenches. "We wanted to cross the fence. We couldn't cross the fence. Do you know why? Because they took the barbed-wire cutters away from us."

**Who took?**

Abadi: They took them. Before the attack, they took the wire cutters away from them. They had no wire cutters. They had no communication. The tanks did not move – only three out of nine.

**What about the three tanks that moved, one was hit by Shalom, what about the other two?**

Abadi: At the intersection, at the entrance to Dgania. They lost their chains.

**The other two tanks, the functioning ones?**

Abadi: Yes. The Armament Force took them later. We used them.

**But why did they stop?**

Abadi: The chains fell off. They functioned. The engine functioned. They left them and fled  
**Okay.**

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The continuation of the testimony of the Syrian commander in the attack on Dgania, Lt. Col. Amir Shalash:

"After that, the companies were sent to the planned target with fire cover, which consisted of the battalion's gunners who took positions on the roof of the British police. Then, the tanks

moved in front of the infantry. Shortly after the tanks moved, most of them became disabled and remained in place."

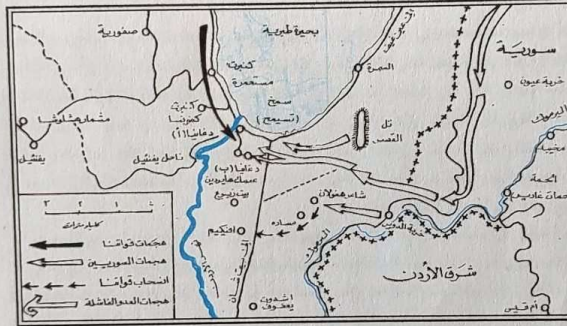
سوري بريقة عالية (....).

إن الوقت الثمين الذي اكتسب بالاحتفاظ بسمخ أتاح مايلي:

(1) المزيد من تنظيم الدفاع عن المستعمرات.

(2) إعداد خط الدفاع عن مستعمرتي نكانيا وكنانيا (ب).

(3) إجلاء الأطفال والمرضى والشيوخ من مستعمرات السهل، وقد أبحرت (في مياه طبرية) قوافل الإجلاء تحت قصف المدافع والطائرات، ولم يطل الانتظار، ففي فجر 18 أيار بدأت المدفعية (السورية) بصف سمخ وشعار هاجولان قصفاً متزايداً مع مرور الوقت، وفي الوقت نفسه انتشرت على شكل قوس واسعة 13 آلية مدرعة، بينها دبابات من طراز رينو، وبدأت تتقدم باتجاه سمخ، ولم تشترك قوات المشاة السورية هذه المرة في الهجوم، وإنما انتظرت عن بعد، وهدم القصف بيوت سمخ اللبنيّة (الطينية) التي كان يختبئ فيها المقاتلون، ولم تكن الخنادق عميقة فيما فيه الكفاية كانت حفراً لإطلاق النار من دون سائر اللراس، وجرح أشخاص كثيرون بينهم عدد من القادة، وتقدمت المدرعات وهي تصف المواقع وأصيب أحد المدافع من عيار 20 مم، التي كانت تستخدم ضد المدرعات فتعطل، وقد حسمت حركة المدرعات هذه، التي هدفت إلى تطويق سمخ من الجنوب، وهددت بقطع طريق الانسحاب على المدافعين من المعركة واضطر رجالنا إلى ترك مواقعهم والخروج من سمخ من دون أن يتمكنوا من إخلاء جميع الجرحى، كانت نيران مدرعات العدو تغطي الشوارع والمساحات بين البيوت، وكان الانسحاب صعباً جداً، وسقطت ضحايا كثيرة في مئات الأمتار القليلة الفاصلة بين سمخ ومستعمرتي نكانيا، وانضم باقي المنسحبين إلى المدافعين عن هاتين المستعمرتين اللتين أصبحتا في خط النار الأول، وكان آخر موقع سقط في سمخ هو (مخفر البوليس)، وقد أتاح الصمود فيه. ولو أن تلك لفترة قصيرة فقط. للمنسحبين مجال تنظيم صفوفهم وإقامة خط مؤقت غربي وجنوب غربي سمخ، في اتجاه (بيت يارح) من جهة، وفي اتجاه (بيت زيرج) من جهة أخرى.



وقد تركزت في الخط وحدة بقيادة نائب قائد الكتيبة الثانية من لواء غولاني، الذي سقط في المعركة في وقت لاحق، وقد أثار سقوط سمخ والقصف والغارات الجوية مشاعر صعبة، وفي الوقت نفسه أرسلت إلى قطاع مستعمرتي نكانيا تعزيزات مشكلة من أفراد الكتيبة الثالثة التابعة للواء غولاني، ومن مستعمرات الجليل الأسفل والسهل.

كما وصلت من الجليل سرية من الكتيبة الثالثة من لواء (بفتح) التابع للالماخ، واستعدت لتوجيه ضربة مضادة (هجوم معاكس) في الليل، وعند حلول الظلام، قيل أن تتحرك السرية التابعة للواء (بفتح) للقيام بهجوم مضاد على سمخ، وصل نياً الاستعدادات في شعار هاجولان وميمادا لإخلاء المستعمرين، ومع الفجر كان قد تم إخلؤهما، وقتل هجوم سرية الالماخ على مركز شرطة سمخ (مركز البوليس) في ليلة 18/19.

لقد نجحت الوحدة في الاقتراب واحتلال مبنى المدرسة المجاور لمركز الشرطة، ولكن عندما اقتربت من مبنى المركز فتحت عليها نيران قوية من المبنى نفسه، ومن المدرعات الموجودة بالقرب منه، واضطرت إلى الانسحاب، ويسقط سمخ في الشمال واستيلاء العدو (الموريين) على ميمادا وشعار هاجولان في الجنوب، وتوصل العدو إلى تأمين جناحيه في حال تقدمه نحو مستعمرتي نكانيا (أ) و نكانيا (ب)، (نكانيا (أ) و نكانيا (ب) هما أقدم مستعمرتين يهوديتين في فلسطين، وهما محصنتان جيداً، ويقعان على مقربة من الخط الدفاعي الذي أخذ في أوائل الحرب العالمية الثانية، اسم «خط إيدن» والذي كان يستهدف أي هجوم ألماني قادم من تركيا أو سورية لاحتلال فلسطين.)، لكن الهجوم المضاد على مركز البوليس، وما سببه من خسائر مني بها السوريون، حققت كما يبدو، على الرغم من فشله إنجازاً معيماً، إذ كسب رجال السهل يوماً آخر، ولم يحدث الهجوم على مستعمرتي نكانيا (أ) و (ب) إلا في اليوم التالي.

فضل الهجوم على نكانيا والانسحاب من سمخ:

بعد احتلال بلدة سمخ في يوم الثلاثاء 18 أيار 1948، زار رئيس الجمهورية السورية ومعه وزير الدفاع

From The Ministry of Defense of the Syrian Republic, "The Role of the Syrian Army in the Palestine War"

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"When the infantry reached the trees' line, which prevented the view of the kibbutzim, they found thick and entangled barbed wire fences, which prevented their progress. Since the tools to overcome these problems, such as wire cutters, were taken away from the battalion, we had no way to proceed.

Suddenly the soldiers were faced with a barrage of gunfire from rifles and machine guns, which forced them to retreat to the starting point, leaving behind them the wounded and dead. Indeed, it later turned out that the Jews were positioned on the Eden Line, which was built by the British Army during World War II, to prevent the Germans from taking over this area. That's how we started to suffer losses."

Abadi: The testimony continues. He says, "We retreated. The battalion headquarters was behind Tzemach's school in the open area and you don't know what happened, a mortar was shelling like you can't imagine."

There was one 81 mm mortar in Dgania. Eliezer Shalev was its operator together with Dr. Shapira. "The sound of mortars – a shell fell at the battalion headquarters. Nine soldiers, myself, and another officer were injured." The names of the doctors and the men who carried the stretchers are all there. Everything is there.

**So, it was a very effective use of one mortar...**

Abadi: Yes. "Then the commander of the Armored Force came and saw our situation, spread out on the ground, beaten by the mortars." What mortars? There was one mortar, 81 millimeters.

**Inside the kibbutz?**

Abadi: The mortar was positioned next to the cemetery. Eliezer Shalev operated it. "We were injured." The Syrian commander says. "The commander of the armored force arrived and saw our situation. He brought the APCs, the ones that were supposed to be used in the attack on Dgania Bet, and provided defense around our defense line. The doctor took the only jeep we had at the battalion headquarters and evacuated 9 soldiers. The two of us were left behind, me and the other officer from the battalion. In the second run, they took me and the officer and led us..."

Now I understand why they didn't continue. But they did cross over to Khirbet Yarda in June. But why didn't they continue from there? Why?



**This question was not examined by the Hebrew historians?**

Abadi: Not on your life. You know what, I want you to check it.

**I'll check it...**

So I checked. See at the end of the chapter, "How to Tell a Complex Story About War."

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**From what you say, perhaps there is a connection between the Syrian battalions' standstill at Khirbet Yarda and the results of the failed battle of the Dganias. They saw that they had no army...**

Abadi: Then why did you fight so hard over Mishmar HaYarden (the moshava was destroyed in the war and never restored by its residents. g.b.) and occupy it? Why did you continue then? Why didn't you proceed further? If you made it all the way there, then why didn't you continue?

**How could they manage to proceed if there were no tanks, as happened in Dgania?**

Abadi: Then why are you putting so much effort into occupying Mishmar HaYarden?

**Maybe they exhausted all their power?**

Abadi: Then why are you sitting there? What was the change in the intentions? If you don't describe to me what happens on the other side, I can't understand the event. Why didn't you proceed? What happened on the way? What made you wait for Mordechai Maklef and the cease-fire agreement? What have you changed in your strategic planning? What about the Hashemite Kingdom? What about the U.K.?

The Syrian commander's testimony explains it.

**What would have happened if they had conquered the Dganias? Wouldn't they have moved further?**

Abadi: Let's continue. It is stated clearly.

**Well?**

Abadi: The operation order states to continue towards Kinneret. It doesn't say which Kinneret (the moshava or the kibbutz. g.b.). It only states 'the one that overlooks the road to Tiberias.' Both of them overlook the road to Tiberias.

**So, is there was strategy to advance and conquer?**

Abadi: Correct. When? On May 20th.

**What happened afterward, why would the strategy change?**

Abadi: They got a report on what Israel acquired in the Czech arms deal.

**So, are you saying that they stopped because of that deal?**

Abadi: Wait, the other thing is that the Hashemite threat (to establish Greater Syria Y.B.) was not implemented, because the Soviet Union and the United States stood in the way of Britain. What did Abdullah mean by saying, 'I am already there'? Have you ever thought about it, Yizhar? What does it mean 'I am already there'? What happened on the day Israel was established, in the military relations between us and between Jordan and Iraq? Look, there was not a single Jewish outpost in the West Bank on the day Israel was established. Gush Etzion fell before the establishment of Israel. Har Tuv fell before the establishment of Israel. Beit HaArava fell before the establishment of Israel. The settlements north of Jerusalem, Neve Ya'akov, and Qalandiya. All that happened before the establishment of Israel. So, what happened?

Now, Wadi Ara, how far is it from there to the sea? Truly, Abdullah could have put his other foot in the Mediterranean in a minute. Listen, because it was a week before the invasion, this conference, the Damascus Conference, and during that whole week, there was such a mess in the Egyptian army. Check when the Egyptian army invaded. Only *after* it found out about the Hashemites under the leadership of Britain. They say that. Read it. Otherwise, you don't understand anything about war. 'Holocaust'. It is just awful. Is that how you write the chronicles of the War of Independence?

**Tell me, despite all this, you are a member of Dgania. You are supposed to be some kind of a local patriot, and you are actually telling a different story, which contradicts the classic heroic story of 'the few against many'.**

Abadi: Again? This is idiotic because we were not few against many. When I read how many Egyptian soldiers invaded and how many Syrian soldiers invaded, we were not few against many. Enough already.

**Wait, but before you yell at me, let's talk about Dgania.**

Abadi: Yes...

**In Dgania, you said a moment ago that we had so and so guns and pistols.**

Abadi: Correct.

**Isn't that considered 'few'?**

Abadi: Because the Palmach and Golani platoons fled...

**It doesn't matter, the bottom line is...**

Abadi: Correct.

**Is it 'few'?**

Abadi: Correct.

**So, what are you saying?**

Abadi: That the few did not win because of their heroic spirit, but because the enemy was a piece of shit.

**So maybe it's 'the few against the many' who were a piece of shit?**

Abadi: True.

**So, we are not arguing.**

Abadi: But to use the word 'shit' you have to write why they are 'shit.' No one wrote that. This is what drives me crazy. Now you are going to ask me 'Why didn't you do it before?'

**Why?**

Abadi: For years, I've been thinking about telling this to my family during one of the Independence Day holidays. After all, we are a big tribe here. I didn't have a chance, because I saw that it was never appropriate. But today, when there is a rumor that another stupid book about the War of Independence is going to be published, I say, 'It should not be published at all'.

**But as far as one side is concerned, it (Dgania fighters) was under an existential threat and fought for the survival of its home, and it managed to burn the tank.**

Abadi: What existential threat?

**You said yourself, "They intended to conquer Dgania and continue to the Sea of Galilee."**

Abadi: And what about Beit Zera, and Afikim, and Sha'ar HaGolan, and Masada?

**Well?**

Abadi: "This, too, was an affair of its own. The affair of Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan. You know, there is one thing that has bothered me all my life. When we were children and returned to Dgania to go to 5th grade, we bullied one of the children from kibbutz Masada, who had no way out, and he hanged himself at school. Amos. Amos Blatt.

**Because you accused him of abandoning you?**

Abadi: We blamed his 'shitty parents' that they ran away. But that wasn't really true.

What happened in Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan? The Syrian battalion that received the order to attack Dgania, the 3rd battalion, should have attacked Sha'ar HaGolan and Masada.

"In the evening, we shelled Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan from Tel Katzir with the 140-millimeter guns. In the morning we were about to attack. Then, Defense Minister Sharabati appears and says: Why are you wasting ammunition?"

On the 23rd of the month, the Minister of Defense was replaced, and Jamil Mardam was appointed as Minister of Defense.

Now, I read this and think to myself, my goodness, what is the Minister of History doing? He fools everyone on all sides. It's just wonderful. I know Jamil Mardam, I have a picture of him. He bullied my father. He sent my father and mother to prison.

**Here, I want to stop and talk about Ini Abadi. He was born in Syria in 1934. When he was 9 years old, he set out on foot, with his sister Simcha, who was 7 years old at the time, on a journey from Damascus to the Sea of Galilee, holding her hand. They settled in Dgania Alef, where he has lived continuously since then, except for short breaks during his military and public service, as a Mossad agent in Iraq in the late 1960s and as governor of Gaza in the early 1970s (see more in "Sacred Cows" in the series "Gaza: The Unfamiliar Story"). The other episodes in his life may be told some other time.**

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Abadi: But it has nothing to do with it. I met Jamil Mardam here in Tel Katzir, during the war (laughs). On the 23rd of the month, three days after the attack on Dgania, he showed up here. They were about to attack Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan.

The next morning, we heard voices in Arabic, looting Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan. I was sent to see what was going on. I saw Bedouins who live nearby, right on the fence of Kibbutz Sha'ar HaGolan and Masada. They saw that everyone left and that there was no one there, so they entered the kibbutzim and started looting.

Listen, when I arrived during the first cease-fire in 1948, I went with Moische'le, my friend, to look for weapons. We wanted to find loot. At that time, the corpses (of Syrian soldiers) had not yet been burned. They were swollen. And under their clothes, we saw negligées. I didn't understand how they got the negligées. This battalion that attacked Dgania came to ensure that there was no looting by the Bedouins who looted Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan.

**What did the soldiers do with the negligées?**

Abadi: They took the negligées from the closets of the kibbutz members, of the women. Under the uniform they had negligées. I didn't understand how they got them. Today I know.

**To bring to their wives?**

Abadi: Obviously. Do you understand what kind of army you were dealing with? They had tanks, right? They had armored personnel carriers, right? But they didn't have a map and they didn't have wire cutters. Zero motivation...

**So, tell me if I'm summarizing your words correctly. In the battle for the Dgania, the balance of power was such that the numbers (of fighters) were on the side of the attacker...**

Abadi: And the weapons.

**There was a majority in the number of fighters and weapons. At the same time, the military ability of the attacker was close to zero.**

Abadi: The battalion commander asks where the Jordan River is located, in front of Dgania or behind Dgania. So, you tell me!

**So, does all this contradict the subjective feeling that there was a heroic battle by the defenders of Dgania?**

Abadi: Correct.

**Is it true that it contradicts itself?**

Abadi: Obviously.

**There was no heroic battle...**

Abadi: A heroic battle takes place when they are inside the kibbutz. But they didn't even see Dgania.

**Are you actually saying that there was no battle in Dgania?**

Abadi: Obviously. There was no battle in Dgania. One stupid tank...

**That came too close.**

Abadi: He thought that he was standing on the Eden Line and didn't know what to do against the trenches. There were trenches with corrugated tin sheets. He didn't know what to do about it. He was sure he had entered the British defensive line. Complete idiots...

**But Shalom (Hochbaum), approached the tank... Listen, a tank is scary...**

Abadi: That's true. There was an act of heroism by Shalom Hochbaum, who got so close to the tank while he was still alive and burned its rubber. But okay...

**Wasn't the mere burning of the tank the reason for the withdrawal?**

Abadi: What caused the withdrawal? They dug in because of the 'hellfire that came from the Eden Line'. Complete idiots... (laughs)

**The 'inferno' was just gunshots?**

Abadi: And hunting rifles.

**Now tell me, why does it matter how the tank was burned, whether they poured gasoline or threw a Molotov cocktail?**

Abadi: It's not important at all.

**Not important?**

Abadi: Of course not. But on the morale (of the fighters), it had a huge impact, and not for nothing.

**For the attackers or the defenders?**

Abadi: For the Syrians.

**Who saw the fire from the tank?**

Abadi: Yes, for Dgania as well. But in Dgania, they didn't know how shitty they were.

Beyond the banana plantation, there was an alfalfa field. The Syrians dug in there until the afternoon and asked to withdraw. The brigade headquarters did not respond. Listen, there was such a mess on their side. It is simply unbelievable. What does it mean 'we didn't have wire cutters'? What does it mean, a forward deployment force that came to conquer the north of the country without a map of Dgania?

**Say, but if the situation were reversed, and the defenders of Dgania would have fled, then the Syrians would have occupied Dgania and continued?**

Abadi: They would have continued. Yes. As it happened with Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan. The people of Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan did not flee, they moved to kibbutz Afikim. They didn't flee from their home. The companies of the Palmach and Golani who were situated in Tzemach police station... They fled.

And the 14-year-old Hezi Dar – they decided to keep around fighters from the age of 14 – was on his way with a message in a bottle for the border (defense) headquarters, which was in Beit Yerach. He jumped into the Jordan River while the tanks were here at the intersection, he dived and reached the other side. On his way back, he saw them escaping. So, he took out the Mauser pistol he had, a German pistol from World War II, and said, 'I'll shoot anyone who passes me. Go to the trenches in Dgania!' They entered through the gate, left through Tnuva (dairy), and ran away...

Tell me, where did 118 people die in Tzemach? There is a monument there. Ask yourself, who are these people? These were not people from the Jordan Valley. People from the Jordan Valley were also killed, but not in these numbers. Who were these people? Those who were on the run from Tzemach.

**Were most of the dead killed during the flight from Tzemach?**

Abadi: Yes. In the conquest of Tzemach by the Syrians.

Do you understand now how fascinating that battle was? But why? Because today we discuss the battle of Dgania when we have a complete picture of both sides.

**What were the losses among the defenders of Dgania?**

Abadi: In the battle of Dgania, an 18-year-old girl, an 18-year-old boy from the Tehran children group, and an elderly man who was in the British army, Shaul Neter, were killed. They were among the defenders.

**What killed them?**



Abadi: The Syrian tank in front of their post which was here at Gate 60. It fired a shell that penetrated the gunhole, hit both of them in the head, and killed them.

**So, the tank that caught on fire later, managed to cause some damage after all?**

Abadi: It killed two people.

**And these were the only losses among the defenders of Dgania?**

Abadi: No. There was another one in the farthest post in the direction of Dgania Bet. He was killed by the shelling.

**Okay.**

Abadi: And another one, after the battles ended when everything was calm. He came to Dgania with a flame shooter.

**Flamethrower.**

Abadi: Flamethrower.

**Yes?**

Abadi: And he burned himself during practice... (scoffs). All these tragedies.

**Yes. And who is the boy who killed himself because you bullied him in Masada?**

Abadi: Amos.

**Do you remember him?**

Abadi: We bullied him. His parents fled, so he committed suicide.

**Did you feel guilty about it?**

Abadi: For years... when I matured... I was among those who bullied him.

**What did you say to him?**

Abadi: "Your parents, they are shit, they ran away from the battle." This is so untrue. But okay, kids...

They also did not receive the Miracle of Sovereignty medal. Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan did not receive it. Nitzanim did not receive it. Years later, they were cleared, and they got it. But when they gave Dgania the Miracle of Sovereignty medal, they did not give it to Masada and Sha'ar HaGolan. Why? Because they fled.

**If the Syrians had a professional army with more capabilities, would it have also stopped in Khirbet Yarda for 13 months?**

Abadi: No. They did not understand at all the motives of the defenders. They didn't understand anything. Today I am in an incredible position because I understand the motivation of the defenders, and I can also judge the motivation of the attackers. This is how you tell a war story.

Listen, when we returned during the first ceasefire, I asked Yakov, my adopting father, 'Tell me, how did you do it?' I didn't know then the story I'm telling you now. And he tells me like this, 'I knew that when the Syrians were here, you were in on Mount Poriya on the way to Haifa.'

**The children (of Dgania)?**

Abadi: Yes. 'At four in the morning, the children left Mount Poriya (to Haifa), and I decided, they (the Syrians) would not pass me to reach you'. (said the father)

**So, this is a heroic story par excellence?**

Abadi: Certainly. Listen. It was not only that. Today, I know that there were elderly people who did not leave (Dgania). They distributed sandwiches and tea (to the defenders) in the trenches. It's a tremendous strength. They knew that they were protecting their life's mission. The establishment of Dgania, the mother of the kibbutzim. They were weak in terms of weapons and all that, but they were highly motivated.

**So, the additional information you've brought about the attackers does not necessarily contradict the accepted narrative.**

Abadi: I didn't say 'contradicts'.

**Complements?**

Abadi: When they talk about the War of Independence in terms of 'the few against many', it is simply not true. Look what a wonderful thing had happened. There are many beautiful things, as far as we are concerned. But to enhance the beautiful points of the story, it's not, you know, to say that they were 'shit'. We were not 'the few against the many'. This is not true. Do you understand? You can go crazy. Why? Because we deserve...

**The full story?**

Abadi: Yes. The one with the hardship, with the shit, and with the beauty. This is how you describe war.

**Tell me, is there any chance we'll go to see the Eden Line?**

Abadi: There is nothing to see now because you cannot enter the Settlement Hill. They closed the anti-tank trench. But I know exactly where it was. The grocery store in Kibbutz Ma'agan is located inside one of the stables. The horse rings (to tie horses to the wall) are still on the wall. Listen, nobody knows anything today. It's terrible. That's not how you raise a generation of heroes. We have something to be proud of, but the story needs to be told...

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**This is not how you write history. How do you tell a complex story about a war?**

“Wars are one of the most complex and complicated phenomena in the political culture of the human race... This is especially true of a war like the one that took place between the Jews and the Arabs in 1948, in which so many different forces were involved. New countries that were institutionally weak and lacking in experience in the art of war and international relations, unofficial organizations, local and foreign, and superpowers with interests in the Middle East. It was a combination of dense and intense fear and despair, hope and frustration, interests and intentions, public rhetoric and secrecy, uncertainty, imagery and reality... power struggles for leadership and hegemony between and within the sides involved, the involvement of superpowers and international factors, moves that tend to get out of control, and an endless variety of accidental occurrences and events...” (Abraham Sela, *The Relationship Between King Abdullah and The Government of Israel in The War of Independence – A Renewed Examination.*)

Professor Avraham Sela was a researcher and an officer in the intelligence division of the IDF until 1986 (Aman). Later on, he was a research associate at the Truman Institute at the Hebrew University. He researches politics and society in the Middle East and the relationships of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel with the Arab world, as well as issues related to the War of Independence. The title of his doctoral thesis is *Arab Countries and the Question of Israel 1945-1948*.

"We must understand the political background (of the War of Independence). The Syrians, first and foremost, wanted to impede Abdullah's intentions to annex the entire territory of Mandatory Israel (a.k.a. Mandatory Palestine) to his kingdom as a step toward the realization of his plan for the unification of Greater Syria. They were absolutely hysterical about it."

"We forget that the Arab countries' entry into the war, except for Jordan, was one big improvisation. In Nasser's memories of the war, he writes about going to the Gaza market to buy olives and pita bread for his soldiers, which indicates the Egyptian army's level of preparation. These were unprepared forces without sufficient military capabilities, whose effectiveness was even lower in the absence of central coordination and command.

“The accepted opinion among many Palestinians, to this day, is that the Arab countries did not fight at all in 1948.”

"Two weeks before the war, the chiefs-of-staff of the Arab countries met in Amman to discuss a joint plan of action, and they concluded that it would be impossible to overwhelm the Jewish forces unless they had at their disposal forces of a size that was not even close to the size of the forces that the Arab armies could amass. That (meeting) took place after the capture of HaKastel and the failure of Kaukji's Arab Liberation Army (ALA) in Mishmar HaEmek."

"The capture of Haifa by the Jews shocked the Iraqi leadership and prompted it to form a joint Arab position with Egypt regarding military entry into Palestine after the end of the British Mandate. In fact, until the middle of April 1948, the discourse between the Arab governments and the Arab League was dominated by the assumption that King Abdullah would act alone to ensure the Arabization of the land."

Sela defines the work of his fellow Israeli historians regarding the conduct of the Arab countries during the war as "flawed" due to the lack of use of Arab sources because the Arab countries did not open their archives containing materials about the war.

"But even if this claim is essentially true, no effort was made to use available primary sources, such as the documents of the Arab Liberation Army (available) in the IDF archives, and plenty of other sources from the Arab press, diaries, and memoirs."

"Either (Israeli) historians don't read Arabic or they have an ideological or political agenda. In any case, the real picture, even the one presented by the 'new historians', who sought to distance themselves from the Zionist narrative and even refute it, is far from exhaustive," he concludes.

\* \* \*

You have listened to/read chapter 57 of Sacred Cows "The Tank in Dgania – The Version of The Syrian Commander."

Before concluding, I have a personal appeal to you. Much effort is invested in preparing each episode you listen to or read, and everything is voluntary and self-financed. The production of each episode requires weeks of work including travel, investigations, interviews, transcriptions, voice editing, and much more...

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Thanks, and see you in the next chapters.

Yizhar