**Chapter 1**

**The Education of a Strategist**

Moshe Dayan was born on May 20, 1915 in Kibbutz Degania Alef, the first child of Shmuel Dayan and Devorah, Second Aliyah immigrants to Israel .[[1]](#footnote-1) Born in the Ukraine, Shmuel joined the Zionist movement at a very young age, immigrating to Palestine in 1908. After working for several years as an itinerant farmhand to prepare himself for agricultural labor, in 1911, he joined Kibbutz Degania Alef in northern Israel, which had been established a year earlier as the first socialist communal settlement (*Kibbutz*). Devorah, also from the Ukraine, was a young idealist from a wealthy family. Disappointed by the failure of the 1905 revolution, she immigrated to the Land of Israel, where she worked as a laborer to fulfill her socialist vision.

Devorah met Shmuel after arriving in Degania in 1913, and they married in 1914, shortly after the outbreak of World War I. Not only were living conditions in Degania difficult, but the couple and their infant Moshe suffered from ill health. Their dissatisfaction was fueled by Shmuel’s ideological objections to the kibbutz’s totally communal life. He and others, claiming that the kibbutz structure limited their personal freedom, proposed a new form of settlement – the moshav – that they considered best for the nation and the individual. They formed a group to leave the kibbutz and found a communal settlement that maintained the traditional nuclear family and household.[[2]](#footnote-2) Nahalal’s first settlers, including Shmuel and Devorah, arrived there in September 1921 via a convoy of wagons and began the work of building the Nahalal settlement, home to Moshe Dayan throughout his childhood and adolescence.[[3]](#footnote-3)

There, Dayan learned from an young age that Zionism must be realized by conquering the soil.[[4]](#footnote-4) The 1917 Balfour Declaration was a victory for political Zionism, but Shmuel still emphasized the importance of the actual land: “And here, my son, is where we began to conquer the land, not by war but by the plow and by labor. Thus, the land will stay ours and we will never leave it.”[[5]](#footnote-5) His father also viewed his Arabs neighbors negatively, as Dayan recalled, “that was the doctrine I grew up with and believed in – that Arabs are inferior, robbers, murderers, and prone to rioting.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

As a child, Moshe was close to his mother, who read him Russian literature, which he came to love,[[7]](#footnote-7) and he became familiar with the writings of the great Russian writers.[[8]](#footnote-8) While a sensitive child,[[9]](#footnote-9) he also showed a great deal of independence, roaming alone between Deganya and Nahalal from a young age.

He considered his mother wise and intelligent, and respected her much more than he did his father. While he felt he could discuss ideas with his mother, his father would issue categorical declarations that could not be questioned. Dayan felt his mother was more open, describing her as being “on the verge of liberalism.” This attitude was manifested also towards Arabs: while Dayan’s father was suspicious and kept his distance, his mother hosted them in their home.[[10]](#footnote-10)

From an early age, Dayan began identifying with independent, nonconformist ideas that challenged the status quo. Rejecting the prevalent attitude in Nahalal that an academic education was less important than training for agricultural labor, and his father’s vision that he become a farmer, Dayan wanted to continue studying.

In addition to Russian literature, Dayan read the Hebrew writings of Avraham Shlonksy and Natan Alterman, and a wide range of classical literature in Hebrew translation. As a result, Dayan broadened his cultural horizons beyond those of his cohort in Nahalal, developing a level of sophistication unusual among his friends and acquaintances. According to Shabtai Tevet, who wrote a seminal biography of Dayan, this sophistication led to a complex view of the world, with room for shades of gray, unlike the black-and-white world of many of his contemporaries.[[11]](#footnote-11) As a youth, Dayan loved ideological arguments and was active in a group called “The Hut,” for which he organized debates and invited guest speakers. Even then, he tended to organize lectures on security and invited speakers on issues of Arab politics and culture.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**Dayan’s Evolving Attitudes toward the Arab Enemy**

Throughout his life as a soldier, military leader, and statesman, Dayan stood at the forefront of the Jewish people’s struggle against the Arabs: Palestinian city dwellers and rural *fellahin*, nomadic Bedouins, Arab inhabitants of neighboring Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Egypt – they were all part of the Arab *ummah* (nation), speakers of Arabic, with a shared religion and ethos. Having grown up close to Arabs, and having been in contact with them during his adolescence, his attitudes toward them developed directly from his experiences and human contact with them in various contexts. Thus, when his worldview was being shaped, Dayan developed an understanding of the Arab perspective in the conflict along with empathy for them. Unlike many Jews of his day who viewed Arabs as uncivilized barbarians, Dayan respected their connection to the land, even seeing in them a contemporary version of how the Jewish people must have lived in Biblical times.

As a child, Dayan came into contact with the Arabs his mother hosted and those he met when his father would take him along when he traveled to the Arab village of Majdal on the Sea of Galilee to grind his wheat. For the child, this was a magical journey, during which his father would explain that the Arabs were hired farm laborers who had not evolved for hundreds of years, that their villages had no services or infrastructures, and everybody was dirt poor, adding that they were largely responsible for their sorry state because they were lazy. But his harangues fell on deaf ears. Dayan was captivated by the Arabs he met and impressed by their ability to survive in this poverty and to make do with little.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Even when running after his father’s plow in the fields, Dayan met Arabs and Bedouins. One child, Wahash Hanhana from the Arab al-Mazarib tribe, became Dayan’s friend, and they would plow the field and spend time together.[[14]](#footnote-14) When the young Dayan went hiking with his classmates, they would encounter local Arabs in orchards and at springs. His friends recalled, “Moshe socialized with Arab kids more than the other Jewish kids. In particular, he liked the *fellahin*, the Arabs who labor and sweat. All of us were full of love for the laborers, but Moshe had a special attitude to them.”[[15]](#footnote-15)

Dayan read literature romanticizing the life of Arabs in the desert, including Moshe Smilansky’s *Sons of Arabia*.[[16]](#footnote-16) He even published a short story he wrote in the Nahalal newsletter with the heroes Ali and Mustafa, whom he and his friends joined on desert adventures, riding mares, wearing Bedouin clothing, and adopting Bedouin customs.

In his memoirs, Dayan noted that while living in Deganiya, relations with the Arab neighbors were generally good, despite a few brief violent incidents:

A bond was forged between those who worked the land. Group members shared knowledge with their neighbors, there were courtesy visits back and forth, two families even made close friendships. The attacks, robberies, and murders of Jewish laborers were not driven by national motivation. The Arab gangs robbed and stole also from the Arab *fellahin* (peasants)…[[17]](#footnote-17)

But the violence between Jews and Arabs escalated on December 22, 1932, after a bomb was thrown into the shed a Nahalal member, killing him and his 8-year-old son. The murder marked a turning point in Jewish-Arab relations because the motive was nationalistic: the perpetrators, from the Galilean town of Sfuriya belonged to the *Qassamiya* nationalist movement.

The ever-curious Dayan, unable to accept his father’s assertions at face value, wanted to investigate what was happening with the Arabs close-up, so he went to Sfuriya to interview the movement’s members. “They are humble idealists; they pray often and operate on the basis of profound religious and national feeling,” he wrote.[[18]](#footnote-18) Recognizing their strength of belief and reflecting his optimism about the possibility of coexistence, he was deeply concerned: “The *Qassamiya* phenomenon shed light on the national, religious, and emotional chasm between those living to realize the Zionist vision and the Arabs; this chasm separates them even when it is concealed from the eye.”[[19]](#footnote-19)

The visits to Sfuriya typified Dayan’s lifelong conduct. His great curiosity and extreme audacity led him to repeatedly risk his life; some considered his conduct reckless and foolhardy. Another aspect of his character, expressed in his visits to Sfuriya and throughout his career, was that he was never satisfied with second-hand reports and accounts; he always sought to come as close as possible to the scene and see things for himself.[[20]](#footnote-20)

An unbridgeable gap opened up between Dayan and his father in their views of the Arabs. The father saw the Arabs who had murdered Yaakobi as nothing but “despicable murderers,” arguing that, “We are bringing them progress, and they murder us in return.” The younger Dayan’s view was more complex, believing that the Arabs’ actions were motivated not by robbery but by nationalism.[[21]](#footnote-21) The *Qassamiya* movement’s members and people saw their actions as idealistic, reflecting the well-known adage that, “one person’s terrorist is another’s freedom fighter.”

Relations with the Bedouin tribes living near Nahalal were also complex, sometimes friendly, and at other times, conflict-ridden. Their confrontations indeed resembled ancient quarrels described in the Bible between Jewish farmers and Bedouin herders.

The realization that the conflict was primal, premodern, with each side convinced of its righteousness, accompanied Dayan in the December 20, 1934 altercation with the neighboring al-Mazarib Bedouin tribe. This was one of many quarrels between Nahalal’s inhabitants and the tribe herders, who allowed their flocks to roam the expanding moshav’s fields. That the settlers had purchased the land meant very little to the Bedouins, accustomed to using the fields around the moshav. On this day, a particularly violent brawl broke out between the Bedouins and some Nahalal members; a Bedouin clubbed Dayan over the head, wounding him badly. Nonetheless, Dayan continued what he had been doing – seeding the field – until falling to the ground. That he continued seeding the field even when surrounded by Bedouins throwing rocks and clubbing him until he collapsed made a powerful impression on everyone there.[[22]](#footnote-22) The story even made it into the newspaper, probably the first time Dayan became the center of a news item. Certainly, the incident made him a local Nahalal hero.

Eyewitnesses claimed that Wahash, Dayan’s childhood friend, had struck him from behind, while others accused a different tribesman.[[23]](#footnote-23) Dayan understood the tribe’s feelings and motives:

I did not bear Wahash or the al-Mazarib tribe any ill will. Generations have been accustomed to herding in the *wadis* of Shimron and watering their flocks at the springs that have now become our possession. From my perspective, the Jewish National Fund is redeeming the land, but for Wahash and Abd al-Majid, these activities look and feel different. They’ve been told to get their tents out of the *wadi* where they and their ancestors have always lived. Six months later, I invited them to my wedding celebration. My invitation was gladly accepted; the Mazarib came in throngs.[[24]](#footnote-24)

Indeed, al-Mazarib tribe members were among the guests at Dayan’s wedding soon thereafter.[[25]](#footnote-25)

The Arabs’ closeness to nature and simplicity of life in that part of the land charmed Dayan. At this time, he still believed the two nations could co-exist peacefully:

My feelings about our Arab neighbors were positive. I liked their way of life and I respected them for their hard work, connection to the land, and immersion in the landscape around me. I had no doubt that it was possible to live with them in peace – they in their settlements and with their way of life and we in ours.[[26]](#footnote-27)

This tolerant attitude was strengthened by a hiking trip he took in the Beit She’an region during which Bedouins hosted him and his friends at their encampment – not the first time Dayan had been graciously hosted and protected by village elders – and it made a powerful impression on him. Dayan and his friends had their picture taken with the local emir who had extended his protection to them. Years later, Dayan made a point of locating him and sending him copies of the photos from the visit.[[27]](#footnote-28)

On October 5, 1939, Dayan was apprehended by the British along with 42 others, all Haganah members, for illegal firearms possession. The 43 were locked up in the Acre jail, housing also Arabs with whom Dayan felt a kinship of destiny. In a letter to his siblings, he wrote:

In practice, most of the Arab inmates are prisoners of the events, i.e., they represent the Arabs’ current attitude to us. And every day, this parade goes around and around as a British officer and sergeant “supervise” it. The personal relations between us and the Revisionists,[[28]](#footnote-29)on the one hand, and the Arabs on the other are very good… Most of the gang members are idealists and religious believers, not mercenaries. And the personal suffering unifies us.[[29]](#footnote-30)

At first, relations between the Arab and Jewish inmates were very tense, but over time, the two sides came to respect one another. Dayan saw this as an opportunity to learn more about the Arab perspective and deepen his understanding of their motives. He wrote:

What goes on in the mind of the Arab who suddenly riots in Jaffa? I don’t think I have reached a conclusion, but I have begun to understand them. Something’s going on here, and it’s not the bad guy versus the good guy. I’ve expressed this in my everyday life, in which I felt no antagonism towards Arabs as individuals. I’ve had friendships with many Arabs, from those I got to know around Nahalal to the inmates in jail. I told you – two peoples on two sides of an issue without any personal enmity, neither murderer nor persecuted. Isn’t that the case?[[30]](#footnote-31)

Evidence of the personal bonds Dayan forged came in 1942, after his release from jail, when he was invited as the guest of honor at the wedding of Abed Abeidat, a member of one of the gangs. After the War of Independence broke out, Dayan recruited Abeidat as his intelligence agent.[[31]](#footnote-32)

Another of Dayan’s connections was with Rashid Tahar, a Bedouin tracker, who had previously been a gang leader. Tahar, reputed to be a brave fighter, was well acquainted with the Syrian and Lebanese countryside. Later, despite his colleagues’ concerns about Tahar’s trustworthiness, Dayan decided to take him as a tracker on the operation to Syria in which Dayan lost his eye; ultimately, Rashid fought effectively and bravely with the front line and stayed by Dayan’s side during the long evacuation to the hospital.[[32]](#footnote-33) In this case, Tahar proved his loyalty to his brothers in arms, quite the contrast to the popular notion that Arabs are treacherous.

**The Young Fighter**

Already as a young child, Dayan had learned to handle weapons, regularly participating in defense and guard duty as a matter of course.

From as far back as I can remember myself, I remember there being a loaded rifle in the house. [My] familiarity with weapons was no different than my familiarity with the farm. Just as I don’t remember when I started milking, I don’t remember when I started caring for Father’s carbine.[[33]](#footnote-34)

At first, Dayan got permission to watch as his father cleaned his German carbine and its bullets. Later, he was allowed to clean it himself, and then to load it. At 10, he practiced target shooting on bottles and such, but he received his own gun only when he was older. From the age of 14, when the men of Nahalal were called out, which would happen whenever someone in the settlement was threatened, Dayan would always be among the first to arrive on the scene, despite his young age.[[34]](#footnote-35)

Following the 1929 riots, Nahalal’s residents joined the Haganah, which provided training and weapons.[[35]](#footnote-36) A group of adolescents, including Dayan, also joined. Their mission was to guard the training grounds and warn of approaching British troops. The youth also underwent self-defense and hand-to-hand combat training, an early form of Krav Maga, and weapons training.[[36]](#footnote-37) In 1931, Dayan was one of a group of youth on horseback who patrolled Nahalal’s fields. The youths were trained to ride like Cossacks by Nahum Habinsky and Yosef Dromi, former Russian army soldiers. Dayan was enchanted by their stories, imagining himself as a horseback-riding Cossack.[[37]](#footnote-38) (Years later, this image came to haunt him, as his political rival then-Prime Minister Levi Eshkol sneeringly referred to him as a Cossack.)[[38]](#footnote-39) The riders would attack and scatter Bedouins who were herding their flocks on the settlement’s fields. Dayan demonstrated courage and a fighting spirit, and his comrades testified to his gift for “battlefield leadership.” While neither the strongest nor the fastest, he still stood out and set the tone.[[39]](#footnote-40)

**Enlisting in the Notrim**

On July 12, 1935, Moshe Dayan married Ruth. The young couple then traveled to London, staying for six months to learn about the world beyond Nahalal.[[40]](#footnote-42) Unlike his wife, Dayan deeply missed Palestine and felt uncomfortable in London. They returned in February 1936 and joined a group from Nahalal that was getting ready to settle Shimron, a new moshav in the north of the country.

In April 1936, the Arab Revolt erupted. This coincided with a new chapter in Dayan’s military education as he enlisted in the Notrim (in Hebrew, “guard”(, a new Jewish security force established by the British. In his diary, Dayan noted that these were his first steps in military activity. The Notrim were recruited as an auxiliary force to help the British police, but one unit of the Notrim was subordinate to the Haganah, which recruited its members, while the salaries, weapons, and uniforms were all British.[[41]](#footnote-44) The first Notrim enlisted in May 1936 and were sent to defend the Jordan Valley and Jezre’el Valley settlements. In 1937, as the riots intensified, the British recruited more men. The nearly 15,000 men were divided into 10 regional regiments. Dayan was recruited to the regiment responsible for Nahalal, at which point the Notrim were already patrolling beyond urban center in rural areas and fields.

The units, equipped with pickup trucks, were meant to patrol and provide rapid responses to security problems. The British, needing local guides, chose Dayan as one, as he was familiar with the valley and its surroundings. The company’s main mission was to prevent sabotage to the British-owned oil pipeline running from Kirkuk in northern Iraq to Haifa. The Arab fighters would puncture the pipeline, let the oil flow out, and then set fire to it, causing prolonged fires. This caused tremendous financial losses and disrupted oil supplies to Britain.

To protect the pipeline, the British also deployed the Royal Scots and the Yorkshire Rifleman Regiments, and Dayan used the English he had learned at school and during his recent stay in London to communicate with them. For Dayan, raised as a farmer-fighter who had brawled with local Arabs, this was his first encounter with a professional, hierarchic, disciplined army operating according to drills and procedures and maintaining a routine of formations and duty rosters. Dayan was not very impressed by the British ability to confront Arab saboteurs, telling friends that the British were untrained in field skills and unfit for such missions. He found them apathetic, loud, and clumsy, relying on them mostly to maintain order simply by their presence.[[42]](#footnote-46) Dayan learned clear tactical lessons in irregular guerrilla warfare, noting in his diary:

In the eight months of operating with His Royal Highness’s army, I’ve seen the impotence of a regular army operating on the basis of established plans and procedures in confronting saboteurs who know the area, move on foot, are assimilated and involved with the local population, and choose the place and time that are convenient for them to strike. It was clear that the way to fight the gangs was by seizing the initiative. It is necessary to strike first and attack them in their bases and ambush them as they move.[[43]](#footnote-47)

These were Dayan’s first experiences in dealing with irregular warfare, a major and very palpable issue he had to confront throughout his career and his life.

In 1937, Dayan attended a British Army sergeants’ course taught in English at the Tzrifin Camp by the 2nd Battalion Black Watch Regiment. He quickly realized that the shoe polishing and parade drills aspects of the military were not for him. His rebellious, individualistic, free spirit was badly suited to the routine. Nonetheless, he understood the British Empire’s army’s need for “this bullshit,” as he called it, because no large entity can be managed without uniformity, discipline, and order.[[44]](#footnote-48) But this particular course contributed nothing to helping him better confront the military challenges in the valley.

In the spring of 1937, Dayan was appointed commander of the mobile guard of Nahalal’s Notrim unit. Here, he was noted for seizing the initiative and going on the offensive. Although this approach was not coordinated among them, it was shared by other prominent commanders, including Yitzhak Sadeh and Yaakov Dori.[[45]](#footnote-49) Later, this approach, most closely identified with Sadeh, was dubbed “beyond the fence.” [[46]](#footnote-50)

During his Notrim service, Dayan wrote a booklet, “Fieldcraft,” addressing various aspects of the subject, such as knowing the terrain and exploiting it for guerrilla warfare, setting up ambushes, sneaking into enemy territory, and patrolling. Dayan sent the booklet, which was used as lesson plans, to Dori, then the Haganah commander of the northern sector and head of the Haganah’s training headquarters. Dori was highly impressed, and while it was never published as an official handbook, it certainly influenced Haganah training.

The handbook criticized regular armies’ rigidity, offering instead, knowledge and skills required in situations that change on the ground, an approach Dayan applied throughout his long career. Dayan himself ran drills with his men using his methods, raiding protected Haganah compounds. In one exercise, he infiltrated the Haganah’s Jo’ara base where most of the organization’s courses were taught. The base guards argued that this penetration was not a real achievement because it was accomplished by breaking the rules. Dayan dismissively retorted that there were no rules of warfare in reality; fighters had to operate according to conditions on the ground and only the outcome mattered.[[47]](#footnote-51)

**Commanders’ Course and Introduction to Yitzhak Sadeh**

The next stage in Dayan’s military development was taking the Haganah’s six-week long platoon commanders’ course, the first to be explicitly defined as such.[[48]](#footnote-52) Dayan considered it superior to the British Army course he had undergone; indeed, many of the participants would eventually form the IDF command backbone.[[49]](#footnote-53) Most of the training consisted of daytime and nighttime field exercises. The course was unique in being entirely devoted to combat exercises, focusing on training units and mobile troops following the Haganah’s field platoons’ experiences during the Arab Revolt. Drills focused mainly on platoon and infantry squad structures. Sometimes, several platoons operated simultaneously, representing something of an innovation. Special emphasis was placed on the indirect approach, such as exploiting the enemy’s weaknesses and attacking from the flank. Moreover, the course stressed the platoon commander’s character and role. The trainees studied the doctrines of the classical thinkers, including Carl von Clausewitz, and influential contemporaries, such as John Frederick Fuller and Basil Henry Liddell Hart. They also took a course on the German army’s tactics and structure after World War I.[[50]](#footnote-54)

Here Moshe Dayan first met Yitzhak Sadeh, who would go on to build the Palmach, the Haganah’s elite fighting unit.[[51]](#footnote-55) Dayan was profoundly impressed by the “old man,” (his nickname), his courage, élan, and originality. Dayan also met Yigal Alon, one of the young, promising leaders, for the first time during the course. With their very different personalities, Alon and Dayan were to become lifelong rivals.[[52]](#footnote-56)

The next significant milestone in Dayan’s development was his move to Hanita on the Lebanese border on March 21, 1938. Against the background of the Arab Revolt, the Hanita’s establishment represented a kind of record, with some 50 “wall and tower” settlements constructed employing a rapid method that placed modular structures in an area so that a new settlement could be made ready overnight. The settlements were surrounded by a wall with an observation and communications tower, with tents for living and a communal mess hall. Armed Haganah members and Notrim, stationed in different areas around Palestine, would defend the “wall and tower” settlements. Dori led the settlement of Hanita, while Sadeh and his deputies Dayan and Alon commanded the defense force. They came under fierce attack already on their first night there, immediately after setting up the settlement; this was probably Dayan’s first significant baptism by fire.

The attack on Hanita began at midnight. A large Arab force approached, getting within 30 meters of the new settlement. The defenders had 120 rifles, and succeeded in fending off the Arabs at the cost of two dead. Dayan reported that Sadeh not satisfied with simply defending Hanita, and wanted to order a unit to go out on an offensive action, but Dori would not authorize what he considered too dangerous an action.[[53]](#footnote-57) Another violent incident occurred four days later when an Arab gang attacked a group of laborers who were paving a road to the settlement. A platoon commanded by Sadeh overwhelmed them and drove them away. Sadeh praised Dayan and Alon for their performance.[[54]](#footnote-58)

Hanita’s founding was commemorated in a famous photograph of Yitzhak Sadeh embracing the two young, uniformed Notrim sergeants – Moshe Dayan on his right and Yigal Alon on his left. On the back of the photograph, Israel’s future first president, Haim Weizmann, then President of the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Agency, inscribed the prescient words: “The General Staff.”[[55]](#footnote-59)

**Orde Charles Wingate and His Influence**

Dov Yermiya, a Haganah commander, recalled the arrival of Captain Orde Charles Wingate to Hanita: “One night, a taxicab came to Hanita and a very strange figure emerged. He carried two rifles, a dictionary, and a few Hebrew newspapers. We looked at him with astonishment. We wondered how he had dared come here alone at night. This made a tremendous impression on us.”[[56]](#footnote-60)

In fact, Wingate (1903–1944) was a British army officer who specialized in guerrilla warfare. He arrived in Palestine in 1936 after having served in Sudan and Ethiopia, where he developed new methods for ambushes and raids. His unconventional military approach matched his uninhibited personality, which at times made him seem extremely eccentric. Coming from a Scottish family belonging to the Plymouth Brethren Church that viewed the Jews as the chosen people and believed in the prophecy of the Day of Judgment, Wingate supported the Zionist enterprise for religious reasons, believing that the war of the day of judgment would take place in Megiddo, and that the Jewish people had to prepare for it.

Wingate arrived in Israel in September 1936, serving first as an intelligence officer. In 1937, Wingate’s recommendations on how to confront the Arab enemy in the land of Israel were finally accepted by the British military leadership. Following a comprehensive study Wingate had done on the modus operandi of the Arab gangs, a study that included discussions with the Haganah’s leaders, on June 5, 1938, Wingate submitted a report recommending the formation of special night squads that he would lead, whose purpose would be to crush terrorism in the Land of Israel’s northern region using unprecedented methods of warfare.

Dayan met Wingate in 1938 near Nahalal just when Wingate was undertaking his study of the Arab gangs. In fractured Hebrew, Wingate explained his ambush methods to the Shimron group, of which Dayan was then a member. Wingate reproached the settlement’s defenders for not going past the wall and not initiating attacks on the enemy.[[57]](#footnote-62)

Wingate’s mastery of navigation and fieldcraft deeply impressed Dayan. He said that Wingate “is a groundbreaking military genius rebelling against conventions.”[[58]](#footnote-63) Wingate became a role model and he and Dayan formed a relatively close relationship. For Dayan, the way Wingate led, such as eating and drinking in the field only after ensuring that his soldiers had eaten and drunk, or his insistence on being at the head of a raid formation rather than sending scouts before the forward line, demonstrated combat leadership at its best. Wingate, who combined the professional authority of an experienced British officer with extraordinary personal charisma, succeeded in encouraging Dayan to seize the initiative and go on the offense.

His Jewish unit included Dayan and many of the fighters who had secured Hanita.[[59]](#footnote-64) The squad’s base, commanded by Wingate, was located in Ein Harod; its objective was protecting the oil pipeline – the same mission the Royal Scots and the Yorkshire Rifleman that Dayan had joined two years earlier – had carried out with little success. Wingate’s immediate task was to have his squad take control of nighttime activities, which was a condition for securing the region. Until that time, only the Arab gangs operated at night.

Wingate’s doctrine was based on maximal mobility, initiative and offense, intelligence, ruses, secrecy (deflection, misleading the enemy, infiltration, and surprise)[[60]](#footnote-65) – principles that suited a small army with few resources, and were therefore enthusiastically adopted by the founders of the IDF. The Special Night Squads quickly seized control of the night and succeeded in stopping the attacks on the pipeline.

One of Wingate’s best-known successful operations was one his unit carried out with Dayan and the Mobile Defense, attacking a Bedouin encampment near the village of al-Awadin. This was a transit station for delivering weapons to the Samaria region and a jumping-off point for the Arab gangs’ assault and robbery raids. Wingate’s plan was based on a ruse: a truck stopped about 1 km before the village, near the railroad tracks, and men disguised as railroad workers disembarked. In reality, this was a squad of Dayan’s men who served as bait. Still inside the truck were Wingate’s men, armed with two Lewis machine guns. The Arabs, who considered the laborers easy prey, hurried to attack them, but were then cut down by fire from the guns hidden in the truck. Panic overtook the Arabs, who scattered in all directions, but then they fell into the ambushes Wingate had placed all along the intersections to the village.

The ruse of camouflaging the men as railroad workers was actually Dayan’s idea. Wingate’s appreciation and respect for Dayan was greatly enhanced following this operation. He identified in Dayan qualities he particularly appreciated, such as daring and creativity. As for the daring, Dayan had been one of the men disguised as a railroad worker, exposing him to considerable danger.[[61]](#footnote-68)

As noted, Wingate profoundly influenced Dayan, paving the way for organizing units specially trained for guerrilla and counterinsurgency warfare. Wingate also influenced Dayan regarding retaliatory acts. Even then, it was clear that it would not always be possible to prevent the next Arab attack. This was true of the dreadful massacre in Tiberias on October 2, 1938. While Wingate and his men were concentrated elsewhere because of misleading information, the Arabs managed to attack and kill 19 Jews in the city, 11 of them children. In response, Wingate carried out retaliatory operations in neighboring Arab villages. Dayan, too, initiated several retaliations: in one, he and his fellow fighters dressed as British soldiers, entered the heart of a village and detonated a bomb in the Mukhtar’s (village leader) house. Dayan would later initiate actions on his own without getting the prior approval from his Haganah superiors.[[62]](#footnote-69) In later years, Dayan would show understanding of subordinates who took local initiative and did not always ask for their commanders’ authorization.

In Palestine, Orde also initiated the Haganah’s Special Night Squads, earning him the nickname “The Friend.” Wingate spent only about two and a half years in Palestine, leaving in May 1939, but he left a strong imprint on the Jewish settlement in general and the Haganah in particular. As a military man, he was original, daring, and visionary. His methods of action and way of thinking about military matters served as an important foundation for constructing a Hebrew defense force, which would become the Israel Defense Force about a decade later. His military approach included collecting accurate intelligence before an operation, seizing the initiative, going on the offense, exploiting the advantage of night, using small, selected units, and shifting the fighting as rapidly as possible to enemy ground. These rules became fundamental components of the IDF’s early doctrine of warfare. This approach was radically different from the preceding approach of passive defense of the settlements. To this day, the IDF considers him one of the people who had the most influential on its doctrine and philosophy.

**In British Prison**

The period between October 1939 and June 1941 was crucial in shaping Dayan’s personality and worldview.[[63]](#footnote-70) During this time, he was imprisoned for illegal possession of arms and sentenced to a 10-year term. While in prison, Dayan and his fellow Haganah members experienced a dramatic role reversal: during the riots, he had been a member of a legal force that fought the Arab subversion. Now overnight, he and his comrades had themselves become a subversive force. The hunter had become the hunted. Dayan now experienced the same sense of persecution and need to hide that until then had been the enemy’s: the Arabs along with members of the splinter groups – Etzel and Lehi.

The background to all this was the outbreak of World War II in 1939. Although fought far from Mandatory Palestine, the war made its mark there too. The British had to focus on the tremendous challenge of winning the war and on May 19, 1939, they issued the White Paper, limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine and forbidding Jews from buying land from Arabs in many parts of the region. Enmity and suspicion replaced cooperation between the Haganah and the British security forces, as the British began arresting Haganah members for illegal arms possession.

As a result of these developments and based on the fear that the British would raid the training camp where illegal arms were kept, the Haganah moved its commanders’ courses from Jo’ara to Yavne’el, renaming the course a “Commanding Officers’ Course.” This was the first time an officers’ course was given in a large-scale format and it covered many subjects, including artillery, which until then had not been taught. The course was led by Dr. Raphael Lev, who had earlier served in the Austrian army. Among the first six course instructors, very carefully hand-picked by Dori, were the perennial rivals Dayan and Alon.[[64]](#footnote-71)

The courses in Yavne’el,[[65]](#footnote-72) developed gradually based on the Haganah’s original command course, are considered the first Haganah courses and were fully adapted to platoon commanders, like comparable courses in other advanced armies.[[66]](#footnote-73) The objective was not just to train officers for platoon commander positions, but also to cultivate the commanders’ independent thinking, stressing in-depth independent thought. The instructors encouraged students to acquire military education, gather information, plan, and seize the initiative.[[67]](#footnote-74)

Lev, a World War I veteran, incorporated materials customarily studied in regular armies, making an important impact on the students and instructors. However, the materials were not suited to the unique circumstances of the Land of Israel, and therefore it was critical to balance his approach with that of other instructors. Among other things, they stressed that warfare had no single established solution. “Every act is based on the situation; use your head, guys, your head,” exhorted Yosef Avidar.[[68]](#footnote-75) The instructors from Wingate’s Special Night Squads, with their combat experience, made a unique contribution to the course.

After the British inspected the course site in Yavne’el where illegal weapons were discovered, the Haganah decided not to take any risks and to move the course to Ein Hashofet. The students and commanders were divided into several groups. The main mission of the core group, commanded by Lev and Moshe Carmel, was to carry unlicensed weapons to Ein Hashofet on foot at night. Dayan among these 43 men, the group still known as the “Mem-Gimmel” (two Hebrew letters whose alphanumeric coding equals 43). En route, the group was discovered by a patrol of the Trans-Jordan Frontier Force and its members were arrested and sent to the British prison in Acre.

In Acre Prison, the detainees were interrogated and beaten, the British reminding their subjects that bearing illegal weapons was punishable by death. At first, Dayan – unlike the other detainees – cooperated with his interrogators, but when they continued to beat him, he threatened vengeance from his comrades on the outside. The beatings stopped. Dayan decided to provide certain innocuous information, such as their membership in the Haganah, while trying to explain to the British that the Haganah was not their enemy.

Dayan, used to the open vistas of the rural areas and fields of the Jezre’el Valley, found the experience of a narrow, locked cell difficult. In his diary, he wrote, “Our state of mind changed when the iron gates of the prison clanged shut behind us.”[[69]](#footnote-76)

The detainees became pawns between the British, who demanded that the Haganah fully relinquish their arms, and the Jewish Agency, that played the innocent, claiming that there was no such thing as a national armed organization like the Haganah. It was the detainees’ bad luck that the new British military leader in Palestine, Gen. Evelyn Hugh Barker, would later be revealed as a viral anti-Semite. The men’s trial lasted a few days, and British officers who had served with Dayan testified as character witnesses for him. However, the verdict was brutal: one life sentence and 10 years imprisonment for all the rest.

This was a harsh blow to the detainees’ morale. After the verdict, they were moved to an Ottoman-era prison that had undergone only minor repairs during the British Mandate, where they were held under severe restrictions. There, the group organized and elected its officers. Dayan, chosen to maintain external contact with the prison authorities, submitted the group members’ demands to them. His letters from that period show that he maintained his equanimity and did not sink into depression. He even managed to find some positive points in his situation, especially regarding relationships he formed with Arab gang members enduring the same fate as he. “Usually, life here is interesting,” he wrote, “and we celebrated and enjoyed the three days of the holiday (the Eid al-Fitr marking the end of the month of Ramadan). The Arabs’ attitude towards us is very good, even though most of them are gang members.”[[70]](#footnote-77) Close relationships even burgeoned between the Haganah members and the imprisoned Revisionists, their former nemesis[[71]](#footnote-78)

Unlike the other inmates, Dayan was indifferent to the prison’s physical conditions and food, attributing his steeliness to his mother’s character and how she had raised him.[[72]](#footnote-79) Nonetheless, after his release, Dayan worried about returning to prison, and for the duration of the British Mandate, he did everything possible not to be caught in a situation threatening possible imprisonment. There is no doubt that his stay there left its scars. He emerged a different man than the one who had entered.[[73]](#footnote-80)

**The Injury**

Dayan and his fellow fighters were released from prison because of another strategic global shift – the threat from Gen. Erwin Rommel, commander of the Afrika Korps, to Egypt and the Middle East, along with the Vichy regime’s seizure of control of Syria and Lebanon in early 1941. Now feeling besieged, the British felt that they needed the cooperation of Palestine’s Jews. This reversal led to the release of the Mem-Gimmel almost overnight after 18 months in prison.

In response to security events, the Haganah decided to establish a national force to be on high alert to defend the Yishuv. The first two companies were commanded by Sadeh.[[74]](#footnote-81) The men considered the most audacious and promising were appointed company commanders, including Dayan and Alon, who was promoted along with Dayan. The British approached the Haganah for scouts and sappers to help the British force invading Lebanon, under Vichy control. Dayan and some 30 of his men were sent together with an Australian force in Lebanon’s western sector. Most of the men were unfamiliar with the terrain and inexperienced in war. Some, in fact, had never even had basic weapons training.

Dayan crossed deep into territory held by the Vichy soldiers to scout it out. Because he was unfamiliar with it, Dayan recruited the help of Rashid Tahar, a former commander of an Arab gang during the Arab revolt. Despite the hesitations of those around him, Dayan decided it was possible to count on Tahar, a decision that proved itself in practice. These incursions –usually initiated by Dayan, not the British – produced several useful reports on the conditions of the terrain, axes, and location of the French forces.

About these incursions, Dayan wrote:

None of us knew Syria, the terrain where we were supposed to be the guides. Only one of us was highly proficient in Arabic,[[75]](#footnote-82) yet according to the plan, we were supposed to impersonate and act like Arabs. Among the guys were some who had had no experience ever shooting with live ammunition. Most had no experience operating a machine or sub-machine gun, we’d been given no maps, and within a few days, we had to get these people ready to function as scouts familiar with the terrain. As for the problem of trust – we overcame that with the help of two experienced commanders. Illegal weapons – those came from the Haganah’s storage. The most important question remained: knowing the terrain.[[76]](#footnote-83)

The British invasion of Vichy-controlled Lebanon began on June 8, 1942. The night before, Dayan entered enemy territory with a spearheading force of 16–10 Australians, five Israelis, and Tahar, their Arab guide. Their missions were to cut the communications line located near the coastal road and to block the road about 5 km north of the border. Both were successfully completed. The third mission was to seize control of two bridges next to Askendron village, which crossed the Lebanese coastal road.

The Israeli column was led by Dayan, Tahar, and Dayan’s friend Zalman Mart, a commander in the Notrim who would later be Dayan’s subordinate as battalion commander in the Jerusalem sector during the War of Independence.[[77]](#footnote-84) The force’s mission was to prevent the bridges from being demolished so that the invading British could use them. Arriving at the bridges, the men found that they were not rigged with explosives and all they had to do was to wait for the main British invading force. When that failed to arrive – due to a delay at the border crossings where the French had laid mines unknown to Dayan, Dayan and the Australian officers decided to advance southwards and situate themselves near the bridges in a building that served as a local police station, unaware that the building served as the forward headquarters of the French force.

The French identified the advancing force and a firefight erupted. According to testimonies, Dayan threw a grenade from a distance of about 25 m, stopping the machine gun on the building’s roof. Then he and Mart rushed ahead and captured the structure. Four French soldiers died in the battle and 10 or so surrendered. In Dayan’s force, one Australian died and several were wounded. Their main problem was that the unit was cut off and surrounded by the enemy and under enemy fire. Dayan organized the building’s defense and his fellow fighters operated the machine gun and mortar they seized from the French.[[78]](#footnote-85) While Dayan was observing events with binoculars he had taken from a French officer, a bullet hit the binocular lens, shattering his left eye. He lay there wounded for about six hours, never losing consciousness, but without the ability to see, only hear. Dayan was wounded at 7 AM; the British forces reached the building only at 1 PM. Dayan was evacuated by a British truck to Hadassah Hospital in Haifa. Before being taken in for treatment, he told Mart, “Never mind. I lived with two eyes for 26 years. It’s not so bad – one can live with just one eye too.” The story of Dayan’s injury was covered by the Hebrew press, lauding him as a hero. The Australian officers also expressed deep admiration for his functioning in battle.[[79]](#footnote-86)

In this action, Dayan’s future command qualities already came to the fore: courage, risking his life while seizing the lead, cool-headedness combined with an instinct for adventurism, a desire for audacious action, and improvisational abilities.[[80]](#footnote-87)

Dayan was optimistic and thought he would recover quickly, but his injury was actually quite severe. Dayan and Ruth moved in with Ruth’s parents in Jerusalem so that he could get daily treatment at Hadassah Hospital. He suffered intensely from embedded shards, causing him headaches. His arm, full of shrapnel, became partly paralyzed. Some of these medical issues plagued him throughout his life. Attempts to reconstruct the eye socket so that he could be fitted with a glass eye failed, and Dayan was forced to wear a patch, which would become his trademark.

Soon, all this began to cloud his mood. He wrote, “I didn’t think I’d be able to get back to military fitness, and sank into sad thoughts about the future – the life of cripple without a profession or financial foundation.”[[81]](#footnote-88)

Indeed, while his friends were rising through ranks and positions, Dayan felt that he was left behind because of his injury. Would he have joined the Palmach had he not been wounded? While the question remains open, it is doubtful that he would have found his place in the newly founded organization. The reason, according to Tevet, is that the Palmach reflected the ethos of the kibbutz movement, whereas Dayan was a “moshavnik,” the owner of an independent farm in Nahalal. Furthermore, his individualism was ill suited to the ideological conformity the Palmach demanded.[[82]](#footnote-89) Moreover, Alon, Dayan’s prominent and constant rival, was appointed the Palmach’s deputy commander and then its commander. It is unlikely the two would have found a place together at the top of so small an organization. Most Palmach members were from the kibbutz movement and were totally loyal to Alon. In fact, the only one who championed and supported Dayan was Sadeh.

**Intelligence, Negotiations, Party Politics, and Political-Security Issues**

Because of his injury, Dayan was sidelined from operational command activity, which is key in every military endeavor. However, what seemed at the time a disaster would later prove to be a blessing, as he acquired experience in areas that would serve him well in the future. First, he joined the Political Department of the Jewish Agency with the help of Reuven Shilo’ah, who was close to Ruth Dayan’s parents and knew Dayan from the time he had worked on behalf of the Mem-Gimmel in Acre Prison. The Jewish Agency then had contacts with British intelligence as it prepared for the possibility of a German conquest of Palestine. In the middle of 1941, Dayan proposed establishing an espionage network. the Moshe Dayan Network. The plan included building a network of radio stations to broadcast news about events in the conquered areas to the British. In September, a course was held for station operators, and Dayan set up six stations with the help of its graduates.[[83]](#footnote-90)

Dayan devised other ideas he proposed to the British: setting up an undercover department with Jews impersonating Arabs, and a German department with German-speaking Jews who would impersonate Germans if Mandatory Palestine was occupied by the Nazis. The British accepted the proposals but, in the end, it was left to the Palmach to execute them. The German department project was halted after the threat to Mandatory Palestine was removed following Rommel’s defeat at al-Alamein in the fall of 1942.

Before leaving Jerusalem to return to Nahalal, expecting to lead a quiet farmer’s life, Dayan got caught up in another adventure. On Haganah instructions, Dayan embarked on a trip to Baghdad in August 1942 as part of a convoy of British trucks driven by Jews from the Yishuv. Dayan was asked to smuggle suitcases full of weapons meant for the self-defense of the Jews of Baghdad who had, a year previously been the targets of the *Farhoud* – anti-Semitic riots against the Jewish community. To elude the British police, Dayan removed his eyepatch to avoid identification. He joined up with Enzo Sereni, the Jewish Agency’s emissary there, contacted the local Haganah activists, and delivered the weapons to them. On the way back, he smuggled in two Jews who had fled Poland, one of them David Azrieli, who would become a renowned architect, developer, designer, philanthropist, and major real estate tycoon.

For several years, Dayan lived with his family developing the farm he had bought in Nahalal. He also spent time with his children, his sons Udi and Assaf, born in 1942 and 1945, respectively, joining his eldest, Yael. However, because of the turbulent events of the time, he was again called on to undertake missions for the Haganah.

The Yishuv’s struggle against the British resumed in the summer of 1945, after the end of World War II. That fall, the Haganah started to coordinate its activities with Etzel and Lehi. The umbrella organization of the Jewish underground, the Rebel Movement, focused its activities on illegal immigration and attacking British targets. In October 1945, the Atlit detention camp was attacked; in November, the Palmach sabotaged trains and blew up British coast guard ships in the Gulf of Haifa; on June 17, 1946, the Palmach blew up 11 bridges linking Israel with its neighbors, thus cutting its land mass off temporarily. All these actions were led by Alon, who had since become the Palmach’s commander, as well as other colleagues of Dayan who participated.

Nonetheless, Dayan wasn’t completely forgotten by the Haganah command. On February 1, 1944, Menachem Begin, Etzel’s leader, declared a revolt against the British. This completely contravened the Jewish Agency’s policy of Yishuv cooperation with the British effort, including recruiting an independent Jewish regiment as part of the British Army (known as the Brigade, founded in July 1944). After two Lehi fighters killed Lord Moyne, the senior British representative to the Middle East, the Haganah leadership decided to eliminate these more radical organizations. A Haganah unit began actions against them named the Saison, French for “season” and an abbreviation for “saison de chasse” – hunting season. Dayan was recruited to the task by the Haganah, even though – or perhaps because – he had shown a positive attitude towards the Revisionists in Acre Prison and did not resent them for their ideology, as did many Palmach members.[[84]](#footnote-91) For obvious reasons, Dayan spoke little about his part in this affair, but we do know that he met and spoke with the leaders of the various organizations. Begin wrote in his memoirs: “Dayan spoke warm words of encouragement… [saying] that he respected our actions.”[[85]](#footnote-92) Dayan earned Begin’s trust and Begin never bore Dayan any ill will. Indeed, many years later, Begin appointed Dayan foreign minister in his government.

Dayan succeeded in establishing relations and building trust even with Lehi, a more militant organization than Etzel. One Lehi senior member who was held captive by the Palmach wrote to Dayan urging his presence at a meeting between Lehi and the Haganah: “You have already gained a reasonable degree of trust already … You do understand that one of the guarantees of success for any negotiations is that spirit of personal sacrifice that creates a background for deep mutual understanding.”[[86]](#footnote-93) This was Dayan’s first experience with negotiations between stubborn rivals and he soon proved his talent. Comparing Alon and Dayan’s approaches to these organizations, Tevet noted that Alon detested the path chosen by Etzel fighters and felt they caused considerable damage. But due to conscientious objections, he resigned his position as commander of the Saison. In contrast, Dayan did not hesitate to fulfill the mission entrusted to him, even though he felt no animosity towards the splinter organizations and even showed a certain amount of respect for their activities. In this, he hewed to Ben-Gurion’s approach that the best interests of *memlechtiut* – the state-in-formation (and, later, the state as an established democracy built on Zionist ideals) outweighed all else.

Over the next few years, the dominant factions of the Palmach – made up of kibbutz members and members of the United Labor Movement (a splinter of Mapai, the Workers’ Party of the Land of Israel, a democratic socialist party dominant in Israeli politics for many years) – kept Dayan at arm’s length from operational activity. A vacuum was created when the Labor Unity Movement, known as Faction 2, broke off from Mapai, and was filled by young people, including Dayan, who had already participated in the Young Turks forum, established by Israel Galili in 1939. That forum was designed for open debate of various issues in a free atmosphere, where the participants’ established ranks and hierarchies were of little importance. The forum discussed the establishment of a national General Staff and changes in the Haganah’s structure.[[87]](#footnote-94)

Dayan first became involved with party politics in the fall of 1944, focusing primarily on his own election, during which time he became acquainted with another young, ambitious politician, Shimon Persky, later known as Shimon Peres.[[88]](#footnote-95) In the winter of 1946, after being embroiled in the young party members’ struggle with its elders at the sixth Mapai convention held September 5, 1946, where Dayan was a delegate, he and Peres traveled to Basel as observers at the 22nd World Zionist Congress, the core issue of which was the struggle between the leaders of the Zionist movement: David Ben-Gurion and Haim Weizmann. This was both a personal struggle and a struggle over what path the country should take. Weizmann was conciliatory towards the British, while Ben-Gurion, already courting the Americans, was more combative toward the British and their policies. Dayan was more activist than even Ben-Gurion and demanded decisive action against the British – more action and less talk, especially on the question of illegal immigration of Jews to Palestine.[[89]](#footnote-96) Dayan got up to speak, declaring: “I don’t understand this argument, because this land is ours. And if someone tries to harm it, we will have to strike… This is a war.”[[90]](#footnote-97)

At the Zionist General Council meeting after the Congress, Ben-Gurion – having given the gloomy forecast that, almost certainly, an all-out war with the Arabs would begin very soon – declared that he was assuming the security portfolio on the Jewish Agency Executive Board. He also summoned Dori, who had resigned as the Haganah’s chief of staff, to Basel and convinced him to resume the position. Dori met with Dayan in Basel and told Dayan that he considered him one of the most senior leadership members who would lead the nation into the future and confront the enormous security challenges facing it.[[91]](#footnote-98)

However, in the first part of the War of Independence, which started in November 1947, Dayan found himself at the rank of a mere major whereas his cohort – Yigal Alon, Shimon Avidan, and Yigal Yadin – and even those younger than he, including Yitzhak Rabin, had much higher ranks. The fact that he had not been clearly identified with the IDF’s constituent groups – neither former British army and Jewish Brigades members nor Palmach members with their fealty to the kibbutz movement – came to haunt him. Dayan belonged to the group loyal to Ben-Gurion, but even there, he was not part of the inner circle.[[92]](#footnote-100) When the battles erupted, he made do with a staff position as an Arab affairs officer assigned to recruit agents to infiltrate the enemy’s ranks and bring back intelligence,[[93]](#footnote-101) a field in which he had experience. Nonetheless, this position ultimately had important, perhaps critical benefits for Dayan’s future.

Now, Dayan was in constant touch with Chief of Staff Dori, the head of the Haganah National Command Center, Israel Galili, and Ben-Gurion, who had assumed the security portfolio as of December 1946. On January 1, Ben-Gurion gathered the army and intelligence heads for a consultation on policy toward the Palestinian Arabs, a meeting to which Dayan was invited. He was appointed to a position on a small committee that consisted of the heads of intelligence and the Jewish Agency’s political department, whose function was to coordinate policy on the Arabs in the Land of Israel. Dayan consequently accumulated considerable experience working with the top political and security cadres and was able to view their concerns and actions from up close. No less importantly, he became a familiar figure and established his status. In particular, he built a relationship of mutual trust and respect with Ben-Gurion – the most important leader of the state-building years.

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations voted to end the British Mandate and partition the Land of Israel. Arab attacks against the Yishuv started the next day, opening the first part of the War of Independence (the second part began once statehood was declared on May 14, 1948, and the invasion of Arab nations the following day). This involved a brutal, uncompromising struggle over the control of the land at a time the British were still nominally in charge. The struggle was led by the Haganah, supported by Etzel and Lehi. The fighting consisted mostly of guerrilla and terrorist acts and military operations of limited scope designed to achieve control of the central cities, strategic roads, and the rural region. Until April 1948, the Yishuv had focused on defense, but at that point, it transitioned to an organized, widespread offensive. It completely vanquished the Arab-Palestinian side and stopped the invading Arab armies beginning in May 1948 and ending with the first ceasefire in June 1949, thus creating a territorial and demographic continuum of Jewish settlements.[[94]](#footnote-102)

On April 22, 1948, the Carmeli Brigade seized control of Haifa, and Ben-Gurion appointed Dayan to regulate abandoned Arab property. This was his first experience with a military government. Dayan ordered food and other goods moved to IDF storage to prevent looting, particularly wheat seeds that could have served the Jewish settlements. Some felt that this was a justified move given the damage the war had done to the settlements; others considered this act immoral.[[95]](#footnote-103)

At this time, Dayan suffered a severe personal loss. In April 1948, his younger brother, Zohar (Zorik), fell in battle in Ramat Yohanan against a Druze battalion fighting alongside the Arabs. Shortly thereafter, Giora Zaid[[96]](#footnote-104) conducted negotiations with the Druze to get them to switch their allegiance to the Israeli side. He worried about Dayan’s reactions, but when he raised the issue with him, Dayan almost instantaneously responded with support, a testament to his pragmatic nature. Zaid recalled that after broaching the topic with him, Dayan thought about it for a second and then said, “*Yallah* - let’s do it.”[[97]](#footnote-105) At a meeting with the Druze leader Ismail Kabalan, Giora Zaid, and Dayan in Kiryat Amal, Dayan displayed an extraordinary personal ability to influence his interlocutor. He succeeded in convincing Kabalan that there was no conflict between the Druze and the Jews, and, in any case, the Jews were going to win the war.[[98]](#footnote-106) This was the start of the alliance with the Druze in Israel, as a result of which they began serving in the IDF and in other state entities.

The state was established on May 14, 1948, and the IDF on May 26. Dayan was 32 years old. After the establishment of the state, Dayan’s position as Arab affairs officer lost all meaning. Although he wanted a combat position, he wasn’t offered one. A frustrated Dayan wrote of this period:

I wandered around underfoot. I had no work and I felt bad. I wanted to join one of the units. The emphasis then was on doing the war, not managing or planning it. I wanted to be in a fighting unit, and it didn’t matter to me if it was as a brigade or platoon commander.[[99]](#footnote-107)

**The Education of a Strategist: Summary**

The literature dealing with the characteristics of strategist leaders and their training points to several important dimensions of effective leadership.[[100]](#footnote-108) The first, charisma –meaning “the gift of God” – is innate. It is a talent, a personality-based ability to lead and affect people in various ways, which cannot be learned or simulated. Still, leaders should be equipped with knowledge and skills early in their development that can prepare them for diverse challenges, have professional knowledge of their fields of endeavor, and, at the same time, have extensive knowledge of world affairs. Leaders who experience and know the difficulties on the ground and the challenges simple soldiers in the trenches face have a clear advantage, because they know the practical significance of their fateful decisions on the people assigned to execute them. The optimal method of learning should combine academic studies with diverse practical experiences and trials. Personal mentoring by significant figures is key to the success of a strategist leader.

Dayan had all of this. All his experiences and life events were instructive because of his curiosity, ability to adapt to different situations, and unique capacity for holding complex, sometimes even contradictory opinions, and yet continue to function effectively.

He was only a child when he got to know Arabs and their culture and religion up close. He viewed them not as one monolithic enemy, but as a stubborn and diversified rival fighting for what was right in their eyes. He was involved in conflicts between herders and farmers, echoing the most ancient struggle since the dawn of human civilization; and despite the complexity of international diplomacy, he never forgot that the fight over land was the source of everything else. Beyond this, Dayan considered Arabs an inseparable part of the landscape. Just as he accepted the land’s sometimes brutal climate, he saw the Arabs – for good and for ill – as part of the package called the Land of Israel.

When incarcerated, Dayan developed some empathy toward the Arab side, which was using various means, including terrorism, to fight a foreign rule. He shared the prison space with Arabs and with Jews from the splinter groups, which were then considered beyond the pale by most Haganah personnel, and he developed a liking for both. While their goals differed from his, they shared the path of struggle and sacrifice. Later, these realizations would deeply affect him .

Dayan learned to handle weapons and fight at an early age. He was blessed with outstanding instructors and mentors who taught him guerrilla tactics but mostly leadership. Wingate and Sadeh were the most prominent, but there were others. Other Haganah commanders, including Lev and Dori, helped him along his path. Furthermore, Dayan received formal military education through the British army sergeants’ course and the Haganah’s platoon commanders’ course in Yavne’el, which taught him how a formal army conducts itself. He led ambushes and patrols and, until his injury, participated in many guerrilla actions in which he proved his cool-headedness. For Dayan, the shattered eye was a curse, as it ended his operational promotions. However, the curse came with its blessing, because as a result of the injury, Dayan gained different types of experiences, enabling him to develop the skills required of a leader at the strategic level. The first time Dayan conducted negotiations was when he represented the Mem-Gimmel before the Acre Prison authorities. After his injury, his negotiating skills were used when the Haganah reached out to the underground splinter groups – Etzel and Lehi. He also gained experience with the field of intelligence when he planned and set up an intelligence gathering network and trained its personnel.

Just as important was the political experience he gained due to the relationship with Ben-Gurion and various Mapai politicos. Finally, he gained experience with political and security issues when he participated in the Young Turks forum and conversed with senior personnel, including Haganah Chief of Staff Dori. The special relationship that started to form with Ben-Gurion paved Dayan’s future path. All of these constituted an excellent preparation for the challenges of the future and the key positions he would come to hold.

1. The Second Aliyah was the wave of immigration of Jews to Palestine between 1904 and 1914, when the Ottoman Empire still ruled. This immigration wave was ended by the outbreak of World War I. During the Second Aliyah, some 35,000 Jews, mostly from Eastern European countries came to the Land of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Tevet, 1971, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ibid, pp. 40–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Dayan, 1976, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, p. 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Tevet, 1971, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Naphtali Lau Lavie, *Moshe* *Dayan*, Valentine Mitchell, London, 1968, p. 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Tevet, 1971, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid, p. 99 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid, pp. 85–87. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, pp. 123–124. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Tevet, 1971, p. 51. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, pp. 51–52. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Tevet, 1971, p. 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Dayan, 1976, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid, p. 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Tevet, 1971, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Tevet, 1971, pp. 137–138. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Tevet, 1971, p. 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Dayan, 1976, p. 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Nowadays, the members of this tribe live in Zarzir near Nahalal and many of them serve in the armed forces. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Dayan, 1976, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Tevet, 1971, p. 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. Revisionists: the followers of Zeev Jabotinsky, the radical group supported the creation of a Jewish state in the entire area of the British Mandate, including Transjordan. They formed two splinter groups – Etzel and Lehi, called by the British the “Irgun” and Stern Gang” and considered terrorists. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. Ibid, p. 196. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. Ibid, p. 197. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. Ibid, p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Dayan, 1976, p. 52 [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Tevet, 1971, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. Ibid, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. Bar-On, 2014, p. 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Ibid, p. 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Ibid, p. 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Ibid, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Bar-On, 2014, 0. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
41. Bar-On, 2014, p. 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
42. Tevet, 1971, p. 157. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
43. Dayan, 1976, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
44. Dayan, 1976, p. 37. This is how psychologist and military historian Dixon described military rituals in his book. Cf.: Norman Dixon, *Hapsikhologiya shel hashmlumi’eliyut batsava* (*On the Psychology of the Military Incompetence*) (in Hebrew translation), Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 2003. Dixon claimed that these rituals become the military’s be-all and end-all , controlling it, and damaging the creativity and originality needed to confront new battlefield challenges. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
45. Yaakov Dori (1899–1973), the IDF’s first chief of staff. Having immigrated to Palestine with his family in 1906, he enlisted in the British army towards the end of World War I, serving in the Jewish Brigades. In 1939, he was appointed the Haganah’s chief of staff, and was responsible for preparing it for war in 1947. After the state’s establishment, he was appointed the IDF chief of staff, a position he held until 1949. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
46. Tevet, 1971, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
47. Ibid, p. 164. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
48. Yigal Sheffy, *Sikat mem-mem: Hamahshava hats’va’it bakursim l’k’tsinim bahaganah* (*The Platoon Commanders’ Pin: The Military Thought in the Officers’ Courses in the Haganah*) (Hebrew), Ministry of Defense Publishing, Tel Aviv, 1991, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
49. Bar-On, 2014, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
50. Sheffy, 1991, pp. 63–66. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
51. Yitzhak Sadeh (1890–1952), an IDF general, commander, strategist, educator and writer. He immigrated to Palestine in 1920 and cofounded the Yosef Trumpeldor Labor and Defense Battalion (colloquially known as Gdud Ha’avoda). Sadeh served in the Haganah and founded the Field Platoons and the Special Operations Units. In 1941, he founded the Palmach (Strike Forces), which he commanded until 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
52. Bar-On, 2014, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
53. Dayan, 1976, p. 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
54. Tevet, 1971, p. 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
55. Yigal Alon (1918–1980), Israeli military man and politician, commander of the Palmach, an IDF commander in the War of Independence, an MK, and an Israeli government minister. Alon and Dayan, two promising, native-born Israelis who followed a similar trajectory from the army to politics, long competed with one another, whether overtly or covertly. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
56. Tevet, 1971, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
57. Ibid, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
58. Tevet, 1971, p. 179. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
59. Wingate’s squad in Ein Harod consisted of 18 British men and 24 Jewish men, mostly from Hanita. Tevet, 1971, p. 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
60. Shlomi Shetrit, *Plagot halayla hameyuhadot (SNS) bamered ha’aravi: Me’afyenim shel hayehidot vetorat halehima shela bemivhan hape’ilut hatsva’it* (*The Special Night Squads (SNS) in the Arab Revolt: Features of the Units and Their Military Doctrine in the Test of Military Activity*) (Hebrew), MA thesis, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2013, p. 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
61. Tevet, 1971, p. 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
62. Bar-On, 2014, p. 44. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
63. Tevet, 1971, p. 175. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
64. Tevet, 1971, p. 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
65. Two courses were given twice. The second came to an earlier end than planned because of the arrest of the 43 men. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
66. Sheffy, 1991, pp. 75–76. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
67. Ibid, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
68. Ibid, p. 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
69. Dayan, 1976, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
70. Tevet, 1971, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
71. Ibid, p. 195. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
72. Ibid, p. 202. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
73. Naor, 2016, p. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
74. On May 15, 1941, two companies were set up under the command of Sadeh, following a decision to establish a national force to protect the Yishuv and to serve as reserves for cooperation with the British Army. This force was the core from which the Palmach developed, although it took on its name only later. Although he adopted its notable social and political features, this made it possible for Dayan to claim, for the sake of political struggles later on, that he never served in the Palmach. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
75. Dayan’s knowledge of the language was limited to basic conversational Arabic. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
76. Dayan, 1976, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
77. Bar-On, 2014, pp. 50–51. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
78. The Australians and the Israelis told somewhat different versions about who seized command of the unit, but there is no doubt that Dayan and Mart led the fighting and the rush. Tevet, 1971. p. 213. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
79. Bar-On, 2014, p. 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
80. Tevet, 1971, p. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
81. Dayan, 1976, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
82. Tevet, 1971, p. 227. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
83. Bar-On, 2014, p. 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
84. Tevet, 1971, p. 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
85. Menachem Begin, *Hamered: Zikhronotav shel mefaked ha’irgun hatsva’I haleumi be’erets yisrael* (*The Revolt: The Memoirs of the Commander of the National Military Organization in the Land of Israel*) (Hebrew), Ahi’asasf, Jerusalem, 1950, p. 391. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
86. Tevet, 1971, p. 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
87. Yehuda Harel, *Halohem: Hayav ve’alilotav shel Moshe Dayan* (*The Fighter: The Life and Times of Moshe Dayan*) (Hebrew), Moked, Tel Aviv, 1967, p. 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
88. Shimon Peres (1923–2016), politician and public figure who serves as MK, minister, prime minister, and president of the State of Israel. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
89. Tevet, 1971, p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
90. Tevet, 1971, p. 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
91. Ibid, p. 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
92. Bar-On, 2014, p. 61. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
93. Dayan recruited his agents primarily from the al-Mazarib tribe with whom he had grown up. At least one of them, Abd Abeidat, had been a gang member during the Arab Revolt. Tevet, 1971, p. 248. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
94. Benny Morris, *1948: Toldot hamilhama ha’aravit-yisraelit harishona* (*1948: The History of the First Arab-Israeli War*) (Hebrew), Am Oved, Tel Aviv, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
95. Tevet, 1971, p. 251. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
96. Giora Zaid (1914-2005), the son of Hashomer members Zipporah and Alexander Zaid. The father was murdered in 1938 by a Bedouin. Giora grew up surrounded by Bedouin neighbors, spoke fluent Arabic, and was closely familiar with the customs of the Arab world. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
97. Tevet, 1971, p. 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
98. “A Druze officer in Israel’s service: The story of Ismail Kabalan” (Hebrew), *Davar*, December 8, 1960. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
99. Tevet, 1971, p, 125. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
100. Yakov Ben Haim, “What Strategic Planners Need to Know,” *Workshop on Strategic Uncertainty in National Security Samuel Neaman Institute*, Technion Haifa, June 26, 2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)