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Image of Victory

The Last Letter

The newly released film "Image of Victory", is more than a tale about the fall of Nitzanim in 1948. For a more profound understanding, one needs to understand the circumstances of its making and the story of its producer, Ehud Bleiberg.

By Yadin Roman



The Last Letter

“Film producers are not usually the center of attention,” Ehud Bleiberg, the producer of the new Israeli film “Image of Victory,” told me on the last day of filming. The focus is on the director, the actors, the scenes. However, for a more profound, insightful understanding of the film, one needs to understand the circumstances of its making and the personal story of its producer. More than just a film, it is a private victory providing closure for an eight-decade festering trauma

By Yadin Roman

Facing page: Scenes from the movie “Image of Victory.”

Above: Joy Rieger as Mira Ben Ari.

Center: Amir Khoury as the Egyptian filmmaker.

Below: Yadin Gilman - on right - as Avraham Schwarzstein. (Amit Yasour. Courtesy United King Films and Bleiberg Entertainment)



The premiere of the movie "Image of Victory" was held on a rainy night. The first serious winter storm to hit the county. However, even with the spread of the Omicron variant, it was a full house. Ehud Bleiberg, the producer, gave the opening speech. He has an impressive thirty seven-year filmographic career with movie hits like "The Band's Visit" (2007) and "Iceman" (2012). Bleiberg thanked his co-producers, Dani and Roni Ben Ari, the various organizations that helped fund the project, the director, Avi Neshet, the actors, and the many people involved in the production. "I hope, father," Bleiberg added in a choked voice at the end of his speech, "that this movie manages to undo a little of the great injustice that you, and the members of Nitzanim, suffered during the War of Independence."

Bleiberg's father, Yerah, was born in the small town of Ostrowiec in southeastern Poland. Yerah's older brother, Moshe, was active in the new Zionist youth movement, "Hanoar Hazioni" (Zionist Youth). The movement was not socialistic like Hashomer Hatzair, not dogmatic like Beitar, nor religious, like Hamizrachi. It was holistic and pluralistic and attracted many youngsters from around the Jewish world.

Moshe immigrated to Palestine in 1935 together with the group that founded the first kibbutz of Hanoar Hazioni, Usha. Yerah was the family's youngest child. He studied in a heder and a yeshiva, as appropriate for a religious family from a small town in Poland. In October 1938, the 14-year-old Yerah made Aliyah to the Ben Shemen agricultural youth village, where he learned to be a dairy farmer. His roommate was Shimon Peres.

Four years later, on graduation, he joined a Noar Hazioni group waiting to establish a new kibbutz. In the meantime, the members lived in Kfar Shemaryahu, near Herzeliya, worked in the fields and orange groves, and prepared themselves for agricultural life.

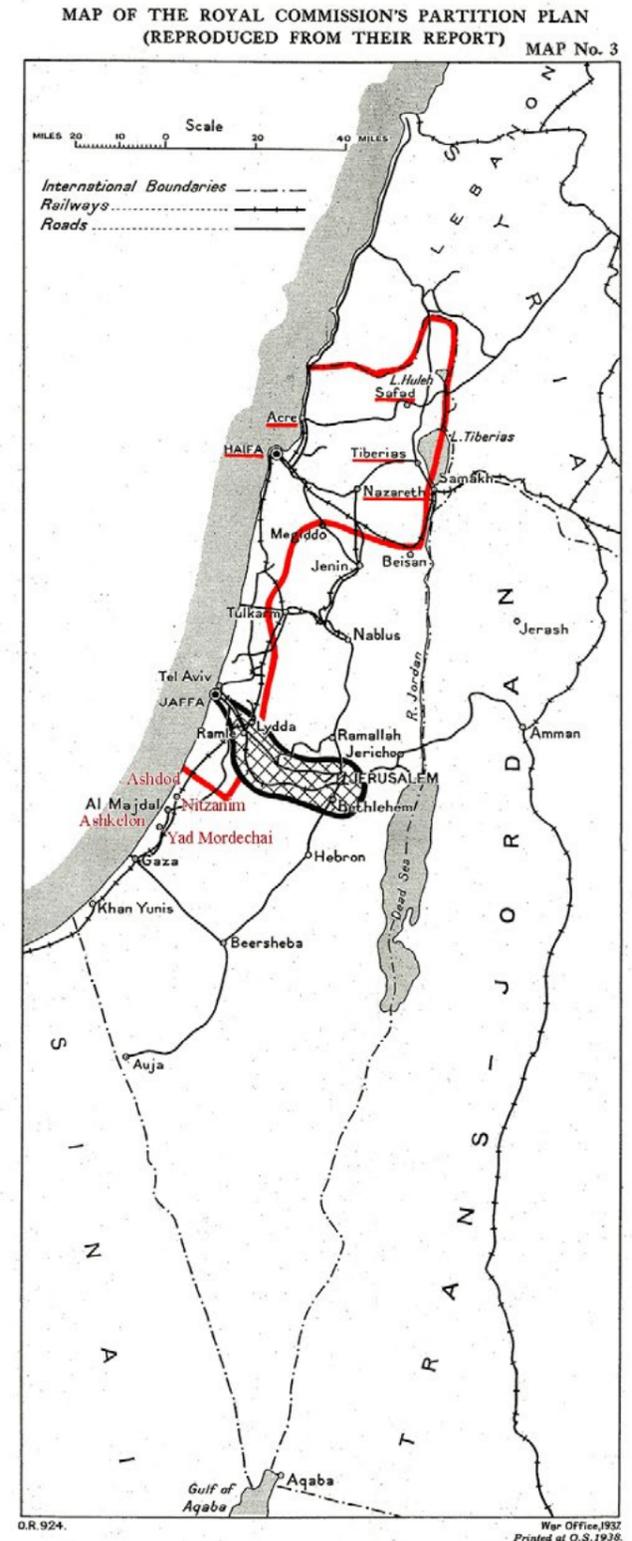
Nitzanim

In July 1937, the British Palestine Royal Commission, headed by Lord Peel, published its report on the future of the British Mandate in Palestine. The government had established the Commission to investigate the outbreak of the Arab Revolt in Palestine in 1936. The six members of the Commission, veterans of British colonial rule, met with representatives of the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine. In its final report, the Commission recommended partitioning Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. "The

"I hope, father," Bleiberg added, "that I have managed to undo a little of the great injustice that the members of Nitzanim suffered during the War of Independence."

Jews and Arabs in Palestine have separate national aspirations," stated the report, "Only after these aspirations are fulfilled will the Jews and Arabs be able to live together in peace." The Commission recommended that Jewish land purchasing be curtailed, defining this as one of the reasons for the outbreak of the revolt. The suggested Jewish state was based on areas with a significant Jewish presence.

The Jewish leadership, David Ben Gurion, Chaim Weizmann, and Moshe Sharett, favored the plan, as it included the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. The Jewish political left was against – advocating a two-nation solution. The right-wing, headed by Menahem Ussishkin, favored continued struggle. The religious Zionist parties rejected the plan as it involved giving up parts of biblical Israel. Finally, Chaim Weizmann and Ben-Gurion convinced the Zionist Congress



Below (clockwise from top left): Tom Avni as Yerah Bleiberg; Yerah Bleiberg at Nitzanim; Nitzanim 1948; Replica of "The Palace" on the movie set; The "Palace" 1948. (Roni Ben Ari, Bleiberg Family, Kibbutz Nitzanim Archive)



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to approve the Peel recommendations as a basis for future negotiation.

The partition plan spurred the Jewish settlement organizations to step up land purchase, especially in areas that could enlarge the future Jewish state. Most of these efforts focused on the sparsely settled Negev and the Southern Coastal Plain, an area dotted with Arab villages and two Arab towns, Ashdod (Isdud) and Ashkelon (Majdal). The southern coastal plain included two strips of relatively empty dunes, along the coast, to the north and south of Ashkelon. Scattered throughout the dunes were Arab farming estates.

In 1942 the Jewish National Fund managed to acquire one of these estates from Abed Rabu, the headman of the village of Hamama. The plot included an elegant two-story house on a hill and orchards and fields around the hill. The deal was finalized in the middle of the night, in cash, after which Abed Rabu fled the country.

The new purchase, a little south of Ashdod, was in the area allotted to the Arab state. It was offered to Yerah's Noar Hazioni group for their kibbutz. The group hesitated. They had three different offers for their settlement, but this one was near the sea and could be settled immediately. The group decided to take the offer and establish their kibbutz, Nitzanim, on the dunes in the southern coastal plain. The vanguard of the group arrived in December 1943, and the kibbutz was inaugurated in August 1945. At the same time Kibbutz Yad Mordechai was established on the coastal area south of Ashkelon.

The Road to War

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the proposal to partition Palestine into a Jewish and Arab state. The Haganah, the Jewish defense organization, was instructed by Ben Gurion to prepare for war and establish six fully mobilized brigades. The fifth brigade, the Givati Brigade, was commanded by Shimon Koch (Avidan). Givati was his clandestine underground name. Most of the brigade staff were members of the socialist Shomer Hazair movement. Unlike the other five regular brigades, Givati, like the Palmah battalions, had a "Political Commissar" called a Politruk, a term taken from the Soviet Army, in charge of morale. The posi-

tion was filled by Abba Kovner, a forty-year-old poet and writer, a veteran of the Ghetto Vilna uprising, who fought with Poland's partisans.

In March 1948, the brigade was commanded to organize the defenses of the southern front in preparation for an Egyptian invasion. In this framework, Yitzhak Pundak, the commander of the brigade's Battalion 53, sent a platoon to Nitzanim commanded by 22-year-old Avraham Schwarzstein, one of his most experienced commanders.

Schwarzstein quickly won the respect and cooperation of the kibbutz members and began to prepare the kibbutz for war.



The Haganah, the Jewish defense organization, was instructed by Ben Gurion to prepare for war and establish six fully mobilized brigades.

A ring of fortified positions and trenches was dug around the kibbutz perimeter, and the members were instructed in the use of weapons. Haganah headquarters (the Israel Defense Forces had not been created yet) assumed that the Egyptians would not try to advance along the coastal road to Tel Aviv but turn inland toward Jerusalem. However, as a precaution, on May 12, 1948, the bridge on the road near Ashdod was blown up.

The first attack on Nitzanim took place on Passover eve, April 20, 1948. Arab irregulars from

Facing page, Above: Mira Ben Ari and Dani Ben Ari (Courtesy Ben Ari Family)

Facing page, Below: Joy Reiger as Mira Ben Ari. (Iris Neshet. Courtesy United King Films and Bleiberg Entertainment)

Above: Lord Peel, head of the British Palestine Royal Commission, with the Arab delegates to the hearings (Wikimedia)

Right: King Farouk of Egypt (Wikimedia)
Facing Page: Scenes from "Image of Victory" (Vered Adir top and bottom, Amit Yasour center. Courtesy United King Films and Bleiberg Entertainment)



the nearby village of Hamama, led by Muslim Brotherhood volunteers, tried to overrun the kibbutz. Schwarzstein managed to repulse the attack. This success filled the members of Nitzanim with the feeling that they would be up to defend themselves. The more experienced Schwarzstein understood that without anti-tank weapons, additional ammunition, reinforcements, and artillery cover, Nitzanim would not be able to hold out against a regular army. Givati headquarters allotted him a Piat, a British-designed locally made anti-tank weapon and one additional machine gun. In the event of an attack, he was promised that reinforcements would be sent.

The Invasion

On May 13, 1948, the eve of Israel's Declaration of Independence, the Egyptian expeditionary force crossed the international border at Rafah and attacked Kibbutz Nirim and Kfar Darom, south-east of Gaza. The attacks were repulsed. Kibbutz Nirim held out until the end of the war. Kfar Darom held out until July 8, when the defenders slipped out of the kibbutz under cover of night.

Four days after the Egyptian invasion, Givati ordered the evacuation of women and children from the settlements along the coastal road to

Nothing is more difficult than a mother parting from her child. However, I am giving up my child so that he will grow up in a safe place, to become a free person in his new country.

Beer Toviya. Mira Ben Ari, the radio operator of Nitzanim, decided to stay. Her husband, Eliakim, the kibbutz truck driver, had left Nitzanim to drive convoys to besieged Jerusalem. Mira sent her three-year-old son, Dani, with the evacuees. In the pocket of his coat, she put a letter to Eliakim:

"I can only write a few words, and you will surely understand why I cannot write. It is difficult for me—even more than that. I have never felt like this before, but I will get over it. In these times, we must get over everything. Maybe our people need to endure now and not give up to receive what is rightfully ours after 2000 years. Nothing is more difficult than a mother parting from her child. However, I am giving up my child so that he will grow up in a safe place, to become a free person in his new country. Give him my love when he arrives. Kiss my mother and father, and ask them to forgive me...."

"Tel Dani that he had a mother," she told Yerah, who took Dani on his shoulders to the meeting with the evacuation detail, halfway to Beer Toviya

On May 16, Egyptian troops were spotted on the hills south of Yad Mordechai. Three days later, Yad Mordechai was attacked. The battle raged for six days, with the kibbutz repulsing wave after wave of attacks. Finally, out of ammunition and with many casualties, Yad Mordechai called for reinforcements. Givati sent eight armored vehicles to break into the kibbutz. Running into an Egyptian ambush on the way, five of the armored vehicles engaged the Egyptians, three managed to reach the kibbutz. The kibbutz radioed headquarters that they



▪ MAKING HISTORY



Above: Shimon Avidan, on left, commander of the Givati Brigade. (Wikipedia)

Center: King Farouk - with binoculars - after the conquest of Yad Mordechai, 1948. (Yad Vashem Photo Archive.)

Center: King Farouk and Ahmed Abdullah Al-Mwawi commander of the Egyptian forces at Nitzanim. (Creative Commons)

Below: Kibbutz Nitzanim during the 1948 war. (Moreshet, Battle of Nitzanim)

would have to evacuate if they did not get reinforcements and ammunition. Givati ordered them to stay. After waiting until three in the morning, without any reinforcements, the defenders of Yad Mordechai abandoned the kibbutz.

On noon, May 29, the Egyptian army entered Yad Mordechai. It was the first Egyptian victory of the war. King Farouk arrived to be photographed next to the bombed water tower.

Five days after the fall of Yad Mordechai, the lookout position at Nitzanim reported 500 Egyptian army vehicles driving north along the coastal road. The Egyptians advanced to the blown-up bridge near Ashdod and halted.

There are different versions of why the Egyptian army halted at the bridge, 32 kilometers from Tel Aviv. Examining the Egyptian narrative, one must consider that King Farouk's decision to send the army to Palestine was a complete surprise for the Egyptian leadership and military. The army's general staff explained that Egypt was not ready to undertake such a complex operation. It seems that limited objectives were set for the invasion force: to take control of the areas allotted to the Arab state. The official Israeli narrative claims that the attack of four Messerschmitt planes, just received by Israel, together with an artillery bombardment by the Givati Brigade, stopped the Egyptians. On June 2, the Givati Brigade launched an attack on the Egyptian force at the bridge. The attack was repulsed, and the brigade suffered significant casualties. Some of the wounded were evacuated to nearby kibbutz Nitzanim.

The Battle for Nitzanim

In the meantime, negotiations for a cease-fire were being held under the auspices of the United Nations, with each side jockeying for better positions. The Givati Brigade planned an attack on some of the positions held by the Egyptians east of the coastal road. Major General Ahmed Al-Mwawi, the commander of the Egyptian force at the bridge, set out to eliminate the threat to his rear by attacking Nitzanim.

Mwawi took several days to work out his plan of attack. It was to be carried out in three phases: breakthrough and taking of the water tank hill, then the dining hall hill, and finally taking the

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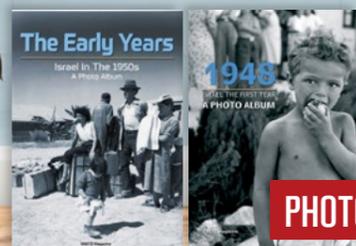
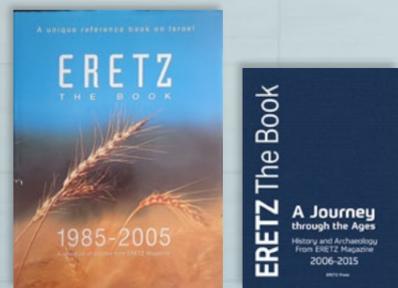


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On noon, May 29, the Egyptian army entered Yad Mordechai. It was the first Egyptian victory of the war. King Farouk arrived to be photographed next to the bombed water tower.



"Palace" as the house of the original landowner was called.

Schwarzstein organized the defenses of the kibbutz so that they would be able to stop an initial Egyptian attack. The kibbutz precinct lay between the "Palace" to the south, the water tank hill to the north, and the dining room on a small hill in the center. Between these three points, Schwarzstein built a perimeter of twenty positions connected with communication trenches.

At midnight on July 6-7, Mwawi began his attack with a massive artillery bombardment. At 6 am, as day broke, he added a close-range bombardment using anti-tank guns. All the buildings in the kibbutz were hit. Shortly after, an Egyptian infantry and armored vehicles tried to take the water tank hill but were repelled.

At 8 am, Mwawi sent in three waves of combat planes. Three hours later, at 11 am, the main thrust commenced. The defenders used the lone Piat in their possession against the tanks and forced them to retreat.

In the meantime, Mira Ben Ari tried to radio 53rd Battalion headquarters. At 10 am, she managed to get an SOS through before losing contact completely.

By noon the Egyptians managed to take the water tank hill and continued to the dining hall. The attack was met by two defenders armed with the Piat. They managed to hit the track of one of

Above: Abba Kovner briefing Haganah members at Kibbutz Yad Mordechai, May 17, 1948 (Israel National Photo Collection)

Below: Nitzanim, after the Egyptian conquest (Wikimedia)

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Clockwise from top left, on the movie set: Bringing refurbished tank to the set; Ehud Bleiberg and Dani Ben Ari; Dani Ben Ari truck creating sand dunes on set; Final touches - 2 photos; Avi Neshar and Dani Ben Ari (Roni Ben Ari. Courtesy Bleiberg Entertainment)

Facing Page, Above: Meshi Kleinstein and Eliana Tidhar as two kibbutz members from Argentina in "Image of Victory" (Vered Adir. Courtesy United King Films and Bleiberg Entertainment)

Facing Page, Below right: Elisha Banai as Eliakim Ben Ari (Roni Ben Ari. Courtesy Bleiberg Entertainment)

Facing Page, Below left: Ehud Bleiberg and Avi Neshar on finished set (Photo by Iris Neshar. Courtesy Ehud Bleiberg)



Mira Ben-Ari tried to help him. As she knelt over the wounded Schwarzstein, an Egyptian officer shot and killed him. Mira Ben-Ari, took out her revolver and shot the officer. She was killed on the spot.

the tanks on the second shot. The tanks halted, but the Piat broke down.

Schwarzstein formed a second line of defense around the dining hall but could not stop the Egyptian advance. At 2 p.m., Schwarzstein decided to regroup at the "Palace" and try to break out of the kibbutz through the citrus groves. The attempt met with heavy opposition and the defenders had to return to the "Palace."

As the fighting raged, Mira Ben Ari tried to radio battalion and brigade headquarters requesting reinforcements. She managed to send three telegrams but received no answer. Schwarzstein, wounded from the break-out attempt, decided to try and surrender and save the defenders from sure death. One of the defenders on the roof

stood up and waved a white flag. He was killed instantly. When this fails, Schwarzstein, carrying his bloodstained undershirt as a white flag, emerged from the "Palace" opposite the Egyptians. He was shot and wounded by the Egyptians. Mira Ben-Ari tried to help him. As she knelt over the wounded Schwarzstein, an Egyptian officer shot and killed him. Mira Ben-Ari, on the ground near the dead commander, took out her revolver and shot the officer. She was killed on the spot.

At 4 p.m., June 7, the 105 exhausted Israeli defenders, 26 injured, destroyed their remaining ammunition and equipment, and surrendered. They were marched in a "victory" parade through the streets of Majdal (Ashkelon) and transferred



Above: Scene from "Image of Victory" (Iris Neshet, Courtesy United King Films and Bleiberg Entertainment)

Below left: Ehud Bleiberg and Avi Neshet selfie on set after battle scene

Below right: Ehud Bleiberg and actors (Courtesy Ehud Bleiberg)

to Cairo. In all, 33 of the defenders of Nitzanim were killed in the battle—17 soldiers and 16 members of the kibbutz (of them three women).

Four days after the fall of Nitzanim, on June 11, the month-long truce negotiated by the United Nations came into effect. All fighting stopped for a month.

The Aftermath

The Givati brigade did not know of the fall of Nitzanim until the evening of May 7, when they heard it on Egyptian radio. The following day Abba Kovner, the culture officer of the brigade, published the first of his many "Battle Notes" that were circulated to the entire battalion.

"The Fall of Nitzanim is a Failure" was the title of the Battle Note.

"We do not have reliable reports," wrote Kovner, "and details that will allow us to pass judgment on the battle. We are not making an accusation but a presentation of things that we have to make clear at this time before we additional disasters in the coming days, or even the next few hours. Even if this is cruel and poignant, we have to say it now, the fall of Nitzanim is a failure. A dismal failure.

At Nitzanim, the enemy learned, for the first time, that our defenses could be broken in a few hours and the defenders taken prisoner.

The surrender of Nitzanim is a time for reckoning and soul searching – real soul searching. Our homes must be defended without pre-conditions... When, by fate, we will have to stand and fight, it is better to die in the trenches than to surrender to a murderous enemy.

Surrender, as long as there is breath in our body and a bullet in our gun, is a disgrace. To surrender is disgrace and death."

A week later, in a meeting with Ben Gurion, Avidan, the commander of the Givati Brigade, remarked: "that there was treacherous behavior of kibbutz members and soldiers in surrendering to

the enemy." The members of Nitzanim were marked as disgraceful traitors who had not fought to the death.

When Nitzanim was retaken, in October 1948, the bodies of the defenders were still lying on the ground. Many of the bodies had been mutilated. The bodies were collected and buried in a common grave.

When the defenders of Nitzanim returned to Israel, as part of the cease-fire arrangements after the war, they and their kibbutz were not given the medal of honor given to every settlement that had fought in the war, and all participants in the war.

The members demanded a committee of inquiry, claiming that Kovner had unrightfully accused them. The investigation was headed by Chief of Staff Ya'akov Dori, who sided with the defenders and wrote: the other two women were not found in nitzanim they were killed.



Neshet came up with a different angle. To show the battle also from the Egyptian side, through the eyes of a young Egyptian filmmaker.

The difficult circumstances of the battle, the bitter isolation, the lack of communication with the rear, lack of ammunition and food, and the high number of casualties in that defense bring honor to all those who fought bitterly there until the last bullet. What happened in Nitzanim also happened to other places, the defenders of which fought bravely to the last option.

In 1984 Pundak, who had commanded the 53rd battalion of the Givati Brigade responsible

Below, from left: Ehud Bleiberg, Roni Ben Ari, Avi Neshet, Dani Ben Ari. (Courtesy Bleiberg Entertainment)



Above: Yerah Bleiberg. (Courtesy Bleiberg Family)

for Nitzanim, came to the kibbutz to apologize. He realized that even though reinforcements could have been sent, or at least the Egyptian forces attacking the kibbutz bombarded, it was not done. Nitzanim was left to its fate, to fight alone. He asked to be buried at Nitzanim. Avidan, the brigade commander, came with him, vaguely talking about the battle and its aftermath.

Abba Kovner never apologized. He left the accusation hanging in the air, floating in the memories of the widows, the orphans, and the kibbutz members, passed on from generation to generation.

The Producer

When Yerah, Ehud Bleiberg's father, was released from the Egyptian prison, he did not return to Nitzanim but moved to the fledgling town of Beersheba. In 1950 he married Amira Davidov,

the first marriage in the new town. Ehud was born in February 1954.

"As a child, I never knew of the trauma of Nitzanim," Bleiberg said as we sat down to talk about the film. "Every year, my father took me to Memorial Day at the kibbutz. He showed me the Palace, the trenches, and the few remains of the kibbutz (in the 1990s, memorials to the women who fought at Nitzanim were erected on the site). But he never talked about the battle or its aftermath.

"Twenty years after the battle, I learned about the events from an article in a newspaper. I was shocked. Nitzanim stood alone, without reinforcements, and was ostracized because the kibbutz belonged to the Noar Hazioni movement and not the socialist Shomer Hatzair kibbutzim around it. The members of the Shomer Hatzair kibbutz of Yad Mordechai had been told to hold on and wait for reinforcements. But they retreated, abandoned their defenses. However, they went down in history as heroes. The members of Nitzanim, fought until the last bullet and did not abandon their kibbutz. However, they were from the Noar Hazioni, not members of the socialist establishment, and as such could be safely accused of not fighting to the death."

"Nehama, a good friend of my father, kept asking me to tell the story of Nitzanim as it should be told. As a film producer, I knew that the main interest must be on Mira Ben Ari. An extraordinary woman, a feminist before her time. She had been a member of the underground Stern Gang, sent on many secret missions after finishing a radio operator course. After joining the group, she married Eliakim, a Palmah member. A year later, she gave birth to her son Dani. She was barely 19.

"When the children and women of Nitzanim were evacuated, she stayed on—sending her three-year-old son away with a dramatic note in his pocket. "I am releasing Dani so that he will grow up as a free person," she wrote. She stayed on as the radio operator. When Schwarzstein tries to surrender and is shot by the Egyptians, she avenges his death and is killed.

"However, Dani Ben Ari's family was not ready to tell that story, afraid that this would damage Mira's heroic image. Eliakim never talked about what had taken place. My sister, Efrat Toussia-Cohen, devoted days of research to Nitzanim, and eventually, we managed to write a script.

However, I felt that it was lacking from a filmmaking point of view. Not a good enough script.

"I decided to approach Avi Neshet, one of Israel's most famous movie directors. He was of my generation who understood the era we were talking about. 'Do what I could not do,' I told him, 'write a script that works.' A few months later, Neshet's 17-year-old son was killed in a car accident. Two years passed until he could bring himself to return to filmmaking. However, the story of Nitzanim grabbed him. Young people fighting for their lives connected him to his son."

Neshet came up with a brilliant angle. To show the battle also from the Egyptian side. Through the eyes of a young Egyptian filmmaker, sent to the battlefield to report on the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood.

"When I received the new script, I was furious. Neshet had changed everything. The center of his plot was the budding relationship between Schwarzstein and Mira Ben Ari, and the Egyptian filmmaker's obsession with that fleeting moment when she avenges the death of Schwarzstein. I put the script aside for two days. I had read it as the son of Yerah and not as a producer. I had to disengage myself from my personal story.

"A week later, I reread the script. The new Egyptian angle, and the focus on Mira, was right. However, I had to persuade Dani Ben Ari, Mira's son. Dani's wife, Roni, was adamantly against it. I convened everyone at my home, Neshet, Dani, and Roni. Neshet was very persuasive. The members of Nitzanim are long gone, he said. The time has come to give Mira the freedom she deserves. She was an outstanding woman. That is what makes her interesting. Otherwise, all we have is a Jewish Agency propaganda film. If we don't make the movie now, it will never be made, I told them.

"Dani sat quietly for a while. He is an outstanding person. True and giving. He doesn't talk much. A man of deeds, with no ego. He agreed."

Filming

Filming was scheduled for May 2020. Neshet finished assembling the cast and crew, and a location was found, an abandoned ammunition base north of Beersheba that looked the part.

And then lock down was declared with regulations that made it possible to work only in isolated groups. Reorganizing we set a new date, September 6. In August, we began to build the

set, a nearly exact replica of the kibbutz. Dani Ben Ari's civil engineering company transported tons of sand to the site to recreate the dunes of Nitzanim, and restored 1948 vehicles and tanks to be used on the set. In the meantime some of the crew members came down with covid. Filming was postponed for another week – during which the virus turned into a pandemic.

"I will not allow a virus dictate if I make the movie," Bleiberg telephoned Neshet. "If we don't make it now, we will never make it. I am ready to take the risk, even without insurance against the virus".

On Thursday, September 10, everything was ready. On Sunday, September 13, Israel declared a general lock down. Rehearsals were stopped and the equipment returned to storage, for the second time. Two and a half weeks later, Bleiberg and Neshet went to Minister of Culture Hili Tropper and persuaded him to let them begin shooting on a set organized into 30-people capsules.

"We shot for 37 days, with 500 actor days, and over one thousand extras. One hundred fifty people a day on the set divided into groups of 30. The most expensive movie ever made in Israel.

"It is not easy to make period films," says Bleiberg, "even more so in Israel. But these movies bring to the public the heritage and history of their country. "Image of Victory" is about a group of young people, suddenly caught up in a dramatic time in history.

"Personally, the movie allowed me to connect to my father: his fears, thoughts, grief over his family that had died in the Holocaust. The epitaph on his grave in Beersheba reads: "Pioneer, straightforward, and a lover of people," which is what he was. I miss him every day. For the things we never talked about: His family, the war, his feelings on the unjust accusation. While researching the movie, we discovered letters in Yiddish he had written to his family in Poland. One of them was a letter to his niece, planning to make Aliyah. She died in the Holocaust. My son read the letter in front of his class when they visited Auschwitz." ■

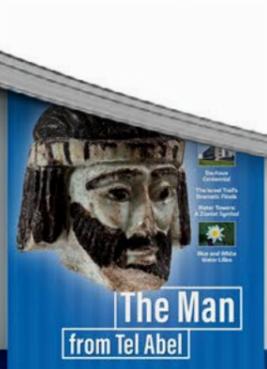
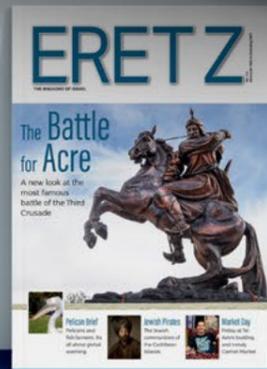
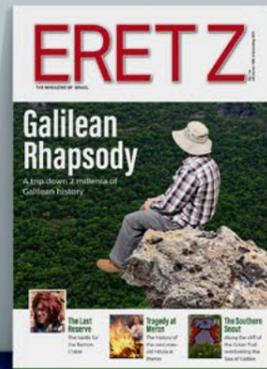
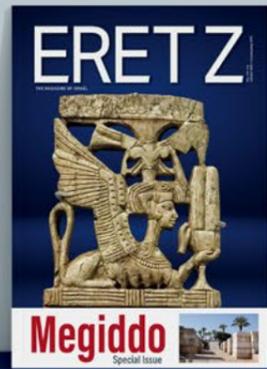
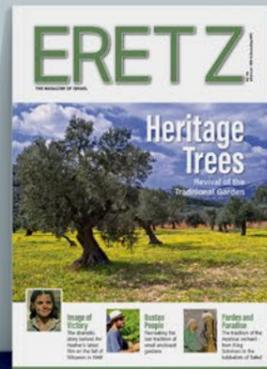
"The movie allowed me to connect to my father: his fears, thoughts, grief over his family that died in the Holocaust. I miss him every day."

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