

The Jewish Undergrounds *Haganah* Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question: What were the factors that influenced the Haganah's actions in respect to the British?

Materials:

- Haganah PowerPoint
- Haganah Video
- Copies of *Documents A, B, C, D, E, F.*

Plan of Instruction:

The PowerPoint, video and supporting documents reinforce lesson content through purposeful repetition and the gradual addition of new material.

1. Pass out Documents A, B, C, D, E, F.

2. Mini-lecture with PowerPoint:

- Slide: Haganah's Origins: *The Haganah – the word means “defense” – is created in early 1920. Originally it is hoped that the Jewish Legion, three regiments totaling 5,000 men that fought in the First World War, will serve as a protective force for the Jews in Eretz Israel. A hostile British military leadership puts an end to the Legion.*

Members of the Zionist Commission led by Chaim Weizmann, fearful of the danger of Arab violence, urge Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky, the founder of the Jewish Legion, to organize an underground defense organization. Jabotinsky is reluctant. While underground defense in places like Russia is understandable, he argues that in the Land of Israel Jews should be able to defend themselves openly. However, he agrees on the need for a defense organization and throws himself into the work of organizing one.

- Slide: 1920 Riots: *The Arabs riot in Jerusalem in April 1920. The Haganah successfully defends the newer parts of Jerusalem. However when it attempts to enter the Old City of Jerusalem it is blocked by British soldiers. Afterwards, the Jewish defenders are jailed by the anti-Zionist British military administration. Jabotinsky and his men are charged with weapons possession, and sentenced to long prison terms. These first Haganah members will be amnestied after a few months when the civilian administrator Herbert Samuel arrives in June 1920.*
- Slide: Haganah Restarts: *With Jabotinsky imprisoned, Achdut Ha’avoda, a Labor party led by David Ben-Gurion officially restarts the Haganah later that year.*

Although Jabotinsky is the first commander of the Haganah, he will not return to lead it. He devotes his energies to reestablishing the Jewish Legion. At a July 1921 Zionist meeting following additional riots in Jaffa in April, Jabotinsky says: “Do not place arms in the hands of Jewish adolescents who know no military discipline. Arms are only for adults who are under military command. A Jewish self-defense of 10,000 men will stir up the Arabs more than 2,000 Jewish soldiers would. The only way is to renew the Legion.”

Jabotinsky is opposed by David Ben-Gurion who is skeptical of a force, even a Jewish one, ultimately controlled by the British. He says at the same 1921 meeting: “I do not agree with Jabotinsky. He believes that only a Legion is able to protect us. I, however, am not certain of protection by a Legion – even if it were to consist only of Jews – so long as it is not under Jewish command, but that of an English General.”

Another argument for developing the Haganah is made by Eliyahu Golomb, who will lead the Haganah from 1920-1945. He writes to Jabotinsky in May 1921, the month of the Jaffa Riots, that a reconstituted Legion would take time to come into being. What is needed is “the immediate strengthening of our defense means.”

Soon the Histadrut, a trade union set up at the end of 1920, will take responsibility for the Haganah, and it will remain under civilian control, subsequently under control of the Jewish Agency.

- *Slide: 1929 Riots: Although the Haganah makes efforts to bolster its strength following the 1921 Riots, sending Eliyahu Golomb abroad to gather weapons between 1922-1924, the general feeling is that the Yishuv can rely on Britain for defense. When the 1929 riots break out, massacres occur in Hebron and Safed. Some Haganah officers break off in protest at the Haganah’s failure to provide an organized defense and create a second defense group, Haganah B, in 1931. It will eventually become the Irgun.*
- *Slide: Post-1929: The 1929 Riots bring about a change in thinking in the Labor leadership. Historian Howard Sachar writes: “It was evident now that training would have to include most of the able-bodied Jewish youth of Palestine. Newer and more modern weapons would have to be secured. Ben-Gurion and [Labor leader Chaim] Arlosoroff were determined, therefore, to give enlarged priority to Haganah activities, and in 1931 solicited the Zionist Congress for additional funds. Initially, the appeal*

failed, largely because the General Zionists in the Congress objected to giving Socialists a monopoly over the Yishuv's defense."

By 1936, however, the Zionist Congress itself is dominated by the Labor Zionists and the Haganah is receiving more funds, secretly gathering weapons, expanding its military training program and its membership.

- *Slide: 1936 Riots: In April 1936, Arab riots break out. Despite a more serious approach to defense, the Haganah and Zionist leadership are still not ready. Moshe Shertok, head of the Zionist Executive Political Department in Jerusalem admits: "In spite of our anxieties over a long period – what happened took us by surprise." Haganah leader Eliyahu Golomb confesses "the attempt to make trouble continued for a long time, but we treated it lightly."*

The Arabs learned in 1929 that the Jewish settlers would defend themselves when attacked in their farmsteads and try a new tactic in 1936, burning fields and crops and cutting down trees. Soon large swathes of the Jezreel Valley reflect the Arabs' new 'scorched earth' policy.

The History of the Haganah says: "The Haganah organization saw its primary duty in securing each position until the police arrived. The defense of the country as a whole, guarding of the fields, the forests and the roads were not part of the 'state of alert' of the Haganah. Nor, needless to say, did it envisage all-out war against attacking gangs. This exaggerated faith in the British administration weakened the alertness of the Yishuv. The heritage of the Hashomer organization, and of the Third Aliya, of fighting back, the spirit of independence in defense, had been weakened. With the advent of the new Arab tactics the defenders were out of their depth."

- *Slide: Havlagah: Jewish Agency chairman David Ben-Gurion decides on a policy of restraint, or in Hebrew, "Havlagah". Terrorists will be punished whenever possible but innocents will not be harmed. Ben-Gurion believes this policy will win British goodwill. He argues that violence will only help the Arabs, but not the Jews. He says: "What we wish to achieve requires the help of the British; what the Arabs wish to achieve requires war on Great Britain." At a meeting, Ben-Gurion says: "Our instruments of war differ," even describing self-restraint as "front-line weaponry."*

A moral argument for Havlagah also develops. Labor leader Berl Katznelson says: "Havlagah means our weapons will be pure. We resist those who come to attack us, but we do not want our weapons to be stained with the blood of innocents." This idea is also important to Ben-Gurion, who says, "We are not Arabs, and others measure us by a

different standard, which doesn't allow so much as a hairsbreadth of deviation."

But Ben-Gurion's policy draws criticism. Historian Shabtai Tevet writes, "His opponents' claim that the Arabs would interpret the policy as weakness and be encouraged to escalate the terror fell on receptive ears..." Bolstering the argument of those who are against Havlagah is the fact that rioting appears to gain political dividends for the Arabs.

Ben-Gurion sometimes has to restrain his own Haganah commanders. After one Arab attack on a Jerusalem cinema, a Haganah officer comes to his office demanding revenge. When Ben-Gurion says no, the commander tells him that his men won't listen to him and Ben-Gurion will have to tell them himself. When the junior officers come, they say the rank-and-file wouldn't listen to them. Ben-Gurion has to repeat his orders to maintain discipline yet a third time. Ben-Gurion finds "havlagah" difficult to digest himself. He writes in his diary in July 1936:

"I have never felt hatred for Arabs, and their pranks have never stirred the desire for revenge in me. But I would welcome the destruction of Jaffa, port and city. This city, which grew fat from Jewish immigration and settlement, deserves to be destroyed for having waved an ax at those who built it and made it prosper."

- Slide: Nodedet: *Havlagah clearly has its limits. In mid-1936, as the intensity of the fighting mounts, the policy of Havlagah is modified when Haganah field commander Yitzhak Sadeh together with Eliyahu Cohen organize Nodedet, or "Wandering Troop," which uses ambushes and mobile patrols to target Arabs in their bases and villages. Nodedet marks the first break from passive defense for the Haganah.*

With Arab riots gaining in intensity and isolated Jewish farm settlements vulnerable to attack, the Jews demand the right to acquire additional weaponry and equipment. The British, hard-pressed for manpower, agree and distribute light arms.

- Slide: Special Night Squads: *In 1936, a British captain named Orde Wingate arrives in Palestine. Because he is fluent in Arabic, his British superiors assume he is friendly to Arabs but influenced by his fundamentalist Christian upbringing, Wingate quickly becomes an ardent Zionist. He says to a Jewish friend: "I count it my privilege to help you to fight your battle. To that purpose I want to devote my life. I believe that the very existence of mankind is justified when it is based on the moral foundation of the Bible."*

Wingate wins permission to set up special assault units of Jewish commandos led by British officers. These are known as the Special Night Squads.

Operating at night they target the Arabs in their hideouts and even cross the border into Syria and Lebanon to attack guerrilla bases. The Special Night Squads inflict heavy casualties and keep the Arabs off balance. Yitzhak Sadeh says: "Eventually we would have done by ourselves what Wingate did, but we would have done it on a smaller scale, and without his talent. We were following parallel paths until he came and became our leader."

Wingate becomes an embarrassment to the anti-Zionist British military, who send him back to England.

- *Slide: British Target Haganah: When the Arab Revolt is finally put down in 1939, the British arrest 43 of the Haganah's best men who had only recently served under Wingate. This pattern – British cooperation followed by British hostility – is one that repeats itself. It highlights a problem with Ben-Gurion's policy aimed at winning British goodwill. The British only welcome Jewish support temporarily, when it suits their needs.*
- *Slide: British Welcome Haganah: The British again ease their policy when World War II breaks out, inviting Haganah officers to join the British in their war against the Axis. One of these men, Moshe Dayan, will lose an eye fighting against Vichy French forces in Lebanon.*
- *Slide: Palmach: When General Erwin Rommel cuts his way through North Africa toward Egypt, the British fear he will overrun Palestine. In May 1941, Yitzhak Sadeh and the Haganah negotiate with the British to establish the Palmach (Plugot Machaz, or 'Strike Companies'). The Palmach will, if the Nazis invade, defend Jewish towns from Arab attackers and engage in guerrilla operations against the Nazi forces. Although the Nazis never reach Palestine, the Palmach will assist the Allies in their invasion of Syria, controlled by Vichy France.*
- *Slide: Alliance Ends: Once the danger of a Rommel invasion passes in 1942, the British again reverse themselves. Historian Howard Sachar writes: "The alliance finally ended in bad blood when the British army appropriated the weapons it had distributed earlier to the Palmach. Whereupon Palmach units broke into a government arsenal several days later and reclaimed the guns. The British in turn relegated the Haganah to its former illegal status." The British raid Jewish settlements in search of*

hidden Haganah arms. After a particularly brutal raid in 1943 on Kibbutz Ramat Hakovesh, 22 settlers are hospitalized and one dies.

- *Slide: Zionists Remain Hopeful: Despite the setbacks, the Zionist leadership is hopeful that British policy will change. When, in February 1944, Menachem Begin leads his Irgun in a revolt against the British, the Haganah asks him to call it off. Shmuel Katz writes: “The leader of the Haganah, Eliahu Golomb, accompanied by his deputy Moshe Sneh, met Begin to persuade him that he was wrong in his reading of the political situation, that in fact British policy would change after the war, that British public figures had actually so promised.” Golomb and Sneh threaten to eliminate the Irgun if Begin fails to comply.*
- *Slide: The Season: The Haganah’s threat isn’t an idle one. From November 1944 to the Spring of 1945, the Haganah, at the request of David Ben-Gurion, engages in a campaign called the “Season” in which it hunts down Irgun members and hands them over to the British, who deport many of them to detention camps in Africa. In some cases the Haganah tortures Irgun members. But the campaign is unpopular with Haganah’s rank-and-file, and the campaign is abandoned.*
- *Slide: United Hebrew Resistance: The Haganah soon makes a major reversal, joining the Irgun and the smaller Lehi in their war against the British. The catalyst is the shock and disappointment that follows the British Labor Party’s hostility to Zionism after its election victory in 1945. Ben-Gurion and other Zionist leaders had counted on the new government to show a friendly face toward Zionism. Realizing that their political calculations had been wrong and faced with the possibility of large defections of Haganah members to the Irgun, they decide they have no choice but to join the Revolt.*

The name of the joint effort is Tenuat Ha’Meri Haivri, or Hebrew Resistance Movement. The Irgun and Lehi are only too happy to have the large organization join their attacks and gives it the leadership of the revolt. In October 1945, the Movement carries out its first attack when Palmach commanders free Jewish immigrants at a detention facility near Haifa. All three groups will carry out attacks, cutting railroads, blowing up bridges, oil refineries, police boats and other targets.

- *Slide: Black Sabbath: On June 29, 1946, the British strike back in Operation Agatha, also known as Black Sabbath. Seventeen thousand British soldiers sweep through the Yishuv and arrest many Jewish leaders. The British also capture a large arms dump at Kibbutz Yagur, delivering a major blow to the Haganah’s preparations for independence. Ben-Gurion,*

who is in Paris at the time, escapes arrest, but he fears that the British won't stop until they've dismantled all the Jewish institutions in Palestine.

- Slide: Haganah Withdraws: *The Haganah withdraws from the United Resistance Movement in August 1946. The immediate cause is the King David Hotel bombing by the Irgun which results in an unexpectedly large loss of life. Haganah chief Moshe Sneh initially gives the go-ahead to this operation though he asks for delays. When Sneh asks Irgun head Menachem Begin to delay it once more, Begin ignores the Haganah commander and goes ahead with the operation. Although the Irgun issues several warnings to the British to evacuate the hotel, they are ignored. Ninety-one people are killed and scores more wounded. The Haganah denies responsibility and withdraws from Tenuat Hameri the next month.*
- Slide: Waiting and Preparing: *Although the Haganah, with 25,000 to 35,000 members, is the largest of the underground organizations, it has seen the least action in the struggle for independence. It has collected weapons. It has even built a secret factory for making bullets. But the lack of action takes its toll on morale. One Palmach member writes: "The emptiness of the passing days makes you forget the central purpose and goal. Your feelings are choked by idleness so real you can touch it."*
- Slide: Haganah's Time Comes: *But the Haganah's hour will come after the UN votes to partition Palestine in November 1947. At first Arab guerrilla forces attack, targeting settlements and communications. It falls to the Haganah to defend the soon-to-be state. And its soldiers will make up the core of Israel's army in May 1948 when, the new state declared, five Arab armies invade.*

3. Play video: Haganah

Introduce inquiry question: What were the factors that influenced the Haganah's actions in respect to the British?

4. Whole class discussion:

- What were the pros and cons of havlagah?
- The Yishuv leadership hoped and expected a change in British policy after the war. Was this a realistic hope and what grounds did they have for it?
- During the period leading up to a state, the Haganah spent most of its time preparing for future conflict. Do you think this was the right policy or should they have done more to fight the British?

5. Hand out Review Questions (may be used as end of class Quiz).

**Document A: “History of the Haganah”, Shaul Avigur
(1963)**

The Haganah organization saw its primary duty in securing each position until the police arrived. The defense of the country as a whole, guarding of the fields, the forests and the roads were not part of the “state of alert” of the Haganah. Nor, needless to say, did it envisage all-out war against attacking gangs. This exaggerated faith in the British administration weakened the alertness of the Yishuv. The heritage of the Hashomer organization, and of the Third Aliya, of fighting back, the spirit of independence in defense, had been weakened. With the advent of the new Arab tactics the defenders were out of their depth.

Source: As Quoted in: Lone Wolf: A Biography of Vladimir “Ze’ev” Jabotinsky Vol. 2, Shmuel Katz, Barricade Books, New York, 1996, p. 1487.

Document B: “Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948,” Shabtai Teveth (1987)

The funeral in Tel Aviv of one of the Jewish victims, at which mourners injured Arab passersby, provided [Ben-Gurion] with a national audience on whom to impress his method of extracting gain from disaster, which he soon termed “the weapon of self-restraint” – avoidance of Jewish reprisal for Arab attacks. The Jews would limit themselves to self-defense and, as much as possible, to punishing the terrorists; under no circumstance would they harm innocents.

At a Jerusalem gathering on April 19 [1936] he had stated “I understand and empathize with all the bitterness voiced here ... but owing to the very gravity of the situation we must maintain clarity of thought as well as the moral and political principles which guide Zionism and the Yishuv. ... If attacked we must not exceed the bounds of self-defense. ... We must monitor ourselves so that we do not become the cause of a flare-up.” He made it clear that the point of “self-restraint” was to avoid provocation and escalation. “I fear that those who today murdered our people in an ambush not only plotted to murder some Jews, but intended to provoke us, to push us into acting as they have, and turning the country red with blood. The Arabs stand to gain from such a development. They want the country to be in a state of perpetual pogrom.” ...

Four weeks later, on May 15, Ben-Gurion had appealed to the JAE [Jewish Agency Executive] to guide the Yishuv in general and the Haganah in particular in keeping to this line of response, which formulated an official and obligatory stance. “We must do all that is necessary so that the public will know to restrain itself in the future as well and not exceed the boundaries of self-restraint, else we suffer a catastrophe.” At the same meeting he coined an axiom of sorts. “Any additional bloodshed [caused by Jews] will only bring the Arabs political benefit and hurt us.”

The support of his JAE colleagues was not enough, and it was no easy task to convince the public and his own party to stop at self-defense when spilled blood cried for vengeance. Ben-Gurion had to call on his best powers of persuasion. He explained, with cool logic,

that the Arabs could achieve their goals “only through revolt and rebellion,” while for the Jews, the opposite was true. Revolt and terror would not encourage Britain “to assist in bringing the Jewish people to Palestine and turning it into a Jewish country.” Jewish counterterror would only feed the flames that would destroy the Zionist enterprise. “What we wish to achieve requires the help of the British; what the Arabs wish to achieve requires war on Great Britain.” The conclusion: different ends dictate different means. “Our instruments of war differ,” he said at a public meeting in Tel Aviv, describing self-restraint alongside striving for dialogue and negotiations with the Arabs as “front-line weaponry.”

But no less important to Ben-Gurion than the political benefits was the image of the Yishuv’s moral integrity, which soon came to be described by the phrase “purity of arms.” ... At a plenary session of the National Council he said that a double standard was at work. “We are not Arabs, and others measure us by a different standard, which doesn’t allow so much as a hairsbreadth of deviation. ... Our strength is in defense ... and this strength will give us a political victory if England and the world know that we are defending ourselves rather than attacking.”

If this line met with resistance, the name he gave it – self-restraint – drew such violent criticism that Ben-Gurion was afraid the policy itself would be rejected. In 1938, when Arab terror was renewed with redoubled force and the controversy reached its peak, he conceded to the Haganah, the Yishuv, and the entire Zionist movement that self-restraint was “a stupid name” and instead proposed self-defense, for “we only defend ourselves and do not take revenge.” But this had no effect, and in fact the label self-restraint stuck. His opponents’ claim that the Arabs would interpret the policy as weakness and be encouraged to escalate the terror fell on receptive ears, as did their argument that a generation of valiant fighters could not be brought up on self-restraint or self-defense. Even those who accepted the moral imperative of not harming innocents feared that Britain would yield to the more aggressive side in the conflict and felt that the Haganah should emulate the Arabs.

Source: Ben-Gurion The Burning Ground 1886-1948, Shabtai Teveth, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston 1987, p. 548-550.

**Document C: “A History of Israel”, Howard Sachar
(1976)**

Arriving in 1936 as an intelligence officer in the Fifth Division, Wingate was a cousin of the governor-general of the Sudan and was seconded to Palestine because of his fluency in Arabic and his presumed rapport with the Arab community. The authorities had not been aware of Wingate’s deeply rooted Protestant millennialism. Within weeks of his arrival in the country, however, it was this biblical mysticism that transformed the young captain into a passionate adherent of the Zionist cause. ...

In studying Arab tactics, Wingate noted the manner in which the guerrillas would strike and escape from heavily armed government columns. He was determined to retaliate by developing fast patrols and placing emphasis on night operations. ... Throughout 1938, during their scores of forays and ambushes, the Jewish Special Night Squads inflicted heavy casualties on the Mufti’s rebels and kept them off balance and increasingly ineffective.

Despite these not unimpressive achievements, the Special Night Squads were sharply reduced early in 1939 and gradually assigned a minor role. Political factors by then militated against British cooperation with the Jewish defense units. Wingate himself was considered expendable; his pro-Zionist views were becoming an embarrassment to the government. Eventually, in the spring of 1939, he was sent back to England. His superiors wrote in his file: “A good soldier but a poor security risk. Not to be trusted. The interests of the Jews are more important to him than those of his own country. He must not be allowed to return to Palestine.”

Source: A History of Israel From The Rise of Zionism to Our Time, Howard Sachar, Alfred A. Knopf, 3rd ed., New York, 2007 (originally published 1976), p. 215-216.

**Document D: “A History of Israel”, Howard Sachar
(1976)**

Once the military situation turned against Britain, however, following the blitzkrieg of 1940, the government tentatively eased its policy toward the Haganah. Indeed, with France out of the war and Syria in Vichy hands, a method had to be devised to block possible avenues of German invasion into the Middle East. Senior Haganah officers thereupon were invited to collaborate with the British in preparing lists of bridges and tunnels that were vulnerable to sabotage in Lebanon, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. ... The need soon became evident for a permanently mobilized Jewish task force. Such a unit accordingly was established by the Haganah in May 1941, and classified as the Palmach (Plugot Machaz – Strike Companies). ...

Once the danger to Palestine ebbed in the autumn of 1942, therefore, the British closed the various Palmach training bases ... and even demanded lists containing names and addresses of Palmach members. The alliance finally ended in bad blood when the British army appropriated the weapons it had distributed earlier to the Palmach. Whereupon Palmach units broke into a government arsenal several days later and reclaimed the guns. The British in turn relegated the Haganah to its former illegal status.

Source: A History of Israel From The Rise of Zionism to Our Time, Howard Sachar, Alfred A. Knopf, 3rd ed., New York, 2007 (originally published 1976), p. 233-235.

**Document E: “Terror Out of Zion” J. Bowyer Bell
(1977)**

On August 25 [1945] the Colonial Office informed [Chaim] Weizmann that the immigrant quota of 1,500 would not be increased. Weizmann’s Anglo-centric policy was devastated. In Palestine the hopes had been so high that this disappointment, which most accepted as a foretaste of worse, embittered all but the most unswerving Anglophiles.

The Jewish Agency had to reconsider future prospects. [Foreign Minister] Bevin seemed immune to persuasion. Increasingly, the militants within the Haganah urged a policy of pressure, a demonstration to Bevin and the British that they could not continue to ignore Zionist demands. More distressing, there began to be leakage from the Haganah. *Herut* noted that twenty-five Palmach men had resigned to come over to the Irgun. August saw the intensification of Begin’s revolt and the renewed plea by leftist newspapers to purge the dissidents. Purges and a renewed Season simply were not in the cards, rather the reverse. A truce with the Irgun was arranged, and Agency spokesmen suggested an amalgamation with the Haganah and a campaign to pressure the British into concessions. Such an agreement for the Jewish Agency would, at one stroke remove a potential political rival, absorb a dissident military force, and end any further independent underground operations. The Irgun was not necessarily adverse to the closest possible cooperation with the Agency. Begin had already offered in 1944 to operate under Ben-Gurion. Grave doubts remained, however, about the timidity of Ben-Gurion’s colleagues. Once absorbed and dispersed, the Irgun would be in no position to renew the revolt if the Jewish Agency and the Haganah lost their nerve or revised their strategy. There would in fact be no Irgun. The Irgun suggested instead a single strategic command of a united resistance that would in effect give the Agency a veto through the Haganah representative over all operations except arms raids. LEHI, somewhat more sympathetic to amalgamation, also accepted the idea of a united command. The result was Tenuat Hameri, the united resistance movement.

Source: Terror Out of Zion, J. Bowyer Bell, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 1977, p. 142.

**Document F: “Anonymous Soldiers,” Bruce Hoffman
(2015)**

[On June 29, 1946] Starting at about 3:45 a.m., teams of Sixth Airborne signals officers and their men, escorted by detachments of the Glider Pilot Regiment, began to fan out across the country to take control of the main telephone exchanges. Less than ninety minutes later Palestine was completely without telephone service, the lines manned by British troops with their civilian operators kept under close guard. Search parties now converged simultaneously on the Jewish Agency headquarters in Jerusalem and its offices in Tel Aviv as well as those of the Histadrut, the Loan and Savings Bank, the WIZO (Women’s International Zionist Organization), and the command centers of the Haganah and the Palmach. Twenty rural settlements were also raided, and curfews were declared in the country’s three major cities and in four additional districts as well.

Meanwhile, an assortment of Zionist leaders found themselves abruptly awakened by loud pounding on their front doors. Awaiting them were soldiers and police who placed the bleary-eyed leaders under arrest and removed them to specially prepared detention facilities at the Latrun and Athlit camps. The dragnet indiscriminately swept up hard-liners and moderates. Some detainees cooperated and went quietly, while others had to be forcibly subdued. One officer, for instance, reported being offered a brandy and soda while waiting for the leader he was assigned to apprehend to dress and pack a bag. Soldiers had to resort to fisticuffs, however, to manhandle the seventy-year-old rabbi Yehuda Fishman into the car waiting to transport him to Latrun after his offer to walk to a nearby police station rather than violate the Sabbath by riding in a vehicle was rejected by the officer in charge of his arrest detail.

By the time the operation concluded on July 1, some seventeen thousand troops and police had taken 2,718 Jews into custody, including 56 women. Among them were 4 members of the Jewish Agency Executive, 7 Haganah officers, and nearly half of the Palmach’s fighters. The search teams carted away an estimated nine tons of documents from the various Jewish institutions that had been raided. Over the three preceding days, a total of twenty-seven settlements had also been searched, from which more than three

hundred rifles, 425,000 rounds of ammunition, eight thousand hand grenades, fifty-two hundred mortar bombs, and a panoply of explosives were seized.

The army hailed the operation as a success. "Palestine is a wasps nest. We dug it up on Saturday and captured a good many wasps," Dempsey told Montgomery. "The remainder are now buzzing about angry and bewildered." ... That Agatha achieved its objective of surprise was indisputable. Despite the leaked planning document, the Haganah's otherwise highly efficient intelligence service and its effective penetration of the British government and military establishment in Palestine, and even the Jewish Agency's own anticipation of just such an operation at least six months earlier, the sheer scope and broad sweep of Agatha caught the Yishuv off guard. The loss of the vast quantity of weaponry discovered at Kibbutz Yagur alone, one of the Haganah's three central arms dumps, dealt the Yishuv a major setback in its efforts to prepare militarily for independence. Such a series of blows, Cunningham had hoped, would bring the community to its senses. "I call upon all those who have the true interests of Palestine at heart to co-operate with the Government," the high commissioner pleaded in his public announcement of the operation. "The door of negotiation and discussion is not shut."

But it was. And Agatha, as even the army recognized, had slammed it closed. ...

...the harm done to Anglo-Zionist relations was irreparable. "This is the first time that the public cannot escape the feeling that the bridges between us and Britain have been blown up and that the action taken by the Government affected not only this or that political scheme but the very foundation of the idea of the National Home," *Ha'aretz* opined. Even the Sixth Airborne's after-action report of the operation had to concede this point. Struggling to put the best face on the Yishuv's unrestrained opprobrium, it noted, "The operation has temporarily lost us what friends amongst the Jews we still had." Such hopes, however, were little more than wishful thinking. That much was already clear to Colin Mitchell, a young subaltern serving in a Scottish regiment attached to the Sixth Airborne. "So far as we could

see,” he commented, “Operation ‘Agatha’ achieved little more than further inflaming Jewish opinion against the British.”

Source: Anonymous Soldiers: The Struggle for Israel, 1917-1947, Bruce Hoffman, Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 2015, p. 280-283.

Guiding Questions

Name _____

1. Why did the British first encourage the Palmach and then suppress it?

2. Why did the Zionist leaders join in the revolt against the British?

3. In what way was Operation Agatha a success and in what way a failure?

In the space below answer the following: *What were the factors that influenced the Haganah's actions in respect to the British?*