

sense of politics, Weizmann realized that at this moment, the creation of a Jewish legion was turning from an object of yearning into a palpable fact and he knew that only the recruitment of soldiers on a large scale could sweep away the opposition of the Zionist functionaries who surrounded him . . .

An announcement to the press (on 27 July) read as follows: "Preparations for the creation of a Jewish infantry regiment have been completed. Experienced British officers are now being chosen to fill the senior positions in the unit and orders have already been sent to transfer to it Jewish troops who know Yiddish and Russian and who are at present serving in British units. The Magen David has been suggested as the emblem of the regiment. Additional information on conditions of service and recruitment will be made available as soon as the necessary legal confirmations have been obtained" . . . On 9 July 1919 after the heavy and slow wheels of the British camp started to roll, the official announcement of High Command was publicized concerning "the changing of the name of the infantry unit" and the world was informed that "it has been decided to change the title of the 38th regiment, the Royal Marksmen (the City of London Regiment). This battalion will be called from the date of the publication of this order and onwards as the 38th regiment, the Royal Marksmen, the 1st Judeans."

*Y. Eilam, The Hebrew Battalions (Hebrew)
Tel Aviv, 1973, passim.*

**(7) NILI — NETZAH YISRAEL LO YESHAKER
(THE STRENGTH OF ISRAEL WILL NOT LIE)**

(a) British Foreign Ministry documents revealing British army and Intelligence Service assessment of Aaron Aaronsohn, Sarah Aaronsohn and the other members of Nili. These Documents show the importance attached by the British army H.Q. in Cairo to the spy ring of Aaronsohn in view of the attack which the British planned in Eretz Israel against the Turks and the Germans. The military heads passed the demands of Aaronsohn to the British Foreign Minister and supported them. This clearly demonstrates Nili's major importance to them.

(b) The bones of Avshalom Feinberg; Truth (historic) sprouts forth from the ground.

Aaronsohn threatens to stop his spying activities

Wingate warned Balfour that unless confidence of some kind was shown in Aaronsohn by the Zionist Federation in England, he would cease to co-operate and disband the organization which he has built up. Wingate wrote in the same letter that Aaronsohn had experienced many difficulties in his relations with fellow-Jews in Eretz Israel. They were doubtful whether he was really working in their interest and in order to clarify the situation, a

meeting was to be held in Cyprus between him and two representatives from Eretz Israel. In another telegram to the British Foreign Office Wingate declared that there may well be reasons unknown to him for which it was inadvisable to give Aaronsohn unqualified support. In his opinion, and in that of the military leaders however, he had proved to be an honest and reliable man. At that moment, he was in an angry and emotional mood and if they wished to continue making use of his organization, he suggested that they grant him the support he requested. The British Foreign Office promptly agreed to this recommendation, as we may gain from the remark inscribed on the margin of the telegram advising that Aaronsohn be granted his request.

Wingate again turned to Lord Balfour. After describing the difficulties experienced by Aaronsohn he concluded that the military authorities desired the continued service of the organization which he had set up in Palestine. He saw a danger that Aaronsohn might wind up the whole business.

*From a review of British Foreign Office documents
by J. Finkelstone, (Hebrew) Ma'ariv, 3.11.1967.*

Letter to Alexander Aaronsohn

The War Office, London, S.W.1.

June, 1932

Sir: I am commanded by the Army Council to acknowledge your letter of the 25th April, 1932, and to inform you that the sum of £10,000 has been received from Barclays Bank, Ltd., 29, Gracechurch Street, London E.C.

The Council desire me to express their sincere appreciation of your action in returning the whole of the grant. As you know, the Council are deeply conscious of the invaluable services rendered to the Allied cause during the war by the late Mr. Aaron Aaronsohn, his family and his associates, unfortunately with so much sacrifice to themselves and to their own interests. The Council regard your present action as a further example of the loyalty of the Aaronsohn family which you represent.

I am, Sir

Your obedient Servant

H. G. Creedy

The Bones of Avshalom Feinberg

I always used to ask myself the question: "What does a man think about in the last moments before his death, when he feels and knows that his time has come. Avshalom, whilst he could still think clearly, saw the sheets of sand in the wilderness about to envelop him. He may have seen seas, mountains, borders, countries and peoples. Also houses, rooms and forests until there appeared before his eyes a shaded house, emerging from the tree branches —

the house in Zichron Ya'akov — the home of the Aaronsohns into which he would enter as a man struck by fate never to come out again. He saw the experimental station on the Atlit coast, combining agriculture and spying, science and war, oil-lamps burning till dawn and lights blinking on the horizon — the lights of warships and approaching vessels. He looked at the face of his beloved mentor Aaron — a distinguished and wonderful person. At the beginning of their relationship they were drawn to one another by the love for the soil, for the grain and the vine. Presently they came to share the human woes and when war broke out and the Germans fanned the Turks' cruelty and wickedness, Aaron clasped Avshalom's hand and led him into redeeming danger. Both rebelled against the degradation of tyranny. Avshalom wrote "my heart dreams of rebellion. Dreams of wondrous events to come".

His eyes no doubt beheld the countenance of his father whom he adored and who had died some years earlier at the age of only forty five. He might well have said to him: "Father, will you rebuke me for having come so early to join you? I followed in your footsteps. You fashioned me in your image . . . I knew and felt your firm hand and the goodness of your heart. I knew your brave soul. I knew that you were proud of me and would not disappoint you. We both left this life, whilst still in the prime of it. And I even went further — not having died in bed. Look, father, how the desert sands are gathering me as I bid farewell to this life". His thoughts now turn to his mother. She has already lost her husband, his father; now she will lose her son. But she is strong, a true Belkind, a true Bilu and will not murmur: "Avshalom, why did you jump ahead? You could have hidden yourself in a cellar or attic like other Jews in this land."

His birth place Gederah now appears before his eyes, the school bench at Rishon-le-Zion, and the days of his youth in Hadera. He sees himself galloping on his horse in the dark of the night, leading the boys of the settlement (Moshava) in their attacks on the highway robbers.

The journey in the desert of the dauntless and noble warrior has come to an end. Indeed, Mount Herzl is his fitting resting place.

*Uri Kesary, Jerusalem, Ma'ariv (Hebrew)
29.11.1967.*

Truth (Historical) Sprouts Forth from the Earth

Avshalom Feinberg, a "Nili" fighter lay buried under a lone palm-tree near Rafiah — only yesterday his body was discovered and one of the strangest mysteries which puzzled the early settlers of Eretz Israel was solved.

Avshalom Feinberg, who was 26 years old when he met his death, was a courageous fighter. But he was also a fine and sensitive man. A horse-rider and a fencer, a marksman and a boxer, he was also a man of spirit, a thinker, a writer and a poet. The Arabs referred to him with awe as "Abu-Salim" and

his fame among the Jews was unsurpassed.

Reckoned as the first "sabro" character in history, barely 12 years old, he founded a group called "Dardakim" with the inscription "A Jewish and Free Eretz Israel" on their flag. He was born in Gederah on 23 December 1889. His parents Yisrael and Fanny Belkind were "Biluim". His youth was spent between the towns of Rishon-le-Zion, Gederah, Hadera, Rehovot and Yaffo. His grandfather, Meir Belkind, taught him Bible and told him about the Bible's great warriors. From these he drew inspiration.

Avshalom knew Arabic perfectly and got to know the Arabs of Eretz Israel from close quarters.

His parents sent him to Paris in 1904 where he studied Botany and literature. After some years of study he returned to Eretz Israel but did not go back to France owing to his father's death. Avshalom had returned from France a mature young man who foresaw the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire. He decided to rebel against Turkish rule and to 'bet' on the British-French "horse". Whilst in Egypt in 1916, where he tried to create a connection between the men of "Nili" and the British command in Cairo, he sent a report on the situation in Eretz Israel to Henrietta Szold. What Feinberg wrote 50 years ago can be written again today: "Jews of America, give us men! We don't want your dollars — we want your hearts, your minds and your love".

On 17 January 1917 the earth swallowed him up. Avshalom Feinberg and Lishanski, both riding on horses had set out for Egypt through the sandy, mysterious desert, with the object of renewing relations with the British Intelligence in Egypt which had been cut off. Two months later Joseph Lishanski returned to Eretz Israel — alone. He related the story that Avshalom had left Egypt to join an Officers Training School in England. However, his story seemed weak in many points and rather strange. The men of "Nili" could not believe that in the thick of the First World War when Turkish rule was beginning to totter, Avshalom should disappear from the scene and run off to London. It did not fit in with Avshalom's character.

Naaman Belkind — the elder brother of Eitan Belkind, the Rishon-le-Zion pioneer — went out to the desert to look for Avshalom but was seized by the Turks and hung in Damascus on the charge of "treason".

After the war, with Eretz Israel under British control, Aaron Aaronsohn revealed what Lishanski who had been brought to Cairo by an Australian patrol which found him wounded in the desert, had told him. Lishanski related that one or two kilometres south of Rafiah, they were attacked by Bedouin on horseback and Avshalom was shot in his stomach and leg. Avshalom then told him "I am going to die; take my documents and you must reach Egypt".

Aaronsohn admitted that the story about the officers course in England was an invention of his, as he was afraid that Avshalom's death might cause the disintegration of the "Nili" movement.

For 50 years, the burning question whether Avshalom had really been killed by the Bedouin and if so, where did his body disappear to, had been exercising the remnants of the "Nili" movement.

Eitan Belkind an officer in the Turkish army who was condemned to death — like his brother Naaman — but was miraculously saved, related that in the last period of the British Mandate in Israel, towards the end of the 1940's, Binyamin Rom, a Jew from Haifa employed in laying telegraph lines from Beer Sheva to Alexandria by way of Sinai, told Belkind of a Bedouin named Yusef Abu-Safra of Rafiah, who said that near the railway station in Rafiah there is a place with a wild, solitary palm-tree which the Bedouins called "Tel Al-Yahudi". Here, he said, a young Jew with a black beard was killed in a fight with horse riders and was buried by them on the spot. The palm-tree grew over the grave from dates he had in his pocket. Though fantastic, this story was taken to harbour a grain of truth but all attempts at tracing this palm-tree met with failure.

Lishanski cleared of guilt

Avshalom's grave was found two days ago by Shlomo ben-Elkanah, a veteran police officer. After many efforts he found the Bedouin Yusef Abu-Safra who told him the same story he had told Binyamin Rom twenty-five years ago: "We were sitting in our tent when suddenly a member of our tribe shouted 'spies!' Two Turks, armed with pistols who were sitting in the tent immediately came out. One of the Turks was wounded in his hand in the exchange whereas one of the spies (Yosef Lishanski) disappeared, the other one was overwhelmed".

Another man from the same tribe, Mahmud Abu-Safra gave ben-Elkanah a similar account. On the ground which Mahmud Abu-Safra pointed out, the shoots of a palm-tree were indeed found. This ground belongs to the mayor of Rafiah Abdul Hamid Kishta who also confirmed the story of the "Jewish grave". Ben-Elkanah did not believe the story about the Turks. Avshalom was no doubt killed by Bedouin tribesmen, who had invented the "Turks" out of fear of vengeance.

Ben-Elkanah started to dig and at a depth of 80 centimetres discovered a skeleton, almost whole and the roots of the palm-tree growing from the very bones. The skeleton was identified by Avshalom's cousin, Eitan Belkind, who recognized it by its teeth.

Thus after fifty years, the mystery of Avshalom's death and burial has at last been solved. The stain on the memory of his friend Lishanski has also been removed; for until this very day many believed that he had killed Avshalom out of jealousy of Sarah Aaronsohn's love for Avshalom, left him in the desert, and created the story of the pistol-fight.

*Uri Porat and David Appel (abridged),
Jerusalem "Yediot Aharonot" (Hebrew) 2.11.1967.*