Hero of the Israelis
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Hero of the Israelis

Itzhak Rabin

Special to The New York Times

TEL AVIV, June 7 — "The bulk of the Egyptian forces are fleeing in disorder, and we have occupied most of Sinai. We have fought with our own forces, and nobody has aided us."

For Maj. Gen. Itzhak Rabin, who made the victorious announcement on Israel's behalf today, the war has been a second encounter with President Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt. The two men last met during the 1948 fighting in the Negev, when an Egyptian unit surrounded at Faluja surrendered to Maj. Gen. Yigal Allon, now the Labor Minister.

Man in the News

Itzhak Rabin was a young, freckled colonel on General Allon's staff, and Colonel Nasser was the Egyptian liaison officer who had arranged the rendezvous.

At 45 but still boyish-looking, Itzhak Rabin (pronounced YITZ-khahk rah-BEAN) commands the country's land, sea and air forces. Blue-eyed, sandy-haired and rugged, he is the hero who inspired many of the episodes in which Leon Uris cast the fictional Ari Ben-Canaan in "Exodus."

Quiet but Authoritative

General Rabin speaks in a quiet but authoritative voice and gives an appearance of humility and shyness.

He was born in Jerusalem March 1, 1922. His mother, the former Rosa Cohen, was to serve later as a labor leader in Tel Aviv and as a member of the high command of the Haganah, the Jewish underground. His father, Nehemia Rabin, lived for 15 years in New York, Chicago and St. Louis before moving to Palestine during World War I as a soldier in the Jewish Legion.

Itzhak Rabin—he was given no middle name—hoped to become a farmer, restoring life to the eroded soil of Palestine. Farmers were then the élite of Israeli society.

But he was recruited for Haganah, the striking force that the British trained for sabotage and partisan activities to be carried out if the Germans, then at El Alamein, captured Palestine.

At 19, he led a Jewish scouting unit 10 miles behind the Vichy French lines in Lebanon to help cut off the retreat of the pro-German forces, which were later attacked by Australians.

When the Nazi threat passed, the young fighter used his training to combat the British blockade of Jewish immigration into the Palestine mandate territory. The raid against a British detention camp in Athlith, south of Haifa, to liberate more than 200 "illegal" Jewish immigrants, described in "Exodus," was actually led by young Rabin.

Later he was incarcerated in a detention camp with other Zionist political and underground leaders. Their freedom came with Israeli independence, and in the 1948 war, as a brigade commander, General Rabin was involved in the heartbreaking attempt to push into the Old City of Jerusalem.

The general commanded a force that lost heavily from Arab bombardment but kept open the supply road between Jerusalem and the coastal plain.



Camera Press-Pix

Prototype of fictional hero

Later, he pursued the Egyptians into the Sinai Desert, elatedly uprooting the Egyptian-Palestinian border marker on his way, but United Nations intervention forced him to retreat.

After the war, General Rabin held various army posts and was sent to the British Army Staff College at Camberley and to Fort Bliss, Tex., for courses. He became Chief of Staff in December, 1963.

Relies on Shock Value

As a tactician, General Rabin has been known for avoiding frontal assaults and preferring indirect approach. His reactions to critical situations in recent years have generally been surprising and original.

Many predicted that Syrian sabotage of Israel's water system through diversion of the Jordan would make war inevitable. General Rabin demonstrated that sabotage could be disrupted without an invasion. In returning fire during border encounters unconnected with the waters dispute, he ordered his tanks and later his planes to direct their bombs at earth-moving equipment.

Where previous border reprisals had followed patterns, each of General Rabin's was different. He used planes to blast artillery emplacements on the far slopes of hills that could not be reached by Israeli guns. He permitted his pilots to pursue Syrian aircraft all the way to Damascus.

Against the Jordanians south of Mount Hebron last year, General Rabin carried out the first daylight reprisal in the history of Arab-Israeli border warfare, sending his men across the border in tanks and half-tracks.

The Chief of Staff lives in a suburb near Tel Aviv with his wife, their 16-year-old daughter and their 11-year-old son. His most enjoyable relaxation is showing the movies he shoots with his 8-mm. camera.

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