

Ben-Dor Chaim (ח"ר)

Born in Jerusalem in 1924

Volunteered for the British Army in 1943

Joined the Palyam in 1946

Participated in the 5th and last course for naval officers of the Palyam

(Killed in action in 1948 when fighting in the retaliatory attack on Balad-a-Sheikh and Hawassa, which was where the Arabs who killed the 48 Jewish workers of the Oil Refinery in Haifa came from.)

Written by: Yehoshua Bar-Lev

A Eulogy for Chaim Ben-Dor

A few words dedicated to the memory of Chaim Ben-Dor
Whose memory burns in the hearts of his friends, and perhaps
He is the wind that blows from the peaks of our youth
To the bottom of the sea.

Since I am not a historian of the 'New Era',
I may allow myself to glorify someone in songs and words
That we sang in the tents of the Palmach.
If anyone thinks that the Palmach
Had only a tradition of battles and their dead
On land and sea and in the air
And scouts that went out at night
And long treks in the desert –
Well, he is making a big mistake
And wrongly assessing the true values of the Palmach
And of those who fell in the ranks.
For not only were there stormy battles
The Palmach had its 'Pillars of Fire'.
In them we can find the truth about the craft of the blacksmiths
Those broad-shouldered men, those professionals who tempered the steel
To their will, and also to sailors.
And they announce to us in the striking of hammers sending sparks of fire,
That without the blowing of the wind on the hot coals
The ashes will not burst into the flame
That will heat the steel to blue-white hot
That will then be beaten on the anvil by the master-craftsman
Who turns iron into a tempered sword.
Therefore I memorialize
A man of the Palyam
Who understood sooner than others of his generation
He understood more profoundly
More personally,
The meaning of life and the philosophy of action –
Of that first plunge into the waves

In a small wooden boat
 That braved a fleet of steel
 These words I dedicate to Chaim Ben-Dor.
 I came to the Palyam with others, riding on a wave of laughter
 We were just some loose ends looking for a place to fit.
 But, after the night we helped them off the boat on the shore of Nitzanim
 When the Palyam and the Olim were evacuated to Cyprus, Alterman burst with
 Laughter then, and described in his column an imaginary 'kumzitz' on the island.
 It went more or less like this:
 The evacuation and the search and the selection was over
 And here we find sitting under the sky of Famagusta
 Uzi the redhead from Mescha and Danny Jamus and Ephraim Kruvi from Kapusta.
 They were passing by near Nitzanim and went to help a ship that came in –
 And Britain after giving the matter serious thought, shipped them to Cyprus also.
 They went there and I took their place in the naval course.
 We had to plug the holes that the evacuees had left.
 Every time I slipped out of the tent and into the water
 Gil Aldema's song would float on the waves
 And bring me the laughter of the banished from that little island.
 And as the poet declaimed: "And it seemed that against the sky of the banished
 The whole earth is laughing, and singing. Ein Harod and Nahalal
 And Bir Asluj and Ein Gev and Manara
 The country is laughing from Kfar Gileadi to Hulata.
 And the pale little children of the camps listen, - shivering.
 Three hundred and fifty young men are laughing,
 They are torn between laughing and crying....

Chaim was like a cloud of love
 That hugged the sky above the shore of Caesarea
 There it was above his friends
 And above "Dov", "Rivka" and "Tirza".
 For Chaim they were not simply boats, they had a certain spirit
 And under the guidance of Foxy and Chaim they were part of the life and of the
 'kumzitz' of the gang as they drank and toasted themselves and their ships.
 And on the night of the 13th of the month.
 It was that sort of night when sailors become soul mates,
 Then there was the 5th Naval Officers' Course, the last course that the Palyam ran.
 There was Noni and Cheeta and Dov and Yitzik and Shlomo
 And uniting them all –Shmuel Tankus, the teacher, the friend, the father.

We lived in Yagur and we studied in Haifa.
 One day on the road to Yagur we were shot at as we rode through the Wadi.
 We ducked for cover instinctively; Chaim stood, unmoved.
 "Why the heroics", I asked. "Take a good look", said he,
 "When I get my bullet it will be right between the eyes, but I will not bend down!"
 Our bus could offer no real cover, but the reaction was the instinct of survival.

That seemed to me not to be an act of false bravado..
 Today I am certain that he knew some inner truth,
 It came from deep inside him. Actually
 He wasn't just sitting there upright, he was writing
 The Declaration of Independence long before
 Ben Gurion did so. That I knew on the day he died.
 It was a terrible day, the day the Arabs killed
 Their Jewish fellow workers at the Haifa refinery.
 The funeral took place the following day.
 And as the funeral procession passed along the slopes of the Carmel
 In a never-ending line that gave expression to the feelings of us all.
 Someone said to me. They were less than fifty yet see how many mourners.
 How long a line if there were one thousand? one million? six million?
 That struck me like a mountain collapsing!
 We are all but 'Remnants of the Holocaust'
 Mourning those that fell on the eve of the next battle.
 That evening some boys were called to action
 Out they went to the village of the murderers.
 The next day we took count, who had gone and not returned.
 Then we knew and we went to look at him.
 The sheet withdrawn – we saw his beautiful, pale face
 He who dreamt of crossing the sea
 To save at least one child from the ashes of Europe.
 There he lay, dead – with a small black hole in his forehead,
 Between his eyes.

We buried him in Yagur and E. Hillel wrote the words that were in our hearts.
 To this very day his memory has not left me.
 That is a sign that the soul remains here and there is no hereafter.
 It is all here, and now! Nor do I believe that the Lord is the true judge –
 He is a creation of man and I am a man.
 I met many survivors on the ships that crossed the sea
 And I bowed my head before them because they
 And only they, - know what Six Million means.

Lastly, may I say, the waves at sea do not lie.
 When a wind blows there are waves.
 So how can a sailor not believe
 That the wind was the force that drove the ancient ships at sea?
 Yet the sea moves not nor does the water move
 But the wind blows and the roots of the waves reach to the floor of the sea.

All this is to the memory of Chaim Ben-Dor,
 The Palyamnik –
 Brave, beloved and wise.