

Note added by Dan Censor, Sat, 16 Jul 2005:

Web-page link: **Article/book #18586: [The massacre in Tantura \(Hebrew, "Ha-tevah be-Tantura"\)](#)**

which leads to 00-01-21katz-gilat-maariv.pdf: gilat's article in maariv  
see <http://www.ee.bgu.ac.il/~censor/katz-directory/>

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----- Original Message -----

**Subject:**[alef] Massacre in Tantura

**Date:**Sat, 16 Jul 2005 08:36:47 +0100 (BST)

**From:**jabowen@cs.ucc.ie (James Bowen)

**To:**alef@list.haifa.ac.il (ALEF)

**CC:**My interzone acct at UCC <j.bowen@cs.ucc.ie>

Those of you who, like me, cannot read Hebrew may be interested to know that Zalman Amit has translated into English the article that Amir Gilat wrote about Teddy Katz in Ma'ariv in January 2000 -- the article whose publication led, indirectly, to the AUT boycott of Haifa. Credit is also due to Zalman's wife, who edited the translation.

Zalman did the translation at my request and I have attempted to mark it up to look like something like the Hebrew original.

Now that Zalman has approved, I have made the marked-up translation publicly visible. It is here:

<http://www.corkpsc.org/db.php?aid=18586>

-jb

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alef mailing list

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# The Massacre in Tantura

by Amir Gilat  
Ma'ariv Weekend  
21 January 2000

Translated from [the Hebrew original](#) to English by Zalman Amit  
English translation edited by Ann Sutherland

This translation shows where photographs appeared in the Hebrew original.  
To see the photographs, view the Hebrew original.

## Ma'ariv Weekend

First publication 21.1.2000

New research determines: In the course of the battle for the conquest of Tantura during the War of Independence, on the night between the 22 and the 23 of May 48, the soldiers of the "Alexandroni" Brigade carried out a mass massacre of the village's men. Theodore Katz's research, which is based among other things on the testimonies given to him by the village refugees and the "Alexandroni" soldiers about 50 years after the events, uncovers an array of atrocities including the shooting of men in the streets, in their homes and, in a concentrated fashion, in groups of six to ten at the village cemetery. More than 200 dead were counted and were buried in mass graves in the area that is today the parking lot of the Dor beach. IDF spokesman: "According to the data available to the IDF there is no testimony of a massacre that was carried out on the residents of Tantura during the conquest of the village in May 48." • By Amir Gilat

## The Massacre in Tantura



Abu  
Haled

They led



Abu Said

They



Abu  
Gamal

A Jew



Bentz  
Fridan

This was a



Mordechai  
Sokoler

I am not a



Avraham  
Amir

Did you

them near the Sabras and shot them	placed the guys along the walls	wandered in the streets and shot people	war and in war people get killed	murderer and I don't have anything to hide	ever see an Arab that will not exaggerate in their stories?
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## **New research determines: In the course of the battle for the conquest of Tantura during the War of Independence, on the night between the 22 and the 23 of May 48, the soldiers of the "Alexandroni" Brigade carried out a mass massacre of the village's men**

### **First publication: The Massacre in Tantura**

The village Tantura was conquered by the soldiers of Battalion 33 of the "Alexandroni" Brigade on the night between the 22 and the 23 of May 48. The research was carried out by Theodore Katz in the context of his Master's thesis work and is based on testimonies of the village refugees, the Alexandroni fighters and the IDF Archive documents and contends that during that night a horrible massacre of the village men was carried out. According to the testimonies the men were shot in the streets, in their homes and in a concentrated fashion in groups of six to ten, in the village cemetery. Some of the men were forced to dig holes that became their graves after they were shot. More than 200 dead were counted there during the night of conquest and the days that followed. The dead were buried in mass graves in an area that is today the parking lot of Dor Beach. Only the arrival of the people of Zichron Ya'akov stopped the killing spree of the soldiers. Amir Gilat exposes the findings of the striking research and he also collects testimonies from some of the participants: The Arabs presented to him shocking facts, the Jews denied the fact that we are dealing with a massacre. Gilat also provides academic objection to the research methodology and tries to explain how is it possible that such a mass massacre was not publicized until today, 52 years after it occurred.

Those scenes will never be forgotten by Fauzi Mahmoud Ahmed Tangi (Abu Haled). Even today, 52 years later, a tremor passes through his body when he remembers how his family members and his friends were massacred in front of his eyes. "They took us to the village cemetery and there they arranged us in rows. The commander of the Jews came and told his soldiers: 'Take ten', and they chose ten from among us, they led them near the sabra bushes and there they shot them. After that they returned and took another ten. Those were supposed to clear the bodies and after that they shot them too. That was the way this was repeated, they shot more and more people.

"These soldiers, whose faces I will never forget, looked to me like the angels of death. When I stood there I was sure that these are my last moments, in one more minute they will take me too and shoot me. The Jews were supposed to have learned from what the Germans did to them. I don't know why they did to us the same thing, I swear to you." The old man from Tul Karem, 74 years of age suddenly breaks out crying, "It would have been better if I had died there and did not have to carry with me this story until today."



Fauzi Mahmoud Ahmed Tangi (Abu Haled) with a photograph of his relatives. His uncle (on the left) was shot in Tantura. "I do not know why the Jews did this to us" •Photography: Gadi Abramovitch.

**Abu Haled: "They took us to the village cemetery and arranged us in rows. The commander of the Jews came and told his soldiers: 'Take ten' and they chose ten of us, they led them near the sabra bushes and shot them there. After that they returned and took another ten. This repeated itself. They shot more and more people."**

History preferred thus far to avoid this chapter of the War of Independence. Even those involved in this dark affair, Jews and Arabs, preferred to hide it deep in their hearts. Only this new research, completed recently at Haifa University, is trying to expose what happened in the course of the conquest of the Arab village of Tantura in the year 1948.

Razek Ashmawi (Abu Said), a resident of Furreidis, was a boy of 13 at the time. This week, in the garage for heavy machinery that he owns, he was reminded of those events. "Not far from the mosque was a square. Not far from there they arranged the guys along the walls of the houses. There was a row of, perhaps, 25 men and after them also women. In front of them were standing ten or 12 soldiers and then they simply shot the guys. The women, following the soldiers' orders continued to walk".



**Abu Said: "They arranged the guys along the walls of the houses. There was a row of perhaps 25 people, and after them also women. In front of them stood some ten or 12 soldiers and then they simply shot the guys and they fell on the spot ... One boy tried to call his mother. They shot her**

Razek Ashmawi (Abu Said)  
"We begged the soldiers that they should take my mother in a vehicle". The soldiers said: "There is no need. We will shoot her" • Photography and reproductions, Elli Dassa

and killer her."

Ashmawi is reminded how he went with a Jewish soldier to gather bread for himself and the other boys. "During the shooting the soldiers stopped me from walking until the end of the shooting. Afterwards we continued to collect bread and then we returned to the seashore. When we returned we passed again near the dead, and then further on, I saw another group - perhaps 40 or 50 people along the walls - being shot in the same style. During the waiting period when the soldiers aimed their weapons at us and each one of the mothers covered her children as much as she could so that they will shoot her and not them, one child tried to call his mother. They shot and killed her. We almost lost my mother too on that day. When we began to move from the seashore in the direction of the cemetery something happened to my mother, out of fear she got some kind of a paralysis in her legs and was not capable of walking. We could not drag her and we needed to beg the soldiers to take her in a vehicle. The soldiers said: 'There is no need, we will shoot her and that will be it.' There was a debate among the soldiers and only with difficulties According to him there were more than 90 dead in the village, who were buried in big holes; two holes for men and one little hole for women. Abu Said remembered also a man's body that was lying in the street. His wife and daughters started to scream and one of the soldiers wanted to liquidate them. The woman begged that they would, at least, allow her to move the body from the sun. In the end they allowed her to do so.

## **"A lethal hunt for adult men"**

Theodore (Teddy) Katz, 56, a member of Kibutz Magal, a coordinator of Moshavim and UKM in Meretz, who prepared this research for his Master's degree, searched for two years in order to meet people who were in Tantura on that night. He talked with the village refugees -- some living today in the village of Furreidis, others who were expelled outside Israel with their family members; with Alexandroni soldiers from Battalion 33 (nicknamed the "Saturday Battalion" because every weekend it received another operational task) that participated in the battle; and with residents of near-by Zichron Ya'akov. He also examined documents in the IDF Archives and in the end reached the conclusion that what happened in Tantura was a massacre on a massive scale.

**From Katz's research: "In the wake of the many meetings with the Alexandroni fighters one gets a uniform impression: these people confronted almost every week hard and bitter battles in which, according to their best awareness and conscience, they were defending with their bodies the first frontline of the Jewish people."**



Teddy Katz

"On the night between the 22 and the 23 of May, 48, and during the following morning," Katz wrote in his thesis, "Battalion 33 of the Alexandroni brigade attacked the village of Tantura. The village was conquered after a few hours of gunfire exchange that was more relentless in some of the battle sectors but in the early hours of the morning the entire village was in the hands of the IDF forces. According to the testimonies of more than 20 Tantura refugees, and also some of the brigade soldiers, the soldiers were involved during several hours in a lethal hunt for adult men in order to kill them. First they shot them everywhere - in the houses, in the yards and even in the streets - afterwards they did it in a more concentrated fashion in the village cemetery. Fourteen of the fighters of the Alexandroni brigade fell in this action in Tantura. On (top of) the cemetery where the bodies of the Arabs were buried, the parking lot of the Dor beach is built today. "We don't have even a place to go to, to visit our family members" some of the refugees claim painfully. Abu Haled comes, from time to time, from Tul Karem to Tantura. He lies on the ground and cries.

## **"They shot them and they fell straight into the holes"**

Abu Haled: "They gathered all of us at the seashore, men and women separately. Young ones from the age of 12 and up were with the men and the smaller ones with the women. After that they took seven to ten men and brought them near the mosque, they shot them and returned to take another group, this way, perhaps, 90 men. A group of soldiers went with each group and the entire village stood and looked. Afterwards they took all those that remained to the cemetery, stood us there and planned to shoot us, all of us. Then some 50 or 60 people from Zichron Ya'akov arrived. As soon as they saw what was going on, some of the seniors among them stopped the killing by saying: "Till here".

Abd el Razek el-Yihya (Abu Anys), today a general in the Palestinian Authority, heard a similar testimony from his family members. Abu Anys, a native of Tantura was staying at the time in Syria where he was recruited to the Salvation Army of Kaukji. However, his parents and his 11 brothers told him what happened.

Abu Anys to Katz: "They gathered all the men in the cemetery and then they took them in separate groups of six or seven. Each group like this dug holes in the dunes. As soon as they finished the digging and stood near the readied holes they shot them and they fell straight into the holes. Then they moved to the next row and so on and so on, several rows.

“At a certain moment two of my brothers who were in two separate rows hugged in order to say good-bye since their turn was about to come. Suddenly a Jewish motorcyclist arrived with an order from the Jewish Headquarters to stop the killing. That was how the rest of the people were saved, probably out of the concern that Jewish prisoners that were in Jordanian hands would be treated in the same way. All told, some 78 people were killed there.”

Another testimony about the actions of the soldiers in that place can be gleaned from things said by Abd el Rahman Dachnash, 75 years old, to his family members. According to him, when he was occupied digging the hole that was supposed to become his grave, he saw soldiers laughing and smiling at one another. "Each time they returned from shooting a group they spoke among themselves and I didn't understand what they were saying. Then a friend of mine who knew Hebrew heard the soldiers guarding us laughing at us and telling his friend: 'Look at these fools, they are digging a hole for themselves and they don't even know it.'"

The friend, Dachnash added, translated these words for him and asked him to dig slowly since it was meant for them. A short time later Dachnash noticed a Jew he knew: "I did so many good things for you in the past", he said that he told him, "Do something good for me too." This Jew spoke to the officer in that place and then the soldiers came, took the two and saved their lives.

## **“Mass killing? The question is what is mass”**

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Sholomo Amber, a native of Kfar Az'ar, who was then 25, was the demolition of officer of Battalion 33.

In a testimony given to Katz he said: “Formally, my only role in Tantura was to blow up some iron chain that was stretched between two sandstone cliffs. On the other hand, I was there during the entire day and I saw things that I prefer not to talk about.” After a long silence, writes Katz in his thesis, Amber added: "I joined the British Army because I thought that the important thing for a Jew to do was to go out and fight the Germans in the knowledge that this is the biggest need that faced the Jews and the world, but we fought according to the rules of war the world community dictated to us. I must note that even the Germans did not kill unarmed and defenseless prisoners. After all, their prisoners returned alive. Here in Tantura they murdered Arabs.

"One could not get the impression that the approach was to regain the National Honor. I also do not think that the number of casualties we sustained in Tantura was so great as to cause people to go out like hunting dogs to quench their hunger. All in all we were going to conquer a village that was isolated and wasn't even on a main transportation route. This was an extraordinary phenomenon, absolutely and unambiguously.

“Later on we were involved in cruel face-to-face combat and such-like things but there was never such a thing as incidental killing. The picture that got carved in my memory is of the men in the cemetery. I saw many men being killed there. I left the place when I saw that they were killing and killing; because of this I don’t know exactly how many were killed there.”

**Shlomo Amber in a testimony given to Katz: "Here in Tantura they murdered Arabs! ... The picture that got carved in my memory is of the men in the cemetery. I saw a lot of people getting killed there. I left the place when I saw that they were killing and killing and killing."**



Shlomo  
Amber

Amber, who later on became the head of Hag’ah and retired from the army with the rank of a Brigadier-General, stressed to Katz that there was no assault on women and children, although there was looting of property.

This week Amber claimed that these things, as Katz wrote them, were not accurate. “I did not say things about the Nazi soldiers and I did not speak about the killing of prisoners because I did not see fit to speak about it. I was angered by things that the New Historians wrote about the killing of prisoners and perhaps he took these things and confused them.”

Amber emphasized in his conversation with me that the army was his entire life and he feels very loyal to it. “I am not prepared to support stories that perhaps are not true and perhaps were written in response to subjective needs of someone and which come to serve a goal which I do not know. There were dead in Tantura, this is true. Mass killing? The question is what is mass? People were killed during the battles and perhaps also after them, but I did not pay attention to it. Today, when I am old, I do not want to relate to what I did when I was 25 years old”.

## **"We are not talking about a generation of complete saints"**

The research whose title is "The Exit of the Arabs From Villages in the Southern Karmel Foothills in 48" is undoubtedly a bombshell. Katz says that he deliberated extensively before he began the writing job. In the background was the view that there are things for which silence is best until this day. "There are also considerations", he wrote, that are like

chasing bears out of the forest, that is, raising again sensitive and charged issues which place the 48 fighters in their various ranks, as well as the civil leadership of the Yishuv, in a moral trial based on today's values, about 50 years after the occurrence of the events when the conditions are different and the acute feeling of existential threat of '48' is long gone.

This is a complicated matter if it is interpreted inappropriately. It can unjustifiably cast a severe, problematic and complicated shadow on an entire generation of pioneers, fighters and builders. These fighters entered, according to him, the '48' war with great trepidation, out of a deep sense of anxiety that here the Jewish people which, only three years before, had been saved from the Holocaust was about to lose the State that had just been established. "It should be said immediately", he wrote, "that we are not talking about a generation of complete saints, but rather about flesh and blood people with feelings and desires, ambitions and aspirations, who went out on a weekly basis - during long months - to blood-soaked battles in which they lost, each time anew, their best friends, brothers-in-arms, relatives, soldiers and commanders, without knowing when their turn would come."

## **"We had to jump over piles of dead"**

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On a wall in the house of the Zara family in Furreidis a large picture is hanging. In it one can see hundreds of women and children from the non-combatant population of Tantura, their native village, standing under the supervision of the Military Police soldiers at a distance of tens of meters from the Mazgega building, waiting for their expulsion from the village. At the bottom of the picture the head of the family wrote, in handwriting, "Tantura's disaster, 22 May, 1948 - The memory and the History".

Ahmed Sallah Zara (Abu Sahil), who passed away eight months ago, and his wife Myamar actually had good memories from the village prior to the conquest. Katz met Abu Sahil a few months before his death. "The village" he told him, "was a better place than Haifa in many respects. Everybody came to pray in Tantura whose lands included areas that are today in Moshav Habonim and the Kibbutzim of Ma'ayan Tzvi and Ma'agan Michael. Near the school were small and colorful pools where we raised small fish and fruit trees. In my childhood I heard that the school for boys and the factory were built by a rich man who gave the school as a gift to the village.

### **REACTIONS**

### **SUPPORT AND CRITICISM**

**Dr. Meir Pail, Historian:**



“Teddy Katz is an honest and credible man who did his work at the university under academic supervision and therefore I am convinced that whatever is written in the research is correct. This research exposed for me things I did not know, and to my sorrow, after I have read the research I think that Teddy is right.” Pail confirms that Teddy is a Leftist like himself, but he feels that he too would have been happy if these things had not occurred. "When you begin a historical research you do not know how it will end. Sometimes you can be pleasantly surprised from the moral level and sometimes negatively. Teddy carried out an important research work. Even though this is really a micro-research of a specific village, but he illuminated an important corner where there is still room to investigate and research."

**Prof. Yoav Gelber, Researcher of the War of Independence, Haifa University:**



“I do not buy the research, any research that is based on verbal documentation is problematic, and particularly in a charged research like this one, especially when there is a problem to verify things.” "Up to the Arab invasion in '48", claims Gelber, "there was only fleeing and not expulsions. After the invasion this changes. The Jews see the Palestinians as responsible for the invasion and the suffering it caused, so at this point there are many fewer inhibitions in the attitude towards them. There are rigid patterns of behavior more that those that prevailed prior to the invasion, including killing. But we are dealing with local killing and not a massive one. The intention was to kill two-three so that the others would run away. In some places, not in Tantura, there was also military justification so that the locals would not become a Fifth Column". Prof. Gelber rejects emphatically the research that speaks of massive killing of Tantura residents, even in the face of multiple testimonies. He notes that such claims were also raised about other places, for example the village Dueima. After an examination it turned out that these were false claims. “This is what happened in a place where it was possible to check. This is why I am very skeptical about Tantura.

**Prof. Assa Kasher, the author of the military ethical code:**



"A war crime was committed in Tantura. The murderers who knew to save the lives of children without exception and the lives of women almost without exception, killed many tens of men. It is imperative to introduce this chapter to the terminology of dealing with the purity of arms and with the blatantly illegal command."

Prof. Kasher defines the research as logical, careful and considerate, and one that tries to understand the heads of the soldiers of then. For example the tremendous anger that was stored inside them because of what had happened to their friends. "I do not accept this anger as an excuse for doing such things. It is not allowed to put people in a row against the wall and shoot them. According to him, there is no statute of limitation on war crimes, not from a moral point of view, not from an educational point of view and also not from a legal point of view. "Since the main figures of the Tantura affair have passed away, there is no point in dealing now with the legal implications but it is necessary to take this affair and use it as teaching material."

Prof. Kasher also expresses concern about the testimonies of looting and he stresses the need to extract these phenomena right down to their roots.

"We are dealing here with an important research and we need to study it, not to avoid it but rather to say that what had happened there is very bad and therefore to make sure that such a crime will not be repeated."

If it is possible to identify the place where the bodies are buried, Prof. Kasher thinks that it should be pinpointed. "We need to make sure that this place will be seen and that there will be on it a memorial on which the words, Honor and Forgiveness, should be written.

He is thinks that it is necessary to illuminate the blessed activity of the Zichron Ya'akov people who came in the middle of the event and protected the Tantura residents and this way saved the lives of tens or even hundreds of the village residents. "The activity of the Zichron Ya'akov people is the only point of light in this entire affair."

**Prof. Yossi Ben Artzi, the Department for Eretz Israel Studies in Haifa University:**

"I did not like the research. It is based on testimonies without factual validation. It is a directional research, and it creates the impression that first they identified the goal and then they searched for support. Even if there is a kernel of something in this story, it is not possible to bring in this type of research every word that was heard, particularly since the thesis is badly written. Oral history is based on oral testimonies but it doesn't have backing in other things and because of that I was very troubled by the research methodology, the writing and the fact that the department of the History of the Middle East did not give the thesis to someone critical from outside the department for evaluation. I do not think that one should hide what had happened, if it happened. It is

necessary to expose the events and discuss them and if there is criticism so it should be criticized, but I was not enthusiastic about this research from a scientific point of view”.

**Dr. Ilan Pappé, Historian, Haifa University:**



“This is a very important thesis. It combines for the first time oral history with documents, and one can see that the merging of the two sources does reconstruct the 1948 story, a fuller and deeper reconstruction. This reconstruction puts us closer to the Palestinian collective memory concerning that war, and with its help we become more aware of the scope and the meaning of the Naqba, the Palestinian disaster. Katz’s research is a model for additional research about additional villages that were not investigated until today only because there was no complete documentation with regards to them in Israeli archives”. Dr. Pappé notes that about Tantura too no one wrote thus far since there was material about this affair in the archives. Katz is one of the first who thought about interviewing also the people that supposedly carried out these difficult acts towards the local population. Dr. Pappé does not have a methodological problem with personal interviews as the basis for the research. “I do not want to compare, in any way, the Holocaust of the Jewish people with the events in Tantura but from a methodological point of view one must remember that Jewish research on the Holocaust actually assigned an important role to personal testimonies”.

Pappé informs that a new research by the Palestinian researcher Sherrif Kanaan points to a phenomenon of concentrated massacre of populations near the big cities in order to induce their residents to flee.

“I am glad”, concludes Pappé, that the university went towards Katz with regards to this topic and he hopes that this is only "the first swallow in historical research based not only on written documents only”.

**IDF spokesperson:**

“According to data available to the IDF, there is no evidence of a massacre carried out on Tantura residents at the time of the conquest of the village in May 1948. The IDF is not familiar with this new research at Haifa University. Following receipt of the research data it will be possible to carry out, in the IDF, a new examination of this issue.”



Ahmed Sallah Zara (Abu Sahil) "Piles of bodies accumulated in the streets."

**Abu Sahil, who died eight months ago, in a testimony provided to Katz: "There was also a case involving a beautiful young woman, about 16 or 17. Four soldiers dragged her out of the pile of people. Her uncle got up to try and rescue her from the grip of the soldiers, but they pushed**

**him aside. When he insisted they shot a bullet in his head and liquidated him."**



Myamar  
Zara (Um  
Sahil), Abu  
Sahil's wife

This rich man according to local tradition was the Baron Rothschild, who offered to build a school in the village for the Arabs of Tantura in return for co-operation in drying the nearby Kabara swamps. Until the war said Abu Sahil, "we lived with the Jews and near the Jews in co-operation in many areas. When the war began the Zichron Ya'akov people tried to convince the Tantura people to surrender, to give up their weapons and make peace. It was clear that, like Gisser a Zarqa and Furreidis, the village would not be able to hold out too long, but our younger men were aggressive and determined and were not prepared to hear about surrender.

"There were families in Tantura that wanted to leave the village even before the end, and a small number of them actually did so. When they saw that the younger men were stubborn and were not willing to give up and were not prepared to surrender, they understood that that this business would not end up well and they simply wanted to leave the village. They loaded everything they could on their family boats and moved. The younger men objected to this and at a certain stage they blocked the exit from the village by force and did not allow anybody to leave."

When the battle began around midnight, the soldiers entered the village from the North, "They shot without discrimination", said Abu Sahil, "at everyone they saw in front of their eyes, and the picture was like in the Hitler war, piles of bodies accumulating in the streets. It was a terrible sight... when they moved us from place to place we had to jump over piles of dead.

"After gaining control over the village they gathered us all at the seashore, men separately and women and children separately, and they began to move groups of men to the cemetery with the intention of liquidating them.

"There was also the case of one beautiful girl, 16 or 17. Four soldiers dragged her by force from the pile of people. Her uncle saw what was going on and got up and tried to rescue her from the hands of the soldiers, but they pushed him aside. When he insisted they shot a bullet in his head and liquidated him. This poor girl, Rasmiya was her name, left afterwards with all the others to the West Bank and as far as we heard never married."

## **"In one grave we put in some 40 or 45 bodies"**

Katz met Raslan Hassan Ayub A'amar (Abu Hassan) about two years ago in the Tul Karem Refugee Camp, where he resides. "A State that rises on a foundation of crime, is a temporary State and nothing more, whereas a State that rises on a just basis, has a chance that it will exist forever", said the elderly man, 75 years of age after he tried to avoid a meeting on several occasions.

After he relented he described to Katz what had happened: "After the conquest of the village they gathered us all on the sea shore and chose some seven people to gather the bodies of the dead and I was one of them.

"In the middle of the gathering we discovered two bodies inside a Sabra bush but I was scared to approach because it was very thorny. When the officer approached us, our guard complained that I refused to walk into the Sabra bush, at that moment the officer pulled out a gun and aimed at me with the intention of shooting me. I didn't have a choice and I jumped into the bush and dragged the dead bodies out of there. Obviously I got full of thorns.



Mustafa Massri (Abu Gamil)  
saw that they shot people  
after the battle already ended  
• Photography: Elli Dassa

**Abu Gamil's father ordered every member of his family to remain indoors. A soldier that arrived there removed Abu Gamil and another sick youngster from the rest. After a few seconds when they were at a distance of perhaps 15 metres from the house, they heard shots and understood that they had liquidated all the family members - 12 people.**

"The bodies were arranged in piles of seven, eight or ten in each pile. In total we gathered then 60 or 70 and perhaps even more bodies, I don't remember exactly any more. All kinds of things happened there. Suddenly a soldier that was wounded in his arm arrived and informed the guards that he intended to execute two of us because of the wound in his arm. He marked the fellow near me and me and planned to take both of us. The one near me managed prior to this to load the bodies of his two slain brothers, and because of that he didn't mind getting up. He walked some 100 meters before the soldier shot and killed him. I, on the other hand, took a chance and didn't get up. Luckily I was not liquidated immediately. One of the soldiers arrived and aimed his weapon at me, He forced me to get up and pushed me with his rifle butt in my back. I fell and injured myself in such a way that since then, during several decades I still get strong pains in my back."

According to Abu Hassan, the women and the elderly were moved to Furreidis although not before their jewelry and other valuables were taken from them. "Everyone who was at the age of from 10 to 100 was taken to prison, first in Zichron Ya'akov and later in Um Halled (Netanya), in Gelil (the Ra'anana region) and some even further away. I sat in prison for a total of 11 months".

Muhsan Mera'ei, a native of Furreidis, was then a youngster of 17 and according to him, among those that were brought to bury the dead.

"We arrived two days after the battle to bury the bodies. In one grave we put some 40 or 45 bodies - in another hole - 42 bodies, and in another hole - nine. Afterwards there was an additional hole for the three women that were also killed."

### **"The guys know the murdering job"**

On May 27, '48, a few days after the battle of Tantura, Naftali (Hulik) Makovski, a soldier in Battalion 33 that participated in the operation, wrote in his diary: "What I learned here is that the guys know the murdering job fairly well. These were primarily guys that the Arabs murdered, slaughtered or did some other nice things to members of their family, or Hitler survivors (After all it is the same fascism). They carried out on the snipers their own private revenge and the revenge of our friends who fell from by their slimy hands. I felt that they were letting loose all the anger and the bitterness that had accumulated in their hearts. I felt that this made it easier for them."

Makovski, from whose diary this paragraph is quoted in Katz's research, fell in the battle of Kfar Monash on June 1, 1948.

### **"At 12 o'clock at night I heard something abnormal"**

The testimonies of the residents speak of a killing field at the cemetery and also of indiscriminate shooting in the northern sector of the village.

One of the witnesses is Mustafa Massri (Abu Gamil), 65 years old. This week I met him in Furreidis on his way to prayers at the mosque. Like many others he was not enthusiastic about talking, but in the end he agreed: "At twelve o'clock at night I heard that there is something abnormal, the war had begun. I was then 13 years old and I went to my father and asked him what is all this noise. He told me that there is probably something among the neighbors."

According to him, his father did not feel well and ordered all the members of the family to remain indoors. When he saw that the village was conquered he offered also to his neighbors, a family from Gisser a Zarqa that came to live in Tantura, to stay with us in the house. He knew a lot of Jews from the area and he hoped that perhaps someone familiar from among the Jews would arrive and it would become possible to "Get out of this business".

Indeed, a soldier came to the family house that knew the family well. "You know us now for some 20 years", my father approached the soldier, but he answered: "Don't dare you say something like this, I don't know anyone of you".

"If this is what you say", responded the wounded father, "Don't do us any favors, I don't need anything from you".

The soldier got out of the place to transfer the Massri family to the responsibility of another soldier. This soldier removed Mustafa and another sick youngster from the rest. After a few seconds when they were at a distance of some 15 meters from the house, they heard shots and they understood that they had liquidated the entire family - 12 people. Abu Gamil spoke also of a Jewish commander that wandered in the village streets and shot people just like that, hours after the battle was already finished. "An uncle of mine asked him why he was shooting unarmed people as if they were ducks, but only after a long exchange of words he stopped shooting."

### **"If not for the Zichron Ya'akov people, no one from Tantura would have remained alive"**

A third site where people were massacred, according to the testimony of the Tantura refugees - in addition to the cemetery and the streets - was inside the houses in the course of searching for weapons. The witnesses said that any young man who was caught was interrogated immediately about his own weapon, which was at that time an important and rare item. The soldiers went out with the detainees to their houses in order to collect the weapons that were hidden under the mattresses, the pillows and in other hiding places. The soldiers came out with the weapons but the young men remained inside the houses for ever, said the witnesses.

According to them the massacre lasted for long hours and they treat the moment when it stopped as a miracle.

"The preparations for the executions were almost complete", the Zara couple told Teddy, "when suddenly the Zichron Ya'akov people arrived and rescued us at the very last moment. A great argument between the Zichron Ya'akov people and the soldiers took

place. The army people did not want to give up but the Zichron people, each with a gun in his hand, positioned themselves between us and the soldiers and they insisted that they should not touch any of the locals since they knew all of them from the village. If the Zichron people had been 15 minutes later, everything would have been finished.

“When they took us out of the house”” added Myamar”, we passed by many bodies and the women, especially, started crying bitterly in view of the many dead. They stood the village men in a row like cows waiting for slaughter. While we were still in the village they piled the dead in one pile, a few meters high, they brought a big tractor and dug a huge hole to which they threw the bodies. I am sure that there was an intention to liquidate the entire village and if not for the intervention by the Zichron Ya’akov people there would not have been one live person coming out of Tantura.”

## **"I am not a murderer and I don't have anything to hide"**

One of the Jewish fighters that was interviewed for the research is Mordechai Sokoler from Zichron Ya’akov, today about 80 years old. In the year 1948 he led the Alexandroni fighters to Tantura. This week, in his home in the center of the old town, Sokoler was saying: “We advanced into the village and suddenly we heard shots. One sniper started to shoot at us and hit one soldier. We started shooting in all directions, we didn’t know from where the fire was coming.”



Mordechai Sokoler. “We started to shoot in all directions, we didn’t know from where the fire was coming” • Photograph: Elli Dassa.

**Mordechai Sokoler: "We dug a big hole and laid the bodies there, with the clothes and everything on them, where only the faces were covered and tied up in kafias. Rows and rows, in a huge mass grave. There was no record-keeping of the dead, but I remember that we counted approximately the number of bodies and reached about 230."**

On the next day, he remembered, he saw the tens of bodies lying around in the village. “We dug a big hole across from the railway tracks, in the bottles area (the Mazgegah building that is standing to this day - A.G.) and there, with the help of seven people from Furreidis, we laid down the bodies as they were found, with the clothes and everything on them. Only the faces were covered and tied with Kafias. Rows and rows, in a huge mass grave. There was no record-keeping of the dead but I remember that we counted approximately the number of bodies and we reached about 230.”

These statements, writes Katz in his research, are in contradiction to the testimony of another witness, Abu Fahmi, who stated before him that he himself wrote in two note books the names of the dead and arrived at much smaller numbers. At the same time Abu Fahmi’s testimony related only to the day of the conquest, while several of the interviewees testified that the burial of the dead of Tantura lasted several days. Sokoler remembers how two days afterwards, when the bodies swelled up in the mass grave, a

huge mountain of death grew suddenly in that place. It took two weeks for it to subside again. He is totally at peace with whatever happened in Tantura.

“I am a warrior” he says after 52 years, “and this happened in the course of battle in which we were shot at. We didn’t know from where it came and we shot in all directions. I am not a murderer and I don’t have anything to hide” he adds and emphasizes that there was no massacre in the cemetery and inside the houses as it appears from the descriptions by the refugees.

Katz writes that Sokoler, like other witnesses, was not present in the killing place since it occurred in another sector.

## **"Did you ever see an Arab that will not exaggerate in his stories?"**

Katz tried to expose and understand what caused the Alexandroni soldiers to act as they did. One of the reasons he raised in his research is the fact that one week before the battle of Tantura the fighters underwent a severe trauma. Two of the comrades were found slaughtered inside a vehicle and their bodies mutilated. Katz’s research raises the possibility that this event affected their friends during the Tantura operation.

In an attempt to uncover other possible reasons he approached Elhanan Anani, then 20 years old, who was attached, during the Tantura Operation to Company A, as a scout. 15 years prior to this Anani came to the country, after escaping with his family members from the Nazis. Perhaps because of that, wrote Katz, he searched for explanations to what had happened in Tantura.

In contrast to other fighters from the unit who did not remember a phenomenon of mass killing, Anani told Katz: “Believe me, during very many nights in the years that passed I was preoccupied with the question of what had happened on that day in Tantura. It is possible that what had happened is tied to the fact that in the week prior to that we lost many of our best friends in the battle on Arab Kfar Sabba, and people came to this battle full of feelings of revenge”.

He also said that like in many units, in this unit too, there were soldiers who were particularly bloodthirsty, and at times it was very difficult to control them. “There was also no clear policy with regards to shooting people after their surrender”. In a conversation with him this week, Anani denied these things. “Katz probably confused me with someone else”, he stated and refused to detail what was his version of the events. “You will not hear about what happened there from anyone of the guys. You understand?” With regards to the testimonies of the Arabs he said: “Grandma stories”.

Colonel (Res.) Bentz Fridan, the commander of the operation in Tantura, and later on the commander of the Alexandroni Brigade confirmed that in the battle on the village many of the locals were killed. "This was a war, and in a war - particularly one carried out in urban areas - people get killed. When you see the enemy in front of you, he doesn't have on his body a label in which it is written that he doesn't intend to shoot you. When you see him you shoot him, that was the way we passed from one street to another, and this way, a large number of people got killed".



Bentz Fridan. "These are simply fairytales" •  
Photography: Elli Dassa

**Bentz Fridan, the commander of the operation: "This was a war, and in a war people are killed ... When you see an enemy in front of you, you shoot him. This way we went from street to street and this way also a large number of people got killed."**

Fridan adamantly rejects the testimonies about the mass massacre in the cemetery and inside the houses. "These are fairytales".

Avraham Amir (Tawil), then platoon sergeant, today he is 73: "Did you ever see an Arab that will not exaggerate his stories? When you shoot near him he will tell you about a machinegun, I was among the first to enter the village and if something of what they describe had happened, it would have become known by now."



Avraham Amir. "When you shoot near an Arab he tells you about a machinegun"

**Avraham Amir: "If anything of what is being described had happened, it would have become known by now ... Everytime some saint rises who feels the need to say that the Jews killed the Arabs, why don't they investigate the killings committed by Arabs against Jews?"**

Amir expresses reservations about Katz's research. "Every once in a while a new saint rises who feels the need to say that the Jews killed the Arabs. Why don't they investigate also all the killings committed by the Arabs against the Jews?"

Shalom Netaneli, 74 years old, who describes himself as the first to enter the village, also rejects the claims about a massacre. "We gathered the prisoners, we concentrated them near the Mosque, and there we told them: "Here is the road to Tul Karem, go straight there. Whoever will stray from the road we will shoot him." No soldier shot any civilian to death. It is true that many locals were killed, perhaps even tens in the course of the battle. We passed from house to house and threw inside hand-grenades. If there were women and children inside the houses, obviously they also were hurt. It was not possible to act differently then. It was a war, and in a war there are casualties. Today there are

different methods, with missiles and more precise weapons, but what could we have done then”.



Shalom Netaneli, "In a war there are casualties" •  
Photography: Yehonatan Shaul.

**Shalom Netaneli: "No soldier shot any civilian to death. It is true that many locals were killed ... We passed from house to house and threw hand-grenades inside. If there were women and children inside the houses it is obvious that they also were hurt."**

## **"Not a conspiracy, no silence and also not an attempt to silence"**

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Katz too does not claim that the massacre was planned. According to him there were many fighters who were not aware of the facts that what was done in Tantura was a massacre. For them it was part of the fighting process. This is also the reason that Katz leans towards believing that there was no conspiracy of silence about the massacre in Tantura. "Is it possible to conceive of the existence of a conspiracy of silence among hundreds of people during the 50 years of the existence of the State?" he asks, and answers immediately: "Not a conspiracy, no silence and not even an attempt at silencing. As a result of the many meetings with the Alexandroni fighters the impression one gets is uniform; these people went almost every week to hard and bitter battles, some even critical to a large extent. In them - to the best of their understanding and consciousness - they protected with their bodies the first front-line of the Jewish people in its young State in its first days."

Another bothersome question is why didn't these events - "the catastrophe of Tantura" as one of the survivors defined it - receive a place of honor in the Palestinians heritage? The answer is complicated. It appears that the refugees that remained in the State of Israel chose to forget the trauma, to erase the past and to get as fully integrated in the State of Israel as possible. It is also possible that they were afraid to talk.

With regards to the Palestinians? This is not completely clear. In principle, the Palestinian research, at this point in time, did not devote the appropriate amount of attention to the 423 Arab villages that were erased from the face of the earth during the War of Independence. This is an amazing fact when one takes into consideration that in ten years from now there will not be any live witnesses to these events.

Katz thinks that it is necessary to isolate one village after another and to tell its story. However, his method of research which is based on personal testimonies and also on testimonies that were given 50 years after the fact, raises reservations among historians who prefer to base their research on written documents. Personal testimonies can be inaccurate and include contradictions. Thus for example, based on his own research Katz

is having difficulties in determining the exact number of those killed in the battle. He recognizes that we are talking about at least 200 killed.

From reading the thesis one gets the impression that Katz does not pretend to think that everything written in his research is the absolute truth; after so much time, he also knows, it is hard to know what exactly happened there. "At the same time", he asks, "Can the fact that there isn't anywhere a written testimony to the mass killing in Tantura solve, or even overcome the testimonies of dozens of interviewees who testified about the act from what they have seen with their eyes?"

Because of that Katz preferred to utilize the many testimonies he collected, to cross-reference them one against the other and then to check them against the archival sources and then reach some conclusions. "All the testimonies both oral and written", wrote Katz, should be respected and the person wishing to establish a true version and one that is close to the occurrences themselves, is advised to make use of all possible testimonies wherever they exist. It seems that this modest beginning is a real challenge to additional researchers. If this is the way that this thesis will serve the goal - so much the better".

Katz asked not to be extensively interviewed for this article, and this was his reasoning: "During long months I worked in the preparation of this research and this included dozens of interviews with the Tantura refugees and with several dozen Alexandroni fighters who participated in the operation, and I stand behind the things that are written in the thesis and behind the conclusions which emanate from it.

Right now I am in an organizational phase towards the beginning of my doctoral work. In it I plan to deal with the issue of the refugees of one of the villages in the Karmel; because of that I do not think that it would be right for me to say more than what appears in the body of the thesis."