

Lieutenant General Mashur Haditha al-Jazi, Former Commanding General of the Jordanian Army and Chief of Staff. Interviewed by Ahmad Mansour, 7 October 1999. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.¹

Ahmad Mansour: Peace be upon you and welcome to a new episode of Witness to the Age. We continue our conversation with Lieutenant General Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (former commanding General of the Jordanian Army and Chief of Staff). The topic of today's episode is very important: Karamah Battle. Welcome HE Lieutenant General.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Thank you.

Ahmad Mansour: Battle of Karamah. In the last episode we talked about the events taking place before the battle such as the Feda'i arrival in Jordan and the various Feda'i factions. We talked about how the Jordanian authorities turned a blind eye to these forces conducting skirmishes against the Israelis in order to achieve certain goals such as allowing the Jordanian army to rebuild its forces. Before we speak of Karamah Battle itself. Was the Feda'i presence a reason for Israel to prepare for the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Before we go into the topic if, I may, I want to say that Karamah Battle was the result of the daily confrontation between the Jordanian forces and the Israelis. We conducted training maneuvers and skirmishes against the Israeli enemy which was trying to fortify its positions. The intensity of such actions was increased by the Feda'i activity and by our cover and support for their operations. I want to say something important. Even before this battle there were attempts by Jordanian politicians to force Feda'i activity out of Jordan because it created a form of chaos and confrontation with Israel in the Jordan Valley. They claimed that this activity would cause a new war with Israel which we can't win. The truth is I continued supporting the Feda'i activity and undermining all attempts to force them out or to clash with them. Using my convincing style and my special relationship with the King we continued coordination with Feda'i activity. Things got worse a day or two before the Battle. Brigadier General Kaseb al-Jazi, who was a brigade commander on Salt-Amman axis, informed me that a security forces is surrounding the Fedayeen in the city of Karamah. They had a base there....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Jordanian security?

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Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Jordanian security. This happened without my knowledge. This was the security not the army. I was very angry.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Karamah Battle was on the 21st of Mars 1968?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes. One day earlier there was an attempt....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): We can say the 20th or the 19th?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes, around then. I, thanks to god, managed to transform curbing Feda'i activity to coordination with Feda'i activity. The next on the 21st of March and I want to clarify a point here. Karamah battle wasn't easy in terms of coordination, especially coordination with the Feda'i activity. Through complete coordination with the posts and through covering the Feda'i positions we managed to close all the gaps that the enemy was expected to come through. The reasons of the battle you asked about weren't only limited to the Feda'i activity. I believe that our increasing daily skirmishes with Israel started to disturb Israel....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): You as in the Army had continuous battles aor lets say a battle of depletion?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I created these battles to feed the army; to restore our forces confidence that fighting Israel is not hard. Very often we took the initiative and opened fire on a patrol, a vehicle or an assembly point. This created a nuisance that Israel wasn't used to. Israel thought that after 1967 the whole area would surrender. I think the true causes of the battle are: killing the growing morale of the Jordanian forces, annihilating the Feda'i activity as all their main bases were in Jordan, and occupying the pocket located between the river and Salt heights which would become an area like south Lebanon where pressure would be applied on the Jordanian state to sign a peace agreement and recognize Israel. In my opinion these are the true causes of the Battle. They say the battle was to eliminate the Fedayeen but I think this is inaccurate. Eliminating the Fedayeen in one go would have been difficult except in Karamah. When our forces joined the fight fighting was around our main positions. The advance was on three axes: Nablus-Salt road, King Hussein Bridge to Salt-Amman, and Jerusalem-King Abdullah Bridge-Swaimet Na'our. The Israel goals were clearly occupation not destroying the Feda'i activity.

Ahmad Mansour: This means that this wasn't an Israeli lightning operation to destroy Feda'i activity?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: No. If it were they wouldn't have thrown 30 thousand soldiers, 100 planes and maybe thousands of tanks into the battle. It wasn't a limited battle. It was a battle to occupy new positions, pressure Jordan and destroy Feda'i activity. This way they would reach their real goal. That is a peace treaty with Israel...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): But there are Palestinian sources that affirm that the main goal of the Battle was eliminating the Feda'i activity and liquidating the Fedayeen in Jordan and as you mentioned forcing Jordan to sign an early peace treaty. This happened later on. Some would say that Jordanian knew of the attack?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I deny this. I don't think its true. I believe that this battle was a political and strategic battle. It was aimed at occupying main positions in the Salt Mountains. Israel still regrets not occupying those heights in 1967. As I have mentioned earlier the front had collapsed. Gilad has some historic meaning for them. The Battle was a battle between armies. It wasn't a Fedayeen battle against the Israeli armed forces. If it was like that the entire Feda'i activity would have been destroyed and Israel would have occupied what it wanted. It was a battle between armies. We engaged the mindlessly advancing armed forces and tanks on all axes. The Fedayeen brothers took part in the battle and fought very well in all their positions especially in Karamah refugee camp. There they fought bitterly and lost many casualties. I think over a hundred martyrs. This shows that they were heroes in the Battle. But it wasn't a battle between the Fedayeen and the Israeli army.

Ahmed Mansour: Where you prepared to fight such a battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes we were prepared. We say the mobilization and had complete information from our leadership in Amman of the possibility of a massive attack on the front. We were 100% prepared. I was on top of these preparations. I redeployed my forces on the assumption that we will confront Israeli forces in the morning of the 21st of March.

Ahmed Mansour: So you also knew the date?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes. The river was the only thing separating us. You could see with the naked eye the soldiers or the tank when they moved.

Ahmed Mansour: You could see but how did you know the time of the attack?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The Intelligence said that the attack would be on the morning of the 21st.

Ahmad Mansour: What were the preparations made to confront an army that defeated the Jordanian forces less than a year earlier...?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): As I said as a result of retraining, rebuilding confidence and continuous work for three months we managed to rebuild the soldiers' confidence in their strength, their country and their leadership. I managed to build their confidence in my leadership. I think this is one of the reasons why the soldiers fought. They fought because they believed they are led by knowledgeable commanders.

Ahmad Mansour: As the commander of this battle on the Jordanian front what was the size of your forces compared to the Israeli forces that were observed?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: On the ground they outnumbered us 3 to 1. But more important than this....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): What was the number of your forces and what was the number if Israelis?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Our forces didn't exceed 5-6 thousands. We had three brigades. They attacked with three mechanized brigades, an airborne brigade, an armored brigade, and an artillery battery much larger than ours. It was...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): You didn't have exact information of the size of the Israeli forces entering the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We didn't know 100%.... what was our size in the area.... we only found out from the results of the battle. Their artillery fire was very intense which meant the number was big. The intensity of the tank attacks against us is an indicator of its number. Israel controlled the air completely. The size of the air force was that for a huge battle. Each sortie had around 50 airplanes...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Every sortie?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Every Sortie.

Ahmad Mansour: So you could count the number of the planes in each sortie?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It was a sortie after another for around 18 hours. As a result of entrenchment and belief in resistance and the use of weapons... I gave orders to use ground weapons against their airplanes. Even in their airplanes they were too scared to strike easily. Its known if you fire at an airplane with ground weapons, even with a simple rifle, you could cause an explosion in the airplane more than a canon could. You need to take into account the speed of the bullet and the speed of the airplane. This is how explosions happen sometimes. My soldiers, thank god, used their weapons as best as they could. They were very brave. I gave orders to remain in the trenches no matter what. If we abandoned our main positions Israeli forces could have advanced all the way to Amman.

Ahmad Mansour: Ok. Before the Battle what was the nature of coordination between you and the Palestinian leaders whom you consider some of your main supporters and one of the targets of this attack? What was the nature of the coordination with them? You being a regular army and they being guerilla fighters?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: First of all we were not new to each other. We had been cooperating for months. We informed them that the battle was coming. They also had intelligence that there would a big operation against the Fedayeen, against Jordan and the Jordanian forces. We briefed them on the situation and said that it would be better if we coordinated to protect what can be protected from our forces and yours. I coordinated between them and us...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Whom did you coordinate with on the Palestinian side?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: There were many individuals in the leadership. Abu Ammar was at the head of all the leadership. We coordinated with them and decided that coordination should be made between local commanders. Our fire would cover their positions except for Karamah which we couldn't protect. Karamah was attacked from the air.

Ahmad Mansour: The Israelis made an airdrop on Karamah?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Israeli forces were airdropped on Karamah. Netanyahu himself was part of it. He was the commander of the force.

Ahmad Mansour: Netanyahu was the commander of the force that was airdropped on Karamah?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The important thing is, and this might be new information for you, almost all the Israeli leaders participated in this battle. Most notably Moshe Dayan.

Ahmad Mansour: Who took part in the Battle from the Israeli leaders?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Netanyahu, Barak, and Moshe Dayan the Israel Defense Minister. Dayan on the morning of the attack gathered 300 journalists, some of them told me this, in Jericho and told them “Tomorrow we will drink tea in Salt.”

Ahmad Mansour: This confirms that the Israeli goal of the attack was occupying Salt Heights and....

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Yes. When he says we will drink a cup of tea in Salt, are there any Fedayeen in Salt? Salt is a city like Amman. Salt mountains are the main defense for Amman.

Ahmad Mansour: Does this reflect Israeli arrogance after they won a war on three fronts?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I think one of the reasons of the battle, like the strategic and political reasons, is the Israeli arrogance after 1967. I will prove to you its arrogance. When you attack with tanks they usually move from one position to the other. Their tanks crossed over the bridge at 60 kilometers an hour until they engaged our forces.

Ahmad Mansour: This is approximately the tanks maximum speed?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It is. This indicates that they underestimated us.

Ahmad Mansour: This means they didn't expect any form of resistance?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: They didn't expect any resistance. One of the tanks advancing on the main the main Salt axis...he wanted to drink tea in Salt... was hit near the main entrance to al-Shuna. We found the tank's commander in that tank tied down with wires.

Ahmad Mansour: Lieutenant General how did the Israeli attack in Karamah Battle start? What was your first reaction to this attack?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Commanders usually make sure that all the preparations have been made when they are informed of an attack. I did my duties during the day...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): What was the nature of those duties?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The duties were making sure that my forces are positioned in the right place in case the enemy attacks. I positioned the tanks and the artillery units and I moved units forward. When I returned in the evening I held a meeting for the commanders. I made sure all the preparations are made. I felt ready for when the enemy attacks.

Ahmad Mansour: You were commander of three main brigades that we were on the frontline?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I was commander for three main brigades. The area under my command was 50 kilometers long and 60-70 Kilometers wide; all the way to Amman. This was the frontline if it fell Jordan would have followed. Amman would have fallen to Israel like Beirut did.

Ahmad Mansour: These were your preparations before the battle.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes

Ahmad Mansour: How did the battle start?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I slept well after the preparations we made. We couldn't do anything more. I didn't change anything the positions were the same positions. I encouraged the commanders to hold their positions and gave them orders to lead from the front. The Jews used to mock us saying "Arab commanders lead from the back and our commanders lead from the front." I told them "All officers to the front." Some of them exceeded their orders and fought in the first trenches. This was in violation of their orders. But it was so that we feel....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Militarily the officers shouldn't be in front?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Militarily the commander shouldn't be 100% in the front lines but should be close to the battlefield. They exceeded their

orders and fought in the front trenches. They saw the fighting. This is unusual. There were also orders that our strategic positions will not be abandoned at any price. Except for the advanced forces, which were light forces for warning, who once they engaged the enemy a group of them were allowed to withdraw while the rest continue fighting. Leaving the trenches in our three main positions was forbidden.

Ahmad Mansour: You gave clear orders forbidding withdrawal?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Not to withdraw.

Ahmad Mansour: Even if it led...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Even if it led.... For me this was a life or death fight. Either we stand our ground or we are defeated. For me death is better than defeat especially whenever I remember 1967.

Ahmad Mansour: How was the first shot fired in the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: In the morning I was in the command..

Ahmad Mansour: on the 21st of March?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: My command was in the rear. There I have a place to sleep. We called it the "war command". The command was in the mountain with all the equipment, telephones, maps, staff, etc.... I lead the battle from there. At 5am the staff working that shift informed me "Sir, the first enemy tank is crossing the bridge now."

Ahmad Mansour: 5am?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: 5am. I told him "Open fire." I barely made to the Morning Prayer in time. I remember I prayed, "God, you know they are attacking our right and we are defending our right. I pray that right be victorious over the vicious." After that I went to my command.

Ahmad Mansour: So you gave the order to immediately start firing?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Immediately and then prayed.

Ahmad Mansour: And the battle started?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The battle started with tanks and everything. At 10am they ran into our positions where they met with resistance. It wasn't a walk in the park. Their air force bombed our position heavily. When I saw the shelling I said to myself I caused the annihilation of the army. I started trembling.

Ahmad Mansour: So we can say that from 5-10am the battle was between infantry?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Until 10am we were in a position.... and at 10:30 am we were in the most dangerous position. We were facing aerial and ground bombardment. The aerial bombardment was especially heavy. We didn't take it into account. But thank god whenever I asked what are the losses they would say: nothing, one wounded, or one martyr. The losses were not serious. In the height of the battle I gave orders to the Imams of the mosques to use the speakers of the mosques to call Allahu Akbar. I wanted all the brigades to hear it. We turned to god almighty.

Ahmad Mansour: The Palestinian resources that recorded the history of Karamah...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Yes.

Ahmad Mansour: Said that the Jordanian Army didn't fire any shots until 11am?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I will give you an honest harsh answer. This is a lie. If we didn't open fire at 5am they would have occupied Salt. If the Fedayeen fought the battle along they would have occupied everything. This was a battle between two armies. The clearest evidence of this is that the battle was fought on three main axes. If we didn't open fire like some of the brothers have said, I have some of their interviews, they would have destroyed the Fedayeen and all their bases and achieved what they wanted to achieve. I will say this again this was a battle between armies. With all honesty our brothers in the Fedayeen took part in the battle with great bravery and sacrifice. Jordanian citizens and Jordanian farmers took part in the battle. Even tomato sellers carried arms and fought. Many of them I recruited in a campaign called "tank hunters". Along with the Fedayeen they hunted....

Ahmed Mansour (interrupting): So at this time the Fedayeen probably had RBGs?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: With the Fedayeen.

Ahmad Mansour: Yes.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We assigned them with the Fedayeen.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): You coordinated during the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The Feda'i, the soldier and the farmer carried RBGs...

Ahmad Mansour: During the battle was there strong coordination between you and Fedayeen?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The day before... of course. I told you we turned from curbing them to allowing them to participate in the fighting. We were brothers in arms.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Before the battle were there any confrontations between the Jordanian Army and the Fedayeen?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: There were some confrontations. Some of these confrontations started because of political divisions and disputes. There were some who worked against the Feda'i activity especially those who failed in their political and military careers. They were against my opinion. My opinion was that all weapons should be directed against Israel, Feda'i activity is part of our work, and that Jordanian Forces protects the Feda'i and Jordanian citizens. There were attempts to marginalize and sabotage the Feda'i activity but they all failed. We crowned our unity at the Karamah Battle.

Ahmad Mansour: Your Excellency Lieutenant General if I may ask you an awkward question. There are some who accuse of implicating the Jordanian leadership in this Battle and issuing orders to fight without consulting the political leadership?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: My answer is simple: I didn't implicate anyone. Field commanders do not need permission. He reports what happens. A successful commander needs to fight the enemy and report aggression without waiting for orders. I didn't wait for orders. My strategy is to confront any force that attacks Jordan. I didn't....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): You considered yourself in an open battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I was in an open battle against an enemy. I had to fight the enemy and report to my leaders. If I ask them for permission to open fire or not then I'm a concierge not a warrior. A guard protecting a property would use his gun to protect that property without permission, right? I used my authority which was correct military field combat authority. Waiting to see if there are orders to fire or not was out of the question.

Ahmad Mansour: Now we are at 10 or 11 am and the Israeli air force started conducted heavy aerial attacks.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Heavy bombing.

Ahmad Mansour: and bombing your positions heavily. What were the balance of power and the balance of the battle after five hours?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We were still holding out in our positions. The aerial bombardment affected us. Its effect, because we were entrenched perfectly, was minimal. As a result of the heavy bombardment the entire valley was burning. The fire was 20 or 30 meters high. It was early spring and the fires were spreading all across the valley. The entire area was on fire. Our soldieris' steadfastness and belief in their strength and in the necessity of confronting the enemy was bigger than the heavy bombardment. Before 11am I received a call from his Majesty asking me "What is the situation?" I told him that the situation was very good. In fact the situation at that time wasn't good but I wanted to steadfast. At 11am his Majesty called me again and said, "They are asking for a ceasefire."

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Who are they? The Israelis?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The Israelis.

Ahmad Mansour: How did they ask for the ceasefire?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Through the Americans and the liaison officers.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): 11am?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: 11 in the morning.

Ahmad Mansour: Only 6 hours after the battle started?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes.

Ahmad Mansour: But I think the battle lasted for 18 hours?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It continued because we didn't stop. I said we shouldn't stop fighting until all these forces leave completely.

Ahmad Mansour: You thought the Israeli request at that time was a maneuver?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: No. They were frustrated because we made suffer heavy losses in equipment.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): So the results of the battle started becoming clear after only 6 hours from its start?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes, of course. A big number of tanks were destroyed and we shot down 7 airplanes.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): During this time?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: During the battle. Our people in Jericho in the West Bank saw the soldiers returning from the battle. They saw the losses and defeat on their faces.

Ahmad Mansour: Until 11am did the Jordanian army or the forces you were commanding lose any of its positions?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We only lost the outposts as I mentioned; the reconnaissance and warning forces only. I didn't lose a single meter. I stopped them before they reached our main positions. The clearest evidence of this is that you can see in the pictures 2 or 3 tanks destroyed on every axis.

Ahmad Mansour: There was a strategic point that you mentioned and I just want to confirm it. You said that the main reason for your steadfastness against the aerial attacks was the quality of trenches?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The quality of the trenches.

Ahmad Mansour: In the presence of good trenches the air force can't hit armies directly?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: You need to imagine the following: a pilot can't score a direct hit easily. He can be scary but he can't be 100% accurate. The shrapnel around the trenches can't hit you if you are in the trench. I also placed the tanks in trenches to avoid casualties except for direct hits. I gave orders that the machine guns on the tanks and the soldiers fire against the enemy's airplanes.

Ahmad Mansour: But I think with the introduction of laser-guided weapons this became....

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): These things are new.

Ahmad Mansour: But the reality of the battle was that the quality of the trenches was the main reason...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): The quality of the trenches was excellent. They saved us from suffering a lot of casualties. If you saw the density of the attack and the heavy shelling you would say there would be a thousand or two thousand dead.

Ahmad Mansour: Were there a lot of casualties among the civilians?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Not many. The armed forces suffered 120 martyrs and wounded. This....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): and the Fedayeen?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The Fedayeen around 100 casualties and some were taken prisoners. They managed to break into the area and captured 100 or 200..

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): The Israeli?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The Israelis.

Ahmad Mansour: They captured prisoners from the Fedayeen?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes, through the air.

Ahmad Mansour: When His Majesty informed you...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): The ceasefire.

Ahmad Mansour: With Israeli desire for a ceasefire, what was your response?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: My response was to intensify shelling against them.

Ahmad Mansour: You felt that the battle was starting to open up?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I felt that the balance tilting in my favour. We needed to profit from victory and shell whatever we could shell. We spoiled their evacuation of the wounded and the losses. The Jews always make sure they evacuate their dead and their vehicle in every battle they fight to hide their losses. They still call me from time to time asking about a body of a soldier they lost in Karamah.

Ahmad Mansour: So until now there is a lost body of an Israeli soldier?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: A month ago the leadership called me asking about a body or if there was a body in a certain tank. They sent me the serial number of the tank, a picture of the tank and the serial of the person. I told them I'm not a gravedigger. I fought the battle and don't know where he went. The Israelis asked if they could interview me and I categorically refused.

Ahmad Mansour: How did the battle progress between 11am and 8pm?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Intermittent shooting and the shelling eased. They stopped the ground assault but aerial attacks continued until 8 in the evening.

Ahmad Mansour: Do you think that the aerial attacks continued to cover the Israeli withdrawal?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: To cover the withdrawal and to allow them to evacuate their casualties.

Ahmad Mansour: In the end what was the result of the battle? How was the decision to ceasefire was taken at 8pm?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: They stopped by themselves.

Ahmad Mansour: Stopped firing?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: They declared the ceasefire, withdrew immediately and the shelling stopped.

Ahmad Mansour: You didn't advance?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: No we didn't.

Ahmad Mansour: Your plan didn't include an advance?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We didn't have the capabilities to do so. We didn't have air cover anyway.

Ahmad Mansour: The Jordanian air force didn't participate in the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: As you know the Jordanian, Syrian and Egyptian air forces were all destroyed.

Ahmad Mansour: So the Israeli air cover was strong.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Very strong.

Ahmad Mansour: A strong armored attack

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Strong.

Ahmad Mansour: Artillery.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Artillery, that's why....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): And you only had ground defensive positions.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I was asked this question by a Pakistani commander when he visited me. We didn't ask for their assistance because they are our friends. He asked me "What air cover did you have?" I said, "Nothing." He said, "Unbelievable! What about anti-aircraft and anti-tank guns?"

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Anti-aircraft.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I said, “Nothing.” We had 12 artillery pieces.

Ahmad Mansour: You didn’t have anything against airplanes?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I had 12 artillery pieces only.

Ahmad Mansour: You didn’t have any rockets or anything like it?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We didn’t have rockets. We had conventional artillery which we used to shoot down 7 airplanes.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): 7 airplanes, yes.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: We repelled the attacking forces. This was the result of steadfastness and determination.

Ahmad Mansour: So you think that the Arab Muslim soldier if had the chance to enter a battle...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Even if it weren’t an equal battle they would do great things.

Ahmad Mansour: You estimate that the Israeli forces outnumbered you 1 to...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): to 5.

Ahmad Mansour: 5 to 1?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: If we take the air force into account 5 and maybe even more.

Ahmad Mansour: Lieutenant General have you surveyed the Israeli losses after the battle and had exact figures?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: According to the information we received from outside and from our people in the West Bank around their losses were estimated to be 1200 killed and wounded.

Ahmad Mansour: Almost 10 times the casualties of the Jordanian Army?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes and around 400 vehicles destroyed.

Ahmad Mansour: 400 vehicles?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes, at least.

Ahmad Mansour: This means that the number vehicles taking part....

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Is a big number.

Ahmad Mansour: Did you count how many vehicles where on the ground?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I think nothing less than 100 vehicles on the battle field that we...

Ahmad Mansour: counted.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes. The rest were evacuated by the Jews. Israeli Jews as you know always evacuate their casualties in personnel or vehicles.

Ahmad Mansour: Are there any bodies that the Israeli didn't take..?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): I think one soldier remained missing. I told you about him earlier. The one who was in chains.

Ahmad Mansour: The one who was in chains inside the tank?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes. He was put in inverted chains.

Ahmad Mansour: He couldn't leave the tank and they couldn't take him?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: He remained burnt in the tank. The body was handed over to Israel.

Ahmad Mansour: How did you feel after the battle ended? I mean after 8 in the evening.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I mentioned the losses to you, around 1200. One of the main western newspapers said, "What Israel lost in Karamah Battle equals what it lost on three Arab fronts in the 1967 war." This was a great sense of pride of this critical battle.

Ahmad Mansour: Even though it lasted only 18 hours?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Despite being only 18 hours long. It was a limited battle in location and number of forces.

Ahmad Mansour: What is your military analysis or the balance of this battle in the military confrontations with Israel despite its short period?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I remember the following: President Jamal Abdel Nasser said this about the battle "It was a turning point in the Arab-Israeli conflict between the Arab and Israeli forces." The Russian Defense Minister, who was visiting Damascus at the time, said, "It's a battle that honors the Arab nation" and thanked us. This battle had a very distinctive feature. After the resounding defeat in 1967 comes a force from the same people who were defeated and defeats Israel. It showed that we could defeat Israel in any battle.

Ahmad Mansour: What were the factors and causes of the victory in Karamah Battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: First of all we were prepared and ready to meet Israel on the battlefield. Victory came from our belief that we were defending a scared cause and a stolen country. I think these factors made us steadfast and defeat Israel. This has created a lot of problems for after 1967. Questions were raised about how in 1967 all the armies were decisively defeated especially the Jordanian army. Then this same defeated soldier fights and defeats Israel in one of the most important battles in history.

Ahmad Mansour: This is an important question. How did an entire army that collapsed that quickly and that easy and then most of those who were involved in the withdrawal manage to hold out against a large military force for 18 hours not only not withdrawing but actually winning?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It was the soldiers and the lower ranking officers who fought the battle. The commanders who were defeated didn't achieve victory. They didn't fight the battle.

Ahmad Mansour: Lieutenant General this is an important point. Do you think Victory at Karamah Battle led to a struggle between the commanders of the Jordanian army and the commanders of the Fedayeen to reap the fruits of victory with each side claiming to be the one that achieved victory?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: In my opinion that Karamah Battle and its results are larger than quarreling over it. The goal was to repel the enemy force attacking the Arab world; nothing more or less. Any Jordanian would say the Jordanian army won it without mentioning the Fedayeen. The Fedayeen would say the Fedayeen won it without mentioning the Jordanian army. This kind of political quarreling is shameful.

Ahmad Mansour: Do you consider the Israeli request for ceasefire had a military meaning from a true military understanding of the Battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Of course. About a month ago Barak wrote in his diaries that the Jordanian army taught them a harsh lesson at Karamah battle. He was one of the commanders leading the attack. Their withdrawal and request for ceasefire wasn't the result of their love for Jordan. They were forced to because of the resistance.

Ahmad Mansour: What are the political and psychological results of the battle on Jordan and the Jordanian army?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: First of all the morale of Jordanian army was raised significantly. Jordan's name rose high in the Arab world and support for Jordan and its forces poured in. Support for Feda'i activity increased significantly. The number of volunteers joining the Fedayeen and the foreign aid they received increased. The problems also increased. Their numbers and their problems increased. This is when we entered the final tunnel.

Ahmad Mansour: Before we go into Black September, we will discuss it in more detail in the next episode; in this period the Israeli goal was destroying the Fedayeen force...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): Destroying us.

Ahmad Mansour: And destroying the Feda'i presence.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): The Feda'i presence.

Ahmad Mansour: Had the opposite effect.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It had the opposite effect...

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): The Fedayeen managed...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It created euphoria among them. It gave them a great sense of pride of themselves, a loud voice, and gained the sympathy of the entire Arab world.

Ahmad Mansour: There are some who accuse you, if I may, of being collaborator for the Fedayeen and that you stood by them and supported them against the Jordanian interests?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Thank god that the charge isn't being a collaborator for Israel. They accuse me of being a collaborator for Palestine and Palestine is scared. I wasn't a collaborator as much as I was an Arab who loves Palestine and fights for Palestine and Jerusalem. It is part of our life, religion and belief. What they accuse of is not correct for one simple reason: my love for Jordan equals my love for Palestine. Palestine and Jordan are one country and one blood. I managed to unite the blood and fought side by side. I think this the clearest evidence that we fought honorably for a cause and not for individuals.

Ahmad Mansour: What was the nature of the relationship between you and the Palestinian leaders after the Battle? Did it make relationships stronger and better or did the Battle have the opposite effect?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I think you because of some officials and the envious you misunderstood. I used my credibility to gain the respect of the Fedayeen leadership. I employed this respect towards achieving reconciliation and coordination between the Feda'i armed activity and the Jordanian activity. I think this was a good message. But those who failed to achieve such relationship said, as it was written in some of autobiographies, I worked for Palestine more. Let me ask you this: why did all the Arab countries work and fight for Palestine? Because Palestine is scared.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): But there are...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I'm not a collaborator. I'm a citizen who loves his country. My duty towards Palestine is big.

Ahmad Mansour: Some would say that supporting Palestine was merely slogans and the practical side that you played a role in wasn't wanted on the political arena?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Maybe. I will tell you one of the charges against me that was really funny. Before Black September I was accused of intending

to lead a coup to become Abu Ammar's chief of staff. Why would I do that? Why wouldn't I become the leader? There was a lot of this king of naivety and false accusations. But I tell you Mr. Ahmad its all the result of envy and failure.

Ahmad Mansour: So your success in Karamah Battle turned some people against you?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: It did. I paid the price and still do. I accept it because I didn't commit treason but fought for a scared cause, for a country and for a people.

Ahmad Mansour: You don't regret fighting the Battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I don't regret all the result. On the contrary, I'm very proud of what I achieved on the battlefield, of coordination with Feda'i movement, and of the Palestinian, especially Feda'i, respect for me.

Ahmad Mansour: Despite the success that Karamah Battle achieved it doesn't occupy an important place in the Arab media. This battle restored much of the Arab confidence. Why hasn't Karamah battle been added to the list of Arab victories?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: The people who fought the battle forget to mention Mashhour Haditha. They should be proud of it. I wasn't invited to any of the seminars about Karamah Battle.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): Even though you led the Battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: I didn't even receive the medal of Karamah Battle. They think I don't deserve the medal. It's ungrateful unfortunately. I didn't fight the battle for my clan or my family but I fought for a country and a cause. Despite all of this I'm proud of what I did and don't regret it. I don't regret any of the consequences I suffered after the Battle.

Ahmad Mansour: What was the situation on the arena...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): You asked me about the relations. The relations with our brothers the Fedayeen continued as they were. Outside my military duties I built friendships and exchanged opinions with them. During their battles in Beirut I visited them under fire.

Ahmad Mansour: This is later. I asked about the relationship immediately after the battle. What was the nature of the relationship with the Fedayeen?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: As I said envy and failure by some of the military leaders and politicians made them start a campaign against the Fedai'i presence and against me. They started mobilizing against the Fedayeen arguing that their presence in Jordan was against the Jordanian regime. They spread rumors. Small clashes started growing gradually and eventually became large battles. This brought us to September. I regret what happened.

Ahmad Mansour: The success achieved at Karamah Battle created a form of internal strife?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes.

Ahmad Mansour: It created competition between the Fedayeen and the Jordanian Authorities that led to the tragic events in September...

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi (interrupting): I also want to say I'm to blame as well for the battle. I was...

Ahmad Mansour: You are to blame for the battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Another charge against me. I'm not to blame for the battle. There was envy and jealousy. It started....

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): They wished you were defeated in the Battle?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes, they wished us to be defeated. This is how low their malevolence and shortsightedness got. Ahmad I remember one of my soldiers told me that one of my officers who was standing near one of the axes and saw the Israeli tanks advance said, "Let Mashhour Haditha drive the tanks back." Can you imagine this kind of malevolence during the battle? Until today I never spoke to him about it because I'm bigger than this. I said to one of the brothers, "Let him see the destroyed tanks." It was this kind of envy and hatred.

Ahmad Mansour: I would like you to mention some of the Palestinian leaders with whom you had direct contact. Some of the leaders don't remember you and don't remember your presence in the Battle.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: May god forgive them. Abu Ammar and Abu Jihad.

Ahmad Mansour (interrupting): You coordinated directly with them?

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Yes. Abu Iyad as well. The coordination started with Karamah and continued to the end. If they don't remember this it's their business. I wish them well. This is how the Arab nation is. It forgets those who serve it. It forgets its leaders and those who sacrifice. It's a bad quality.

Ahmad Mansour: Your Excellency Lieutenant general we will stop at a very important and decisive period and unfortunately a black mark in the history of the nation: Black September and what happened during it. You had an important role before September which we will discuss in the coming episode in detail. We will discuss all the events taking place before September and the claims that September was planned and received an Israeli green light. You will give your testimony about the age in the next episode god willing.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: God willing.

Ahmad Mansour: Thank you very much.

Mashhour Haditha al-Jazi: Thank you.

Ahmad Mansour: Thank you for watching. Until we meet again in the next episode of Witness to the Age, Ahmad Mansour greets you.