

“Interview with Nasir Yusuf” in Yakhluḥ, Yaḥyá. *Shahadāt ‘n Tarikh al-Thawra al-Filastiniya*. Ramallah: Sakher Habash Centre for Documentation and Intellectual Studies, 2010 (pp. 73-77 & p.80). Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.¹

This conversation was linked to a friend and a classmate called Younis Abu al-Haija. He was from Kawkab al-Hawa area in Palestine, which was close to our area. We were in the same class in al-Shouna al-Shamalia school. Then we moved together to a school in Irbid. In Irbid he introduced me to his brother who was older than us. His brother was called Mahmoud. He was a man who from the first meeting you would feel that he is a moving, an honest and a pure person who understands the cause in the awareness of someone older than his age. Younis and I were still children when fled Palestine and didn't know anything about Palestine. This man, however, studied in Palestine's schools and fled Palestine a young man carrying in him an early awareness that affected his personality.

They lived in Wadi Arab in al-Shouna al-Shamalia near Irbid. Relations between people at that time were strong. He spoke to us about the cause and its political and revolutionary dimensions using clear and specific terms. He was direct and proposed that we join Fatah. This was in 1964. The man was clear and practical. I told him that I agree in principle. As I have mentioned earlier I had an idea from what brother Abu A'ashour told me but the goals weren't clear. I joined with Younis. I was asked to work in the Jordan valley in the towns of Waqqas, Qlia'at, and al-Manshiah. I was asked to work there since I lived geographically close to the frontline as a resident and as a student.

After a period of time Mahmoud Abu al-Haija (Abu Fathi) told me that they were preparing for a mission inside the occupied land. He asked me to scout the area near the frontline with the enemy. There were national guards stationed in the army's positions in the area. My mission was made easier by the fact that I studied and lived in the area. This made my presence in the area natural. I finished the mission and passed the information I collected on to Mahmoud.

The movement at that time depended on reconnaissance missions; scouting the border areas and finding gaps that they can go through. This meant collecting as much information as possible about the area. I collected information about the area from al-Manshiah to Qlia'at. We moved as

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students going to and back from the school. The presence of our families in the area helped us a lot. They worked as farmers in the region. We could reach the river without raising any suspicions. The most important factor that helped us in our missions was the fact that we didn't have any previous political activities. We recorded everything we saw and passed the information on to the movement.

The movement had also reconnaissance positions in the area north of Wadi Khaled Dam near the Syrian Hemeh. The railroads and the destroyed rail bridge are located there. The area is in the shape of a triangle; a Syrian, Jordanian and Israeli Triangle extending to the outskirts of al-Majame' Bridge towards al-Manshiah. The people there were clans that were related or closely connected to each other. Intermarriages were common between those clans. All the conditions, the people and the factors in the area helped the work.

The first operation, which carried Fatah's name and marked the beginning of its overt military activity, was carried out by Mahmoud Abu al-Haija (Abu Fathi) and a group of brothers led by the martyr Ahmed Mousa. The operation was launched on the 1st of January 1965. In the aftermath of the operation Abu Fathi and the rest of the group were arrested. Ahmad Mousa was killed when on the way back. The operation targeted the Tiberias-A'ilaboun tunnel near the point where the water of the Jordan River is diverted. A brother called Ali al-Lafi and al-Sheikh Sabri participated in the operation by acting as rear support positions. Later on Sheikh Sabri, who knew Galilee area, sent many operations and many groups to that area and supplied weapons to the cells.

The brothers remained in detention for four months or less. As soon as they were released they snuck into Syria. I remained in continuous contact with them and I went to visit them in Syria. I also went on missions to supply them with information.

In the middle of 1965 Abu Fathi and Abu Ali Iyad, may god have mercy on their souls, went on a patrol into Bisan area through Jordan. They attacked position in the area and planted explosive devices. They came from Syria through Jordan and the Jordan valley and then they went into Bisan. There was a settlement called Beit Youssef there. Abu Ali Iyad led the operation and I remember Youssef al-Hayel was among the group.

After this operation the Jordanian security apparatus were deployed in the area. They launched a huge manhunt operation. As a result most of the youth who were known members in the movement left Jordan to Syria such as Turki

Kana'an and Youssef a-Hayel. Abu A'ashour was arrested. The security forces weren't able to capture any of the people involved in the operation.

My involvement in the movement was still unknown to the Jordanian authorities. I went to Syria. The movement had two centers in Deraa area. Up until then I used to go there and return home. In Deraa I found brothers Turki and Mahmoud. The main center was in Mzeireb area. During the unity between Egypt and Syria and as part of the agricultural reform plan that Abdel Nasser implemented a project was started in Tal Shhab and Mzeireb to install a permanent irrigation that would draw water from the Yarmouk River. The project was stopped after the secession. A villa was part of this project. The villa was owned by to the Agricultural Reform Committee. Our Syrian brothers gave us the villa. The villa became a position for Fateh in Mzeireb area. There we conducted our basic and shooting training. The fact that there weren't many people in the area helped our training.

I went to Deraa three times. In some of my visits I used to see some of the officers of the Palestine Liberation Army. One of those officers was Youssef O'rabi who was stationed with the Hattin Brigade in Deraa at that time. Abu Hmeid, another officer, was also there. We used to go to Rasmi Shaker's house. He was a Palestinian. We used to meet with them at his house and give them reports on the situation in our area.

Abu Fathi came to visit me in Jordan with two other people that I can't remember their names. I met them in Wadi al-A'arab Area. They gave us a shipment of weapons. Before he returned to Syria he asked me join them in Deraa.

I followed them to Syria. The Bisan Operation was agreed there and we started preparing for the operation. My role was to guide the fighters from Wadi al-A'arab to Tal al-A'arbaeen area. This was in 1966. Abu Fathi did the reconnaissance for this operation. Turki Kan'an, Youssef al-Hayel and Abu Heshmeh were also members of that group. There were 5 people in total. I brought them a car to use after they crossed the borders on foot. The car belonged to one of my cousins. I drove them over the Wadi al-A'arab dam, behind al-Tal and then to Tal al-Araba'aen. I dropped them at Hussein Abu Juei'd's banana orchid and then returned home. At that time I finished my Tawjihi exams and was waiting for the results, which were due the next day.

The area around Tal al-Arba'aen was very important strategically. Next to the permanent Jordanian Army position was a position for the intelligence for reconnaissance and observation. The intelligence detected he group. They

started firing at the group and pursuing them. During this pursuit Turki Kan'an was martyred. Abu al-Haija was injured and arrested with another person. Abu Heshma and Youssef al-Hayel managed to escape. They hid in a dense farm of sugar canes. At dusk they sneaked through the Zaqlab Dam area.

I remember the next day Hussein Abu Jueid's wife came to our house and told me what had happened. She said that I needed to hide as all of us have been exposed to the authorities. I went to Irbid. I hitched a ride with my neighbor Abu Khaled al-A'lari. We went to the Jordanian al-Hamma where there was a rail bridge between Deraa and al-Hamma. A train used to pass there once every week, as at that time there was rail connection. I crossed the bridge towards Syria on foot. There the Syrian army caught me. I told them I was a member of Fateh and that the Jordanian army was chasing me. I slept that night in the custody of the Syrian army in Hama. The next day I was transferred to Quneitra. There they contacted the movement. Brother Abu Jihad came to pick me up and took me to Damascus. This was the first time I met him. He dropped off at a house called al-Sakhr in Damascus. There was an office in that house and William Nassar was there.

I stayed in the house for a short period. Then I moved to al-Hamma. According to the nature of my job I used to travel to Mzerieb Center in Deraa. All our movement was along the Jordanian borders. The commander of al-Hama center was Abu Ali Iyad.

The military activity wasn't intense at that time. Sometimes at that time, as I was the holder of a valid Jordanian passport, I easily went on missions in Lebanon. On those missions I carried with me leaflets or the movement's statements to be disseminated in Beirut. The movement was clandestine in Lebanon. We used to put the leaflets in specific mailboxes and at specific addresses and return to Syria. In other times I was asked to transport weapons across the Lebanese borders. We used to go to an area called Hammrah just before al-Masna'a area to deliver the shipment. The area was on the outskirts of Northern Beqa'a.

My relationship to Abu Ali Iyad, Abu Sabri, Abu Jihad continued. Brother Abu Ammar was at the heart of all the movements directing such movements with Abu Jihad from Damascus.

There was a military training course organized for us at al-Zabadani Training Camp. The movement had sent a group of its cadres to Algeria in 1964. The group studied at Cherchell Military Academy. They graduated and returned

to Damascus to train the new cadres on what they have learnt in Algeria. The group included Ziad al-Atrash, Manhal Shadid, Fawazi Abu Sakran, and another young man from Hebron I can't remember his name. We went to al-Zabadani Camp to receive training. The Syrians had allowed us to run this course and they also supervised it directly. It was considered to be the first organized course that movement offered. It wasn't only basic and shooting training; professionals taught classes at this course as well. One of those professionals was Hussein al-Haibah who was an officer in the Palestine Liberation Army at that time. We learnt skills in rules of engagement and physical fitness etc....

For me that was the first training course I received. It was a very important course. It equaled a training course that officers would normally receive. It had a very accurate programme that was supervised by the Syrians. After the training course we returned to our positions and continued our activities in Jordan and Lebanon. On the 1st of April 1973 we set out on a patrol. The aim of the patrol was to reach our area in Bisan through Jordan. We went through the Syrian Hemma crossing the destroyed rail bridge on foot and then arriving at al-Shouna al-Shamalia. It took us two nights to get there. The group consisted of Youssef al-Hayel, Abu Moutlaq, Abu Ghandour, Khaled Nghemsih and I. All of us came from the Jordan Valley area. We clashed with the Jordanian Army before we reached our objective. The Jordanians launched a wide pursuit. We divided ourselves into two groups that went into two different directions. One group was caught and the rest returned to Syria.

The Jordanian authorities had intensified its activities near the borders in the Jordan Valley. They also increased their surveillance and harassment of our families.

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A month after the war we were sent to China to join a military training course there for six months. Abu Sabri headed the group. The group consisted of Abu al-Houl, Hani al-Hasan, Hamdan A'shour, Mousa Arafat, Haj Ismail, Abu al-Khil, Abdelaziz Abu Fiddah and Joum'a Ghali and I. We were a group of thirty cadres. We trained at the Nanking Military Academy. They gave military classes with clear principles and clear military thought. The programme was accurate and included all military affairs.

In January 1967 we returned. We found Abu Ali Iyad waiting in the airport. He drove me and on the road told me that I need to prepare to go on a patrol in South Jordan in three days. The objective of the mission was to hit the Israeli Potash factory close of the Jordanian borders. We went through al-Hamara with the help of the Iraqi army that drove us to Amman. The next day brother Younis and Abu Khaled came to accompany us. Abu Khalid worked for the Natural Resources Authority. He drove us in his car to Ghour al-Safi with our weapons. We hit the factory which on the frontline with Jordan. In our way back we had an injured brother and near Karak the Jordanian army arrested us. We remained in detention for three months. We were released 10 days before al-Karama Battle.