

Abu Karoom. Interviewed 2011. Translated by *The Palestinian Revolution*, 2016.¹

We used mules to transport supplies. We had two of them and one was quite wild. It was one of those Shebaa mules that we refer to as *Makwi*. It was unruly and if it decided to go stubborn, there was no way to get it moving as you wished; it would simply throw you off its back and slothfully walk on by. The other mule was different. It had a long mane, just like a horse, and was calm and unbeatably good. We used to tie the two, extending the ropes so that they could graze. We used to bring to them supplies, hay and barley. Food used to be brought especially for them. The two of them used to escape sometimes. How could they run off given the fact that they were tied? Well, we found out that they used to untie each other! We would run after them across Marj al-Zuhour, going all the way from Khuluwat to Marj al-Zuhour. Can you believe the distance? Sometimes we would find them on the way to Shebaa. What's the name of that place...in Chouaia or Ain-Qenya. The young men in the bases there would catch them and then look around for the owners. We would search and find them with the fighters in the bases!

Did you used to visit each other in the bases on party trips and so on?

Yes, all the time. I even had a suit [for that purpose]. I still have it. We used to visit the Popular Front, Fateh, the Democratic Front, all the organisations. It was normal. People would ask each other if they needed anything. For example, when I lacked supplies I would go to the base nearby and ask them. Back when we were planting landmines along Shebaa road, there was a site called Qabr al-Shaheed. It had some Libyans stationed in it, and the person responsible for them was called Abu Sakher. He might have joined the Ashbaal later on... In any case, whenever we lacked anything we would bring it from them, from the guys stationed behind us.

I remember there was an apple orchard right at the bottom edge of Shebaa, exactly at the bottom edge. I don't know if you've ever been to Shebaa or not. Exactly at that edge there was the Shebaa area that both we, and the Israelis, were not allowed to go to. One had to go there secretly. Sometimes the Israelis used to do landings there, and sometimes they would go to buy things from there, descending from their radar station. There was a Syrian radar on one side and an Israeli one on the other... The Israelis were stationed at a few hilltops and we used to monitor them and they used to monitor us. The fields in this area were filled with cows; they looked like Dutch cows. There was a

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really deep valley. Perhaps it was the Leitani River or something like that. I don't remember what was it called, but it might be a tributary of the Wazzani or the Litani.² I don't know, but it was an extremely deep gorge.

There, you would watch the Israeli soldier and he would watch you. You would point at him with your hand and swear and he would do the same. Can you imagine? That was really strange. We went down there once on a patrol, straight to the mined apple orchard. We used to operate on a 24-hour basis, with one group coming and another going. If we received an early warning of an Israeli advance we were ready to detonate the bridge there. That bridge was deadly; if it gets detonated everything on it would fall to the deep *wadi* underneath. The bridge was mined you see and it had previously belonged to the Lebanese Army. Yes the whole road was mined. There were concrete installations underneath the ground and they were filled with mines. Once these were detonated there would no longer be any way for the Israelis to advance. It would be a miracle to be able to pass through this path by land. The only way would be to fly or to use a helicopter. Vehicles could simply not pass if the bridge was detonated...

We were expecting Israeli landings all the time, not the least because the middle sector witnessed many of them. The Israelis would come disguised as shepherds, and some of them would walk with the shepherds and the sheep. It happened with several people. The Popular Liberation Forces and al-Saiqa once faced something like that in the middle sector... As for being on watch duty, it differed, depending on whether you were guarding a site or a base. In somewhere like Shebaa you would sit for four or six hours on the mined road in the midst of the snow. Your legs would be freezing and you would continuously try to get the snow off your clothes. It was like being a German or a Russian soldier [during WW2], walking and making movements with his legs to take the snow off. We were doing the same thing, seriously!

What kind of things did you talk about back then?

We used to entertain ourselves, talking about day-to-day matters. We also had an old man with us and he would tell stories. We would chat about different things. You know...old stories. One would say to the old man: "Isn't this the palace of Antar here above Mount Hermon? Tell us, Abu Ibrahim". That was Abu Ibrahim al-Ghadban from Burj al-Barajneh. We would say "Abu Ibrahim, tell us a story" and he would tell. Once he started, he kept on

² The interviewee is in fact referring to the 16 km long Wadi al-Asal, which is located on the south-eastern edge of Shebaa.

narrating and narrating and you would drink one teacup after the next and would comment on one aspect of the story or the other. Sometimes, what's his name, Ziad Mukhtar, no not Ziad, another one of the guys, would ask him to tell, and then he would give up and say "he won't tell us anything". I would answer back "be patient" and I would lure him into telling a story. I would say: "Abu Ibrahim, isn't the palace of Antar here on Mount Hermon?" He would answer back: "yes my son, it is", and after telling us all about Antar he would move to al-Zeer Salem, and after that he would tell us about the garrison of Sha'ab back in Palestine and its stories during the 1936 revolt. One of the figures of the garrison was called Abu Issaf and there were others whose names I don't recall. He would tell us about them and about how they were taken to Syria, given no more than sticks in the camps, and at the end were stripped of everything and told to go back home.

Did you wash your clothes there?

Of course! Let me tell you something that happened to me. There was a base next to us called Maymas. This was for the Democratic Front, and the Popular Front had stayed there once, but the people who were last there were from the Democratic Front. Maymas had a spring and the Druze there had installed structures around it and there was a pool of water next to which they had planted apple trees. The pool was neglected though and algae and various other things grew there. Sometimes the pool would gather a lot of water as a result of the rain. Exactly next to it there was a fig tree covered with algae, and it had a huge opening inside it that looked exactly like a cave! We would bring a large tin can, one of those that are used for storing cheese, and we would fill it with water from the spring. We would then heat the water and use it for washing our clothes and bathing ourselves. One day, I heated some water and I took a bath under the fig tree. While I was drying off and getting dressed, I suddenly saw a snake. Perhaps it was more than two meters long, or at least a meter and a half or two meters. I shouted "Abdel Razzaq, Abdel Razzaq!" He was an Alawi guy with me. He asked me "what's wrong?" I said: "come, run, there's a snake, a snake!" I shouted as I made my way out. So he came and hit it. We used to make sticks from oak wood. We would shape them on the fire, rub them with oil or gee, and fix them. So he had one of these sticks with him and he poked the snake with it. It opened its mouth and it had such a large tooth! He poked her and it fell. It was humid inside the tree. You know, it was summer but there's always humidity under the fig trees. In any case, the snake came out after he poked it and he then killed it with his Kalashnikov. Afterwards he took its skin out, while it was still moving. He wanted to make a belt out of it but it didn't work out. He didn't

know how to do it correctly. Perhaps he made a mistake by oiling the skin. Maybe he should have salted it instead and not have oiled it at all.

This is one of the incidents that happened to me. In any case, we have now arrived at the events of 1972, what is referred to as the battle of the 4 days. At our base in Khuluwat we were on full alert. We saw the fighter planes very closely. Our area, Wadi al-Hasbani, was high. We could see the Syrian Sukhoi fighter jets...The Syrian planes were going fast and the Israeli planes would go behind them, and we had a Dushka gun on top of the base, and we began to shoot (DoDoDoDoDo). Abu al-Fouz was told the following day that the planes that do more wing manoeuvres are friendly ones, Syrian ones... That day, we started shooting at the planes, and they began doing wing manoeuvres, we had no clue. But the area commander then sent to Abu al-Fouz telling him "you are shooting at friendly planes, these are Syrian planes!" We said "what?" He said, haven't you seen their wing movement? We actually didn't see. The pilot would see us firing from below and he fly higher up! Just next to us, the Democratic Front had a Gun, probably a 14.5, and the Democratic Front or the Popular Front had perhaps fielded 17 units or something like that. Naji Kabuli was also there I remember and he was the commander of the Popular Front sector.

The important thing is that the war started and we went out. Where should we assemble? One could no longer sit in bases. We needed new instructions. We went down with full precaution and we marched with the commander of the group. He called for instructions and they told him to keep the guys on standby in Kfeir. We stationed ourselves in Kfeir and we saw brother Riyad Awad and we liaised with him. They had storehouses in Kfeir, taking weapons from it and bringing weapons to it. In any case, there was coordination with some of the military leaders and they of course moved forward, while we left later. Around that time, we were being dispatched in a Land Rover to Shwaia, Ain Qenya, and these areas to plant booby traps. One time while we were heading off, Israeli fighter jets spotted our Land Rover and began shelling us near Shwaia. We just stayed quiet between the rocks. There was a guy from Fateh called Mahmoud al-Mileigi, who was an artilleryman, this guy could really shoot ... He began firing his gun and kept on going until we finally got out safely. Honestly, we barely made it. What really benefited us was that we threw ourselves outside of the Land Rover and hid between the rocks. The Land Rover was completely filled with bullet holes. Really, our escape from death was miraculous!

At that moment, did you get any news from other sites?

Yes of course. We were going on an official mission and when you go on a mission you carry a radio device. Of course, you can't use radio devices all the time. Sometimes they would disconnect them and they could bomb you if they detect them. However, there were other devices that were more local in range, the "handy" ones. You could use them. But we were not using these devices that much anyways, because there were people coming and going. In other words, there was constant communication.