

Israel Bars Rabin From Relating '48 Eviction of Arabs

By DAVID K. SHIPLER

Special to The New York Times

JERUSALEM, Oct. 22 — A censorship board composed of five Cabinet members prohibited former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin from including in his memoirs a first-person account of the expulsion of 50,000 Palestinian civilians from their homes near Tel Aviv during the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.

In it, Mr. Rabin attributes the final decision on expulsion to David Ben-Gurion, one of Israel's founders and its first Prime Minister, who died in 1973. Mr. Rabin says that some Israeli soldiers refused to participate in driving out the Arabs and that afterward, propaganda sessions were required to soothe the consciences of embittered troops.

The account does not appear in either the Hebrew edition of Mr. Rabin's memoirs or in the American edition, which was published in the United States this month by Little, Brown & Company under the title "The Rabin Memoirs."

Sympathy for Palestinians

Although reports of such expulsions have been published by authors not subject to censorship, Israel remains highly sensitive to the issue, especially when it threatens to bolster Palestinian claims to territory that is now part of Israel. The anxiety is particularly acute at a time of growing sympathy for the Palestinians.

The Rabin account involves two Arab towns, Ramle and Lydda, now called Lod. Both are near the Tel Aviv airport and were in strategic positions when the Arabs attacked the new nation in 1948.

Mr. Rabin was then commander of the Harel Brigade, assigned to eliminate Arab Legion bases along the Jerusalem-Tel Aviv Road. A copy of his manuscript was provided to The New York Times by Peretz Kidron, who translated the book from Hebrew to English.

Under Israeli law, those who have served in government must submit written material to two sets of censors: the military, which cleared the paragraphs in question, and then a board composed of Cabinet ministers and headed by Justice Minister Shmuel Tamir.

'I Can't Violate the Law'

"I was puzzled," Mr. Rabin said of the deletion. "But they decided and I had to obey because I can't violate the law of the country." He said discussing the order with a reporter would also be illegal.

His narrative opens with a meeting that included him, Mr. Ben-Gurion and Yigal Allon, who later became Foreign Minister. The text is as follows:

"While the fighting was still in

progress, we had to grapple with a troublesome problem, for whose solution we could not draw upon any previous experience: the fate of the civilian population of Lod and Ramle, numbering some 50,000.

"Not even Ben-Gurion could offer any solution, and during the discussions at operational headquarters, he remained silent, as was his habit in such situations. Clearly, we could not leave Lod's hostile and armed populace in our rear, where it could endanger the supply route to Yiftach [another brigade], which was advancing eastward.

"We walked outside, Ben-Gurion accompanying us. Allon repeated his question: 'What is to be done with the population?' B.G. waved his hand in a gesture which said, 'Drive them out!'

"Allon and I held a consultation. I agreed that it was essential to drive the inhabitants out. We took them on foot towards the Bet Horon Road, assuming that the legion would be obliged to look after them, thereby shouldering logistic difficulties which would burden its fighting capacity, making things easier for us.

"'Driving out' is a term with a harsh ring," the manuscript continues. "Psychologically, this was one of the most difficult actions we undertook. The population of Lod did not leave willingly. There was no way of avoiding the use of force and warning shots in order to make the inhabitants march the 10 to 15 miles to the point where they met up with the legion.

"The inhabitants of Ramle watched and learned the lesson. Their leaders agreed to be evacuated voluntarily, on condition that the evacuation was carried out by vehicles. Buses took them to Latrun, and from there, they were evacuated by the legion.

"Great suffering was inflicted upon the men taking part in the eviction action. Soldiers of the Yiftach Brigade included youth-movement graduates, who had been inculcated with values such as international brotherhood and humaneness. The eviction action went beyond the concepts they were used to.

"There were some fellows who refused to take part in the expulsion action. Prolonged propaganda activities were required after the action, to remove the bitterness of these youth-movement groups, and explain why we were obliged to undertake such a harsh and cruel action."

Survivors' Reports Confirmed

Mr. Rabin's account does not differ markedly from others. In "O Jerusalem," Larry Collins and Dominique Lapierre described "a calculated Israeli policy" to drive Arab residents from their homes, and they confirmed reports

by some survivors that many elderly people and small children died in the overpowering heat during the forced march.

In both "O Jerusalem" and "Genesis 1948" by Dan Kurzman, the eviction from Lod was attributed to the local residents' opening fire on the Israelis shortly after surrendering. Fouzi el-Asmar, in his book "To Be an Arab in Israel," also documented the expulsion, which he witnessed as a child.

Throughout the rest of the country, however, the pattern was mixed. In some places, the Israelis expelled the Palestinians, while in others they encouraged them to stay. Many left in panic after the Israeli massacre at the village of Deir Yassin outside Jerusalem, which remains a name of infamy in the Arab world.

There, contingents of the extremist Stern gang and Irgun attacked the village and lined men, women and children up against walls and shot them, according to Red Cross and British documentation.

Menachem Begin, now the Prime Minister but then the leader of the Irgun, staunchly denied in his book, "The Revolt," that any atrocities had been committed at Deir Yassin by his followers. He said that the village was a legitimate military target and that the story of a massacre was a "lie" spread by "Jew-haters all over the world."

The New York Times

Published: October 23, 1979

Copyright © The New York Times