

Fighting Occupation in Gaza

One Woman's Story

On the occasion of International Women's Day, we take the opportunity to relate the story of Um Samir. Allow us to call her one of the 'little heroines' - one of the thousands of militants who never made it to the final pedestal of fame, but without whom the revolution and liberation of Palestine would be impossible.

Um Samir is a Palestinian from the Gaza Strip. Militant, wife, and mother of three children, she is as active and devoted to her cause and the revolution today as she was twenty years ago, at the time of the 1967 Zionist occupation of the remainder of Palestine. Here she retells her experience as a militant during the first years of the occupation of the Gaza Strip. This was a shining period in the course of Palestinian struggle. The militants of the PFLP were in command of the Strip at night, despite the Zionist military rule. The outstanding leadership of PFLP political and military commanders at that time was a hallmark in the Palestinian struggle. Especially famous was Mohammad Al Aswad, called Guevara of Gaza for his outstanding role as the PFLP's military leader there at that time.

I am the youngest in a family of five children. Being the only daughter did not make any difference. I was very close to the youngest of my brothers, who was a member of the PFLP.

At the time of the Zionist occupation, I was not politically conscious, but everyone, young and old, was gripped by a fever, a patriotic enthusiasm which pushed us to demonstrate, to agitate against the enemy. I was barely a teenager then, but under the influence of my youngest brother, I was slowly introduced into the organization. I was not very active among the masses; rather I was part of cell, along with a few other comrades. These were the only people in the organization I was ever to know from the time I was recruited until I left the Gaza Strip. We knew each other only by our code names.

My family was never aware of my activities. My brother used to cover up for me so I could carry out my duties. I was entrusted with smuggling arms from one point to another, or hiding them until they were required. Sometimes I was asked to strike up a relationship with families of collaborators to gather information about them.

During that period, the PFLP raised slogans rejecting so-called peaceful solutions with the enemy. It was our duty to paint these slogans on the walls. This had to be done very late at night or very early in the morning. It was the

same when we distributed leaflets. Our enthusiasm never left room for fear, and we would squabble over whose turn it was to carry out a certain task. We would feel a special kind of pleasure when a task was assigned to one of us. Once when I was distributing handbills I tripped over the outstretched leg of a sleeping Zionist soldier who was supposed to be patrolling the street. I was so alarmed that I quickly retraced my steps and distributed the handbills in another area.

Our missions were not especially dangerous; on the other hand, they were not unimportant. I remember once the organization desperately needed a typewriter and a mimeograph machine. Our responsible drew up a plan for us to steal these from a training center in the vicinity. I and another female comrade kept watch, while another comrade threatened to shoot if the principal (who slept at the center and woke up at our sounds) called the police. Luckily, he didn't try anything. This was to our advantage because the pistol our comrade held was damp from having been buried underground. When he tried it later, it didn't shoot! Anyway we got what we needed, and our higher commander, Guevara of Gaza, rewarded us with chocolates. Looking back, I was more concerned with how I was to get back into the house without waking my family, than I was about carrying out the operation.

OPPOSING COLLABORATION

Another mission which was not so successful was an attempt to assassinate Gaza's mayor Rashad Shawwa (feudalist and known collaborator). Our group consisted of four male comrades, myself and my girl friend. For two weeks, we watched him and kept a record of his schedule - when he left the municipality, when he arrived home, what kind of car he drove, and so on. Our plan was to shoot him as he was leaving the municipal building. However, on the appointed day, the area was teeming with Israeli patrol cars, and we couldn't possibly have done anything without being caught. We quickly agreed to change the site of the planned assassination to the area of his home. After he got into his car and drove off, we followed him in two separate taxis. We arrived before he did, took our positions and waited. Shawwa stopped his car in front of his house. Before he got out of the car, our comrades walked over to him and asked for his papers. Shawwa handed them over. Then realizing that they had drawn pistols and were going to shoot, he ducked. The bullets went through the windshield. The other gun did not go off, because the bullets were too damp. Desperate, our comrades threw two hand grenades into his car, but they did not go off either. We all realized that to waste any more time attempting to kill him would be dangerous, so we ran away only seconds before a patrol car swerved into the street. We were all terribly disappointed and were reprimanded by our commander for our failure.

In the early 1970s, the members of the municipal council were appointed by the Zionist authorities. The PFLP was opposed to such appointments, and we decided to threaten these municipal council members with death if they did