

# Felix Beatus<sup>\*)</sup>

The Sh./10<sup>1</sup> was the first armoured battalion of the IDF. It was founded in 1948 by “The Old Man” the deceased General Yitzchak Sadeh, one of the creators of the *Palmach*<sup>2</sup> field companies [viz. commando arm] of the *Haganah*. The [battalion’s] first commander was Major Felix Beatus, who spoke only Polish and Russian.

Felix Beatus himself came to Palestine from Szczecin (next to Częstochowa<sup>3</sup>), Poland, in May 1947. When the Red Army invaded Poland [in 1939], in accordance with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, Felix fell captive to the Russians. In the questionnaire that he filled out, he put down his occupation as “driver-mechanic”, as experienced Jews, who told him this profession surpassed others as far as the readers of the questionnaires were concerned, had advised him to write.

And, indeed, just ten days later, he was summoned to repair a Citroën motor car belonging to a high official of the NKVD<sup>4</sup>. Beatus rummaged about in the Citroën’s insides, without being able to tell right from left. The car [then] started up quite spontaneously and was again deemed fit for travel. Beatus was released from captivity, but his questionnaire was not lost. In 1941, when German troops invaded the Soviet Union and [General] Guderian’s tanks<sup>5</sup> were storming towards Moscow, Beatus was drafted into the Red Army and sent on a course for tank drivers. At first, he drove a light T-27 tankette and, later, a T-34 [medium tank]. In a T-34, he fought at Kremenchuk, Chutovka, Połtawa and Charków<sup>6</sup>. In 1943, he was a tank [platoon] sergeant in the Red Army.

In 1943, the Soviets began to build up their exiled Polish Army. Felix, having become an officer, was sent to study for six months at a commanders’ academy and [then] sent out to fight in the ranks of the Polish Army<sup>7</sup> at the Lenino Front, near Urzeczce [Belarus]. He completed his service in the Polish Army as commander of a tank platoon, with the rank of Major.

Be that as it may, in 1947, he was the Jew most experienced and knowledgeable in armoured warfare in the entire Land of Israel. Yitzchak Sadeh had the foresight to comprehend that the State of Israel would [only] rise through war and a modern war at that. There were no tanks, but [nevertheless] Felix Beatus lectured at the *Haganah*’s squad commanders’ course in Jo’ara<sup>8</sup>. The course’s commander was Bar-Lev, who would, in the future, become head of the IDF Armoured Corps [in 1957] and Commander in Chief [of the IDF in 1968].

Beatus lectured in Russian and his words were translated to Hebrew. Despite speaking Polish perfectly well, he only knew the terminology [pertaining to] tanks in Russian. In 1947, “The Old Man” and Beatus founded the first armour school.

---

\*) From the book “*The Tanks of Tammuz*” by Shabtai Teveth.

<sup>1</sup> [TN: 10/10 in the original; reference to the IDF’s 82<sup>nd</sup> armoured battalion.]

<sup>2</sup> [TN: Acronym of Hebrew “*plugot machatz*,” i.e. storm troops.]

<sup>3</sup> [TN: Szczecin is, in fact, at a distance of 425.8km. from Częstochowa. Beatus did arrive in Palestine from Szczecin, but he had been brought up in Częstochowa, to which his family moved in his youth from his hometown of Kalisz.]

<sup>4</sup> [TN: The People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs, viz. Soviet Home Office.]

<sup>5</sup> [TN: The 2nd Panzer Army.]

<sup>6</sup> [TN: All in Ukraine.]

<sup>7</sup> [TN: The Polish First Army, aka “Berling’s Army.”]

<sup>8</sup> [TN: A hilltop in the Carmel Range of Northern Israel.]

Today, Felix Beatus is the manager of the Egged Tours<sup>9</sup> station at the [Ben-Gurion] airport in Lod.



---

<sup>9</sup> [TN: A subsidiary company of the Egged Bus Cooperative.]