

Mordche (Motek) Sztorchain



Motek Sztorchain

He was born in 1919 in Dąbrowa¹ to his father Abram Sztorchain - a well-known *Mizrachi* figure in town - and his mother Cypora Fajfkopf.

When he was three months old, he lost his father Abram z"l and, with his mother, moved to his grandfather Pinches Fajfkopf's house in Żarki. He was brought up at his grandfather's for years and became imbued with the spirit of Zionism which pervaded this house.

A cheerful and lively boy, he displayed the qualities of a leader in society. Already as a schoolboy, he stood out as the leader of groups of children. When he was [a little] older, he joined the *Ha'Shomer Ha'Tzair* cell. There, too, he distinguished himself for his vigour in all areas of his activity. His cheerfulness and jocularly never abandoned him. On one occasion, when he was a pupil in the first year of primary school, before receiving the reports, he said to his mother jokingly, "In one subject I'm sure to get an excellent grade - in Tomfoolery!"

At the age of 16, he made *Aliyah* together with his mother. This was following his sister's death. In the Land [of Israel], he wished to continue his studies, but was unable to do so due to the lack of financial means. He was his mother's only provider. Over the course of time, he devoted himself to the profession of mechanics. At this point, he came into contact with the *Haganah* and engaged in the repair of weapons. In time, he became very active in the *Haganah*. He distinguished himself there also and, at a very young age, reached the rank of commanding officer.

His educational level and spiritual development were limited but, within a short time, it was as if he had grown wings in the Land of Israel and unimagined spiritual powers were revealed in him - courage, alertness and a passion for knowledge and progress. He lived life with every fibre of his soul. He dreamt of living in a *kibbutz*, but could not fulfil his dream due to his family circumstances. In the *Haganah*, they recognised his manifold talents and gave him tasks laden with responsibility. He was always sent to the most perilous locations - the [Jerusalem] Old City, [Kibbutz] Ramat Rachel, Motza, etc.

During the events of 1936 [viz. the Arab Revolt], he was sent to the Tel Mond area, where murderous Arab groups were operating and there he was made commander of a company of Ghaffirs². He faced the dangers with ferocious bravery. The Arabs knew him well and recognised the man with the upraised, fair-haired head as the one who galloped his mare in the nights, instilling terror in them. He was wounded twice in the course of these operations, but his family only learned of these details from his comrades after his death.

¹ [TN: There are a great many localities in Poland thus named – it is unclear to which one the author is referring here.]

² [TN: From the Arabic term meaning "guard"; ref. to the Jewish Settlement Police (JSP), which operated in Mandatory Palestine under the auspices of the British military.]

One recalls the hunt for illegal Jewish immigrants during the [British] Mandate and how tense things were in those days in the Land [of Israel]. Among those who broke into the government building in Jerusalem in order to destroy the material on the illegals - was Motek. Tall of stature and fair-haired, he looked like an Englishman and, as an Englishman, was how he was described in the press. The British police went ballistic and detained a large number of youths as suspects. At that very moment, Motek was standing guard not far from the scene of the event. Seeing him thus, I was filled with anxiety. All my pleading with him to be gone from there was to no avail.

Fanaticism was one of his traits and, if he believed in the rightness of the deed, he was willing to make any sacrifice and was not deterred by any perils.

His guileless character, his exceptional qualities, his noble spirit, his warm heart, his eagerness to help - all these drew one's heart [to him].

He fell not in battle, but at work in the Dead Sea - and he was just twenty years old. The *Haganah* commemorated his death and he was entombed in Kibbutz Ramat Rachel, alongside the graves of the *Haganah's* fallen combatants.

Those who knew him intimately will treasure his memory in their hearts.

Eliszewa