
A BOMB IN THE HEART OF THE EMPIRE

The fact that Begin was a political leader greatly affected the underground from a military aspect. Unlike the commander of Lehi, Begin prohibited Etzel members from carrying weapons outside the framework of their operations, claiming that the benefits of carrying a gun were outweighed by the likelihood that a British police officer would open fire on an armed Etzel member.¹ Similarly, he stuck to the principle of the “open underground”: most Etzel members continued to provide for their families while being active in the organization. It seems that due to this principle many Etzel members were spared incarceration; upon being detained for a check by the British, they would present legal identification documents and would be immediately released.

Even in his private life Begin differed from the Lehi commander. He continued to maintain his family life under a false identity, either because he had had enough of forced separation from his wife during his imprisonment or because he found it so utterly unbearable to live in seclusion. But his family paid the price for being part of the underground organization. Batya Eldad, Aliza’s friend, did not dare tell her that her son Benny might be harmed by this kind of life.² The mysterious aura surrounding his father prevented Benny from connecting with children his age. He was considered a stranger, weird and peculiar, and he spent most of his time secluded in his room. He longed for social interaction and would pounce on any visitors to their hideout, calling them “uncle.” Betzalel Amizur, one of the Etzel headquarters officials, never visited Begin’s house without a gift for Benny, giving the boy great joy.³ The members’ nicknames confused Benny; Livni,