

LORNA WINGATE: *Christian* **WOMAN** *of* **VALOR**

IN ISRAEL'S TIME OF NEED

BY DR. MICHA'EL MOSHE TANCHUM

At its moment of birth in 1948, Israel was attacked by the armies of six Arab nations. As the fledgling Jewish state fought for its very existence, a determined thirty-one year old, Christian woman arrived in Israel to stand with the Jewish people in their most pressing hour of need. When asked by a reporter why she left the quiet comfort of her home in Aberdeen, Scotland, she responded, "It's a lot harder for a friend of truth and of Israel to sit in quiet Scotland and to read the non-quiet things going on in Israel, than it is to be found here on the front." This woman of valor was Lorna Wingate. She was the widow of the legendary British army officer Orde Wingate. Called Ha-Yedid ('The Friend') by Israel's founding generation, Orde Wingate had helped shape the self-defense organization of Jewish farmers in pre-independence Israel into the first Israelite army since the time of Maccabees. [See "Orde Wingate: A Christian among the Heroes of Israel" in *The Torch*, Fall 2011]. No less than her husband, Lorna Wingate embodied the words of the Prophet Isaiah, "For Zion's Sake, I will not keep silent."

Lorna Elizabeth Margaret Paterson was known for her intelligence and strong will as much as she was for her striking beauty. She had finished high school and was preparing for her university entrance examinations when she fell in love with the courageous Captain Wingate — a man known as much for his deep Christian piety as for his extraordinary military acumen. "He was a Bible man," Wingate's Hebrew tutor in Israel later recalled. "This Book of Books accompanied him everywhere." In Lorna, Orde not only found a partner whose advice he valued, but also his cherished companion who matched him in faith and commitment.

The couple married in England in 1935 and moved to then British Mandatory Palestine one year later where Orde was posted to assist in protecting British assets. The sight of Jewish farmers in the Jezreel Valley and the Galilee working the land of their Biblical ancestors

exercised a profound effect over the couple's minds and hearts. Orde and Lorna became devoted Zionists for the rest of their lives.

In the Holy Land, the Wingates became participants in history. It was the time of an Arab campaign of murderous violence against the Jewish communities in the British-controlled territory. The Arab terrorist war escalated until 50 members of the Jewish community were being murdered every month. Although the Jews possessed a self-defense force, the British outlawed it because they feared the political consequences of an independent Jewish fighting force. Orde Wingate refused to accept this situation in silence. Wingate gained permission to create a British-commanded Jewish force, the "Special Night Squads" (SNS), and trained groups of Jewish soldiers to take the fight to the terrorists on their own turf. Wingate established his SNS base at the farming community of Ein Harod—the Spring of Harod—from which Gideon's men drank at the foot of Mount Gilboa. Like Gideon, Wingate encamped there with a few chosen warriors. Yigal Allon, a young man born on a Jewish farm in the Galilee, later to be a Lieutenant-General in Israel's War of Independence, recalled his esteemed commander: "With the eye of the spirit, he saw himself as a modern Gideon, operating in the very same terrain where Gideon fought."

With the outbreak of World War II looming in 1939, Britain promulgated its notorious White Paper that restricted Jewish immigration to Israel for the next five years and forbade it altogether thereafter. Violating its 1917 Balfour Declaration promise to assist in establishing "a national home for the Jewish people," Britain instead established a naval blockade to prevent thousands of Jews escaping the Nazi concentration camps from making their home in Israel. Taking a dim view of Wingate's Zionism, the British dismantled Wingate's headquarters at Ein Harod and ordered him to leave Israel. In his final address to his Jewish fighters, Wingate declared, "I am

sent away from you and from the country I love...I am transferred because we are too great friends...But I promise you I shall come back."

But Wingate was never to return. The British posted him to Ethiopia, where he formed a brigade of native African troops that helped drive out Mussolini's fascist forces and restore Emperor Haile Selassie to power. With Ein Harod still in his heart, Wingate called his brigade the "Gideon Force." Posted next to Japanese-occupied Burma to fight behind enemy lines, Orde was far from both Lorna and Israel. He wrote to his wife, "I am feeling very much at the moment 'Im Eshkohekh Yerushalayim, Tishkah Yemini,'" the Hebrew words of Psalm 137:5: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its skill." Orde continued his letter to Lorna, "pray that our lot takes us there together to the place and the work we love." Tragically, Orde died in an airplane accident in 1944, four years before Israel's miraculous victory in its 1948 War of Independence.

Yet, Lorna did return to that place and continued the work which they loved. And, for Zion's sake, she too refused to be silent. In 1945, she traveled to North America and spoke forcefully before both Jewish and Christian organizations on the need to assist Jewish women and children who had survived the brutality of Nazi Europe re-settle in their ancient homeland. Such people were still prevented from landing on Israel's shores by the might of the British Navy. In Canada, she urged the women's organization of the Church of St. James to press the Canadian government to request that Britain abide by its promise in the Balfour Declaration. With impassioned eloquence, she explained to her audience that it was a Christian issue no less than a Jewish one, asserting that if the people of Israel were not allowed to return to their homeland the democratic and Christian peoples would be the ones to suffer.

On November 29, 1947, the United Nations was scheduled to vote on a resolution to partition British Mandatory Palestine, which included establishing of a Jewish state in part of Biblical Israel. Knowing that every member's vote would be critical, Lorna Wingate wrote to the Emperor Haile Selassie to prevail upon Ethiopia to support the establishment of Israel. Although her husband's troops had helped restore Selassie's rule, Ethiopia had to consider its powerful northern Arab neighbors — Egypt, which would lead the assault against Israel at its birth, and Sudan, which officially remains in at war with Israel to this day. In a personal letter, Lorna implored the Ethiopian emperor, "It's quite possible that the fate of the

world hinges on the UN's decision regarding the land of Israel. In the name of [Orde] Wingate, I implore you to rise up again in history as a man of destiny [and support the State of Israel]." Ethiopia abstained and thereby did not add its vote to those opposed to the establishment of the State of Israel.

"I AM SENT AWAY FROM YOU AND FROM THE COUNTRY I LOVE...I AM TRANSFERRED BECAUSE WE ARE TOO GREAT FRIENDS...BUT I PROMISE YOU I SHALL COME BACK."

The UN resolution passed and six months later on May 14, 1948 Israel declared its independence. Many of the men that Orde trained were now leading the newly created Israel Defense Forces (IDF) in the fight for freedom. When Lorna learned that a group of Orde's men were about to face a desperate battle, she decided to give them Orde's Bible, believing it would inspire the men as it always had Orde. According to the version of events at the Ein Harod museum where Orde's Bible is proudly displayed, Lorna flew over the battle scene and dropped Orde's Bible from the plane to his former soldiers camped below.

In 1949, as a victorious Israel opened its gates to Jews from around the world, Lorna co-chaired the World Youth Aliyah ('Ascent') movement, which engaged in the vital work of bringing tens of thousands of Jewish youth to live in Israel. She was a tireless champion for the right of the Jewish people to live in their reborn country. "Youth Aliyah," as Lorna explained in a 1953 speech, "has drawn tens of thousands of Jewish and non-Jewish women throughout the world in the closest ties of brotherhood in an effort to save the lives of 62,000 children in the past 20 years." In same year, Lorna helped establish the Yemin Orde ('Memory of Orde') youth village atop Mt. Carmel, which today educates over 500 immigrant youth in Israel.

In the spirit of Orde and Lorna Wingate, the Yemin Orde Educational Initiatives (YOEI) operates an Orde Wingate preparatory program in the Upper Galilee to provide young Israeli immigrant men with the leadership skills necessary for service in the IDF and later in civilian life. Three serving IDF colonels are Ethiopian Jewish immigrants who graduated from this program. YOEI now plans to establish a Lorna Wingate preparatory program for young women, a fitting honor for a woman of valor in Israel's time of need. ■



Dr. Micha'el Moshe Tanchum is a scholar of Zionist thought and the history of Israel's founding period. He is a fellow at the Shalem Center in Jerusalem, Israel where he is writing a book on the ideals of Israel's leading founding father, David Ben Gurion. Dr. Tanchum would like to express his gratitude to Dr. Chaim Peri, director of Yemin Orde Educational Initiatives, and especially Malka Klein, for their assistance.