



# Murder Over the Border

by Richard Steinitz

## Foreword

This is a work of fiction, and should be read as such. Certain events described here did take place and some of the facts are true, but many others are the figments of my imagination. To the best of my knowledge, the overwhelming majority of minor events described here never took place, and certain locations are not exactly as described.

However, Jerusalem and the Sea of Galilee are as I described them, as are Amsterdam and the Arava. And the antelopes do wander the slopes of the Galilee Hills and the Golan Heights.

## Murder over the Border

### I

Through the lens he saw the little antelope approaching. Its markings were perfect, with two little pointed ears standing as if antennae. As he thought of the word “antennae”, it raised its head, as if it had heard something.

As the antelope started to move, he squeezed his trigger finger ever so gently, and with a slight click, the animal was his, captured forever on the black and white film. The antelope ran off, having heard the sound of the Nikon being wound on, and Lt. (Res.) Yossi Abulafia put his camera down.

He turned back to what he was supposed to be doing – watching the highway on the Jordanian side of the border. It was boring work, since there was little traffic on the road that leads from Irbid on the Jordanian plateau down the rift valley to Aqaba. Once or twice an hour, a vehicle would drive down the road. If it was a military truck or Land-Rover, he would check the markings painted on it against his list, and mark down: “two-ton truck, 15th infantry division, heading south”, or “Land-Rover, 2nd Armored Corps, heading north”, or something like that. This was supposed to be one way that Military Intelligence had of checking Jordanian army movements, but no one seemed to take it very seriously.

Abulafia didn't really have to be where he was, doing such a boring job. As a Commander in the Jerusalem Police Department (Murder Squad), he was exempt from the yearly stint of military reserve duty that all Israelis between 21 and 55 were called upon to perform. However, he had voluntarily given up his exemption, for several reasons. Officially he had said that he felt that if all his fellow-citizens had to do reserve duty, then he saw no good reason for policemen to be exempted. The real reason was that he enjoyed getting away from police duty for one month a year, while not being on holiday with his family. He found that it helped clear his mind of all sorts of rubbish that accumulated over the year, and when he returned to the police department after military service, he was much better at his job, at least for the first few months.



The regiment he served in (and had served with for the last twenty years, through three wars and countless tours of reserve duty), had for the past five years done its service here on the Jordanian border. It was relatively easy duty, with groups of ten to fifteen soldiers being stationed in little fortifications that were strung along the border like beads on a string. At night they watched the border for infiltrators, using star-light scopes and infrared equipment, and during the day they kept tabs on the soldiers of the Arab Legion. All day long they would write down the movements of the Jordanians, and every day or two someone from Intelligence would come by and collect the reports. Presumably the Legionnaires on the other side were doing the same.

There was a bonus to the service. Four years earlier, Yossi had been stationed at Charlie Post, which sat on a little hill near the triangular border between Israel, Jordan and Syria. During his daytime shifts, he had become bored, and when not looking across the border, had noticed a flock of antelope that wandered over the hill and approached one of the lookout posts. Due to the inside ring of barbed wire that surrounded the fort, they couldn't come up to where he was sitting, but they came within about fifty meters. The minefields between the inside ring of barbed wire and a second one further out didn't bother the little animals, as they weren't heavy enough to set them off. The telescope that was supposed to be used for watching Jordanian trucks could be turned just enough so that he could get a close-up view of the antelopes and what he saw had changed his attitude to wildlife forever. Whereas before he had been, if anything, disinterested, he was now totally and completely enraptured by the beauty of the little beasts. Between tours of reserve service he had begun to read up on the antelopes, invested in an expensive camera and long telephoto lens and when on duty, spent (if the truth be told) more time watching the animals than the Jordanians.

As a lieutenant and titular commander of the little post, he was not required to do the daily surveillance shifts, but he would relieve one of his soldiers for a few hours every day, in order to be able to watch the animals. Each year, when Abulafia reported for duty, he asked for, and received, posting to that particular fort, and now after five years, he knew most of the antelopes by sight, each with slightly different markings, and rejoiced in the new kids that were added to the flock each year. His office in the old Police Department building in the Russian Compound in Jerusalem was covered with photographs of the antelopes, and his colleagues joked with him that they had replaced the "Wanted" posters that should have been

there.

On this particular day traffic had been extremely light, and Yossi had spent even more time than usual watching the antelopes. After the last “shot”, which he hoped had captured the head of a particularly beautiful doe, his conscience awoke and he returned, albeit regretfully, to watching the Jordanian highway. Since it was already the end of November, light would fade fast in the afternoon, and he hoped there would be some movement of Legion cars or trucks which he could write down in his report. Otherwise it would look suspiciously blank, and he would have another argument with the particularly unpleasant lieutenant from Intelligence who picked up the daily reports.

He looked out over the sandbags that formed the edge of his post and started scanning the highway without using the telescope. His eyes were still good enough at 45 to see if there were any vehicles on the road, though he needed the scope to identify their make and unit. From the top of the plateau, he saw a vehicle begin the long and winding descent. Before he could identify it, it slipped behind a small hill and he knew that it would take another minute or so before it reappeared. Yossi had just enough time to see that this was a civilian vehicle, which was unusual though not unheard of. Most of the farmers in the area were too poor to own cars, though there were some that had managed to scrape together enough dinars to buy an old banger and somehow keep it running. This one did not seem to fit that description, and when it reappeared from behind the hill, Yossi saw that he was right.

The car was about one kilometer away from him (as the crow flies) but he could already see that it was a new and expensive one – probably a BMW. His curiosity aroused, he reached for the telescope to have a closer look and in his haste knocked it over. The confines of the outlook post were so small that he knew it would take him several minutes to get it set up again. Remembering that he had a camera with a telephoto lens, he picked them up, and began searching the descending highway. Near the bottom where it leveled off, he caught up with the car. As he managed finally to focus on the moving car, it popped into view and he saw that it was indeed a BMW. A metallic gray model, expensive looking, similar to but even larger than the one his friend and neighbor Yehiel the lawyer had.

Some *falah* he thought to himself. No peasant from the Jordan Rift Valley could afford

a car like that – it represented the equivalent of a lifetime's earnings for the average farmer in this part of the world. It must belong to some bigwig from Amman, perhaps an absentee landowner visiting his property. Or maybe some son of the land, who had moved to the big city and made his fortune.

As the car reached the bottom of the descent, he waited for it to pick up speed for the slight incline that led to the straight road that followed all the way to Aqaba. But to his surprise, the car slowed down and as it reached the curve at the bottom, instead of continuing on, it slowed down and came to a stop at the lowest point. The driver pulled off onto the right shoulder. It was then that Yossi saw that there was a passenger in the front right-hand seat. For a few moments, no one moved out of the car, and then both the driver and his companion got out and walked over to the edge of the shoulder. From here both looked down on to what was at this point a narrow stream of no more than two or three meters width, which would further south become the sluggish, muddy and shallow Jordan River.

Between the two men from the car there developed a discussion that quickly became heated and extremely vocal. From his vantage point over the border, even though it was some 800 meters away from the pair, Yossi could hear the sounds of the exchange, but could not make out what they were saying. They were arguing fiercely, and it was obvious that this was serious. They were now yelling at each other, pushing at one another with pointed fingers, as if to drive home a point.

The passenger turned his back to the driver, as if in disgust, and began to walk back to the car. The other man reached under his jacket, and ... there was a gun in his hand. He called out to his companion, and the second man stopped and turned around. The two were now facing each other, shouting, and then it all began to happen at once.

Yossi had been leaning over the edge of the post, as if every centimeter he got closer to the argument would help him hear and see better. He leaned a little further, balancing the long lens in one hand and holding the body of the camera with the other. The early winter rains must have loosened one of the sandbags, for as he leaned over, the wall supporting the post began to collapse. At the very same moment that the driver pointed the gun at his retreating passenger, the entire structure of the outpost disintegrated. Everything that had been in the

little position, including the large telescope, Yossi, his camera and the long lens began to fall down the hillside. The scope had a slight head start over Yossi but must have been slowed down by something, for they met half-way down. The last thing he remembered was the huge lens coming at him, and then everything went blank.