**THE MOSSAD DIARIES:**

**“Operation: Cast Lead” (2008-‘09)**

**Episode 3 of 6, of Mossad missions, as**

**told to photojournalist Dennis F. Stevens**

**by Rachel Mordechai, a recently retired**

**Mossad and Sayeret Matkal commando.**

**A 120-minute TV Miniseries Episode**

**Story by:**

**Dennis F. Stevens & Rachel Mordechai**

**Screenplay by:**

**Dennis F. Stevens**

**(Member: WGA, West)**

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**SYNOPSIS**

**Memo to Christine R. Graham:**

**In reading Rachel Mordechai six recently declassified diaries consisting of Mossad missions in which she participated, I’ve chosen for episode three the one entitled *Operation Cast Lead a*bout the Israeli airstrikes on Gaza from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009.**

**Her participation in the mission occurred early on, before 27 December. She and other Mossad agents covertly entered Gaza in order to pinpoint potential targets by obtaining the PGS coordinates of the said targets. She would remain in Gaza City relaying coordinate corrections and causality assessments to the IAF via cell phone – which if caught with, she would have been executed by Hamas.**

**The information dealing with this part of Operation Cast Lead was only declassified in 2019.**

**Without IDF cooperation and assistance this episode could be very expensive to film. But with IDF cooperation and assistance comes access to actual film footage of practically the whole operation, including the F-15 air strikes; some views from inside the cockpit. Other stock footage can be purchased from photojournalists and media sources covering the operation from inside Gaza. No actual filming inside Gaza or the West Bank will occur. Instead, those scenes would be filmed in Jordan. Filmed in a documentary style, in Israel and Jordan, using an Israeli film crew, I estimate the budget for this 120 minute truly exciting episode to be (approximately) between $1.8 and $3 million, depending upon the cast.**

**The Israeli government, headed by Ehud Olmert, decided to launch *Cast Lead* after a large scale, prolonged barrage of thousands of Qassam rockets on the towns and cities near Gaza. For many months, residents of the area had lived in fear, forced to sleep in safety rooms and bomb shelters. It was an absurd situation; no other nation in the world would have accepted being subjected to the daily firing of rockets on its civilian population. The cease-fire that had been reached via Egyptian mediation in June 2008 had collapsed, and Israel’s southern region was subject to a real war, in which Palestinians fired rockets, Israel responded with bombings by the air force and the pattern continued. The residents of the south were paying the price.**

**The objective of Cast Lead would be to end the Palestinian missile fire, destroy Hamas operational abilities and prevent its rearmament.**

**Rachael Mordechai wrote in her diary:**

**Israel began planning for a military operation as early as six months before the conflict by collecting intelligence on potential targets. The IDF also engaged in a disinformation campaign to give Hamas a false sense of security and to take them by surprise. Defense minister Ehud Barak stated that the offensive was the result of Israel's "patience running out" over the rocket attacks, which had been restarted by Hamas after Israel destroyed a tunnel on 4 November. According to Israeli officials, its subsequent 27 December offensive took Hamas by surprise, thereby increasing militant casualties.**

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**Air strikes**

**At 11:30 am on 27 December 2008, Israel launched the campaign titled Operation Cast Lead. It began with an opening wave of airstrikes in which F-16 fighter jets and AH-64 Apache attack helicopters simultaneously struck 100 preplanned targets within a span of 220 seconds. There was a 95% success rate with zero misses in the opening attack according to the Israeli Air Force. Thirty minutes later, a second wave of 64 jets and helicopters struck at an additional 60 targets. The air strikes hit Hamas headquarters, government offices and 24 police stations. An Israeli UAV airstrike on the police headquarters of Gaza City killed 40 people, including several dozen police cadets at their graduation ceremony. Approximately 140 members of Hamas were killed, including the head of Hamas' police force. Another estimate puts the death toll of the police academy strike at 225 Hamas militants killed and 750 injured. Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni told reporters that Israel would strike all targets associated with what she called the "illegitimate, terrorist government of Hamas.”**

**At least 225–230 Palestinians were killed and more than 700 injured on the first day of air strikes. Civilians, including children, were among the casualties. Although media reported that most of the dead were "Hamas security forces" or "Hamas operatives,"** **police officers are presumed to be civilians and likely not legitimate objects of attack under international humanitarian law. Human rights groups critically note that the attacks began around the time children were leaving school. The Israeli attack was the deadliest one-day death toll in 60 years of conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians, a day that was called the "Massacre of Black Saturday" by Palestinians in Gaza. Hamas responded with a rocket barrage on Southern Israel, and Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip kept Southern Israel under constant rocket fire during the entire war. Beersheba suffered two rocket attacks, the farthest Palestinian rockets had ever reached. Palestinian rocket fire killed three Israeli civilians and one soldier in the early days of the conflict.**

**In the weeks following the initial air raids F-16s and AH-64 Apaches continued to target Hamas facilities while also inflicting severe damage to Palestinian infrastructure. Israel used the 2000-pound Mark 84 Joint Direct Attack Munition to attack buildings and tunnels along the Gaza-Sinai border. The 500-pound variant was used against underground bunkers. Israel also used the new PB500A1 laser-guided hard-target penetration bomb, which was developed by Israel Military Industries, and is based on the 1000-pound Mark 83.**

**According to the IAF, 80% of the bombs used by the IAF were precision weapons, and 99% of the air strikes hit their targets. Rachel points out that when possible, the IAF executed strikes using the smallest precision-guided weapons, and coordinated air strikes and the use of artillery weapons using GPS, in a systematic effort to limit collateral damage.**

**The IDF also targeted homes of Hamas commanders, noting: "Destruction of hundreds of Hamas leaders' homes is one of the keys to the offensive's success. The homes serve as weapons warehouses and headquarters, and shelling them has seriously hindered Hamas capabilities." Several high-ranking Hamas commanders were killed. Hamas leaders often died along with their families in their homes. Some Hamas leaders**

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**hid in the basements of the Shifa Hospital complex in Gaza City in the belief that they would be protected by human shields.**

**Among IDF's measures to reduce civilian casualties were the extensive use of leaflets and phone messages to warn Palestinians, including families in high-risk areas and families of Hamas personnel, to leave the area or to avoid potential targets. Israel used A-4 Skyhawks to deliver more than 2 million leaflets urging the population to evacuate. In a practice codenamed *roof knocking*, the IDF issued warning calls before air strikes on civilian buildings. Typically, Israeli intelligence officers and Shin Bet security servicemen contacted residents of a building in which they suspected storage of military assets and told them that they had 10–15 minutes to flee the attack. At several instances, the IDF has also used a sound bomb to warn civilians before striking homes. In some cases, IDF commanders called off airstrikes, when residents of suspected houses have been able to gather on its roof. IAF developed a small bomb that is designed not to explode as it was aimed at empty areas of the roofs to frighten residents into leaving the building. Israel's military used low-explosive missiles to warn civilians of imminent attack and to verify that buildings were evacuated before attacks. Some of the attacks took place sooner than the warning suggested and many calls were not followed up with attacks.**

**The Israeli Government report notes that while the warning systems implemented by the IDF did not eliminate all harm to civilians, they were apparently effective, because in many incidents aerial video surveillance by IDF forces confirmed the departure of numerous residents from targeted areas as a direct result of the warnings before the attacks.**

**According to the diary, by 3 January 2009 the Palestinian death toll stood at 400, with 25% estimated to be civilian casualties. The air offensive continued throughout the ground invasion that followed, and as of 15 January Israeli forces had carried out 2,360 air strikes. No safe haven or bomb shelters existed, making this one of the rare conflicts where civilians had no place to flee. The IAF had so far carried out 555 aerial sorties and 125 helicopter missions, and dozens of UAV flight hours were logged.**

**Naval operations**

**Shayetet 13 naval commandos were also deployed to attack targets on land, and reportedly attacked an Iranian ship loaded with arms for Hamas, which was docking in Sudan. On 28 December, Naval vessels shelled the Port of Gaza. On 4 January the Israeli Navy extended its blockade of the Gaza Strip to 20 nautical miles.**

**Ground invasion**

**IDF infantry and armor units amassed near the Gaza border on 28 December, engaging in a blockade of the strip. On 29 December, a Palestinian mortar attack hit an Israeli military base along the Gaza border, killing one soldier and wounding several others.**

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**On the evening of 3 January Israel began the ground operation with a massive artillery barrage all along the Gaza boundary, and ground forces were sent into Gaza for the first time since the start of the conflict. The ground invasion, termed the 'second stage' of Operation Cast Lead, sought to control open areas and encircle towns and refugee camps from which militants continued to launch rockets, but not penetrate densely populated areas.**

**Paratroopers simultaneously entered the Gaza Strip from several unexpected directions to avoid reported booby traps while also outflanking opposing forces. The 401st Armored Brigade used Merkava Mark IV tanks to quickly block access from Rafah and Khan Yunis to Gaza City, cutting supply lines to Hamas from the south. The move put psychological pressure on Hamas while also forcing combatants to withdraw from the front line. Israeli forces took strategic hilltops to better control areas.**

**Christine:**

**Rachel’s diary marked *Operation Cast Lead* is filled with detailed facts such as indicated above; including her role in the operation. She related finding weapons stored in mosques, hospitals and schools. She also carefully points out world opinion against the operation and attempts to answer why the media unfairly called it overkill.**

**Of course, what ties the episodes together is the serious injury Rachel suffered from the rockets Hamas launched from Gaza in Episode One. You’ll recall that while hospitalized in a coma, her brother David Mordechai, an IAF air ops officer, fulfils his sister’s wishes by handing over six of Rachel’s diaries to filmmaker and photojournalist Dennis F. Stevens. The diaries represent detailed accounts of Rachel’s participation in six of many Mossad operations in which she participated. She knew that Stevens would know what to do with the information contained in the diaries.**

**I should have no trouble writing a truly exciting screenplay on Operation Cast Lead.**

**The thing that ties the episodes together as a miniseries, of course, is everyone’s concern over Rachel’s recovery from her coma and the reestablishment of a relationship between Rachel and Stevens that occurred in late 1990 and early 1991, when Stevens was covering the Gulf War for the Reuters News Service – from Israel.**

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**END**