Trespassers in Israel

Hard Words, Soft Drinks Greet Newsmen

By Alfred Friendly

TEL AVIV—A few days ago, Yvul Elizur, The Washington Post's Jerusalem associate, and I incurred the wrath of the Israeli army. Psychologically we were beaten, but physically we were passively just a little bit heads. We were at a place where the army did not want us to be, and which, accordingly, we did not want to visit beyond the fact that it was in an excessively unattractive desert area occupied by Israel during the 1967 war.

A couple of miles from our goal, we drove past an area cordoned off by the army. A mile further on, our car sank and sagged into sand, and we were inches deep and so fine that it stuck at one's shoes. Looking for help, we trudged on to the objective, which was interesting enough, and innocently began to photograph what we saw.

A young soldier approached us. In positive terms and with admirable economy of words he demanded our papers. On the supposition that his hasty-looking little UZI, a cross between an automatic rifle and a pistol, could actually be unlimbered and was not merely an armistice which Israeli troops invariably drape over their shoulders, we did not argue very long.

He then told us, equally forcefully, to get the hell out.

TWO YOUNG LIEUTENANTs appeared on the scene, advising us of our crimes with considerably more embroidery, and repeating the invitation. That done, they piled us into ice-cold bottles of orange soda—the staple on command car, preceded by a jeep flying a red flag and carrying a driver, machine gunner and rifleman.

First, however, we were asked to make a "gentlemen's agreement" to check in on our return with the military headquarters. I consented readily. As I reflected, we had been dealing with gentlemen all day.

"And now," the colonel continued, "Dinner is ready in the officers' mess. I hope it's a good one."

We contented ourselves instead with some more orange soda and asked, finally, if we could return to Tel Aviv. The request caused some embarrassment. It seemed that the colonel had called the general command of the whole district, and his orders had come back to keep us in custody until further notice.

But orders are made to be broken, so we were sent in a command car, preceded by a jeep flying a red flag and carrying a driver, machine gunner and rifleman.

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