



# The Survival of an Incurable Optimist: From Fascist Persecution to the Battlefields of Palestine

*Leslie Paldon, Marie Walter*

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Peeping into the night between the planks of a cattle wagon's door, young László Popper wondered with anxiety where the train, driving at full speed across the Hungarian countryside, was taking him. Over the course of World War II, there were numerous occasions for his life to find a premature ending. Helped by courageous friends, warm-hearted strangers and an uncommon amount of luck, he endured persecutions, forced labour, deportation and a murderous siege, and lived to see the Red Army drive away the Nazis from his native Budapest. Fascism and war having obliterated a solid share of the foundations of his life, the young offspring of a respected family from the Jewish community soon turned his gaze towards Palestine. He left to follow his Zionist dream, only to find himself caught in another war. Alongside the future leaders of the country, he fought for the promise of a Jewish National Home. Many perished around him, but he survived, as did the young State of Israel. Under his chosen name of Leslie Paldon, inspired, in homage to his industrial heritage, from the Hebrew word for steel, he built himself a future with relentless optimism, in spite of all the obstacles in his way. Thus passed the years and many stories were left untold, dormant but tormenting. Decades later, the questions of his grand-children brought these back to the surface. It was time for Leslie to break his silence. This book relates the tale of his uncommon life, of his unlikely survival.

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