

LEBANON

A Film by Samuel Maoz

A Sony Pictures Classics Release

**Winner: Golden Lion 2009 Venice Film Festival
Official Selection: 2009 Toronto Film Festival | 2009 New York Film Festival
European Film Awards Winner: Carlo Di Palma European Cinematographer
Award, Giora Bejach; and European Discovery – Prix Fipresci**

Running time – 94 minutes | MPAA Rating: R

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East Coast: Sophie Gluck & Associates Sophie Gluck 124 West 79th St Ste 2B New York, NY 10024 Phone (212) 595-2432 Sophie@gluckpr.com	West Coast Block-Korenbrot Melody Korenbrot 110 S. Fairfax Ave., Ste 310 Los Angeles, CA 90036 Phone (323) 634-7001	Exhibitor Contacts Sony Pictures Classics Carmelo Pirrone Lindsay Macik 550 Madison Avenue New York, NY 10022 Phone (212) 833-8833
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SYNOPSIS

The First Lebanon War – June, 1982. A lone tank is dispatched to search a hostile town that has already been bombarded by the Israeli Air Force. What seems to be a simple mission gradually spins out of control.

Shmuel the gunner, Assi the commander, Herzl the loader and Yigal the driver are the tank's crew, four 20-something boys who have never fought in a war and are now operating a killing machine. Though trying to remain brave, the boys are pushed to their mental limits as they struggle to survive in a situation they cannot contain, and try not to lose their humanity in the chaos of war.

Writer-director Samuel Maoz's raw and visceral film is based on his own experiences as a twenty year old novice soldier serving in the Israeli army during the 1982 Lebanon war. Using his own vivid recollections to bring us inside an Israeli tank during the first 24 hours of the invasion, Maoz restricts the film's action entirely to the tank's interior and shows us the outside world only—as the four young soldiers themselves see it—through the lens of a periscopic gun sight. The cathartic process of writing and directing **LEBANON** allowed Maoz to finally free himself of the events that he had experienced twenty-five years earlier.

WRITER-DIRECTOR SAMUEL MAOZ' NOTES ON THE FILM

On June 6, 1982, at 6:15 AM, I killed a man for the first time in my life. I was 20 years old. I did not do so by choice, nor was I ordered to do so. I reacted in self-defense, with no emotional or intellectual motivation, only the basic survival instinct that takes no human factors into account, an instinct that forces itself on a person facing a tangible threat of death.

Twenty-five years after that miserable morning that opened the Lebanon War, I wrote the script for the film. I had some previous experience with the content, but whenever I began writing, the smell of charred human flesh returned to my nostrils and I could not continue. I knew that the smell would evoke indistinct scenes that I had buried deep within my mind. After years of trauma and violent anger attacks, I learned to identify the ominous moment and escape it in time. Better to live in denial than not to live at all.

The year 2006 was particularly difficult. Five years had passed since my last project and I felt burned out. I produced a few short commercials and promotional films, but other than that, nothing. I suffered financial pressure, passivity and a maddening lack of responsibility. Once, someone asked me: "What about post-battle trauma? Do you experience nightmares when you remember the war?" I wish it were as simple as that, I thought to myself.

When a person feels he has nothing to lose, he takes chances. That's how I felt in early 2007 when I started to write the script for LEBANON. I had hit rock bottom and decided to go all the way. This time, I would not run away from the smell, but would let it take me to the blurry scenes. I would put them in focus, dive right in and cope with it all! Suddenly, I felt uplifted, with a weird sense of euphoria. I'm not lost yet! I've still got fighting spirit! I went to bed early, got up in the morning and started to write. I was careful. I didn't tackle the topic directly but rather wrote around it. I waited for the smell but it did not arrive. I found myself willing it to come back, but it was not there any more. The scenes were gone as well. All that remained was a dim progression of difficult and particularly distant events. After about a week, I realized that I had become emotionally detached. I was no longer the boy of my memory. I felt pain for him, but it was a dull pain, the pain of a scriptwriter attached to a character. It did not matter to me whether I had been cured or was simply breaking a world record for denial. I was flooded with adrenalin and I had spit out the first draft within three weeks.

This brief writing experience was like an electric shock for me, a shock that aroused me from a long hibernation and reset all my switches. New blood flowed through my veins. I was focused. I also felt sorry about the time I had lost, but did not allow it to trouble me. I devoted myself entirely to a project that rehabilitated me in return. A brilliant business deal that I'm proud of to this day - because what I gained was myself.

I wrote LEBANON straight from my gut. No intellectual cognition charted my path. My memory of the events themselves had become dim and blurred. Scripting conventions such as introductions, character backgrounds and dramatic structure did not concern me. What remained fresh and bleeding was the emotional memory. I wrote what I felt.

I wanted to talk about emotional wounds, to tell the story of a slaughtered soul, a story that was not to be found in the body of the plot but derived from deep within it. How the hell could I put that on film? I realized I would have to shatter some basic principles and bend several rigid cinematic fixtures, creating a total experience instead of building a plot. The decision to make an experiential movie gave rise to the cinematic concept. My basic principle called for the presentation of a personal, subjective point of view. The audience would not watch the plot unfolding before it but experience it together with the actors. Viewers would not be given any additional information, but would remain stuck with the cast inside the tank, having the same limited view of the war and hearing it only as the actors heard it. We would try to make sure that they could smell it and taste it as well, using the visuals and sound track not only to tell a story but also to impart an experience. I realized that I would have to create a total experience to achieve complete emotional comprehension.

We began shooting the complex war scenes: flames, blood, gunfire, and explosions. I wanted to accelerate from zero to a hundred, to flood the crew with my adrenalin! Everything proceeded according to plan. The first day of shooting, spirits were high and self-confidence abundant. The only thing that troubled me was a dull pain in my left foot. By the end of the second day, my foot swelled up. I remember telling myself that I must be out of shape after all those lost years. But by the end of the third day, I could hardly walk. I limped from place to place as the pain sliced through my flesh. A doctor who came to the set told me I had an aggressive infection. I took a double dose of a powerful antibiotic and fell asleep, still in pain, but totally knocked out.

Twelve hours of uninterrupted sleep. The pain was gone. I stole a glance at my foot and saw it was bleeding slightly but was no longer swollen. Alongside it were five small pieces of shrapnel, the last testimony to the Lebanon War that my body suddenly decided to eject after 24 years. A fitting conclusion for my intentional self-healing.

How could I take a young Tel Aviv actor and get him to internalize so extreme a trauma? I realized that I had to adhere to the experiential principle. The actor would only understand and internalize what he could feel.

I began with the basics: Instead of explaining to the actor that it is stifling and hot inside the tank, I locked him into a dark and blazing hot container. Instead of describing the extreme panic that breaks out when a tank is fired on from all directions, we struck the walls of the container with iron bars. He remained boiling inside for hours, waiting tensely for the next shock – artillery fire! Rocking back and forth! And then more nerve-racking quiet. When he came out, sweating and exhausted, we felt no need to speak. Words would only ruin the experience. There were two types of scenes to be filmed – internal tank scenes and external battle scenes. The tank scenes were shot in the studio and the battle scenes at two locations: a banana plantation and an abandoned industrial zone. I decided to begin with the battle scenes, a battle that Shmuel, the gunner, sees through the crosshairs of his gunsight. I did so because a tank has no effect on the course of war but rather responds to its unforeseen whims. We had to film the incident as it occurred, before any response ensued. The paratroopers were part of a close-knit unit

that had been demobilized three months earlier. The location looked like a bombed-out urban area; black smoke in the foreground turned it into a battlefield. We spent eight days in a heat wave of blood and fire, experiencing intense physical hardship, with a film crew on a high.

We completed filming the external scenes without leaving Tel Aviv. We constructed a set representing the inside of the tank. From the outside, it looked like a monstrous insect from an old-fashioned horror movie, standing in the center of the studio. I placed my monitor opposite it. We looked at one another tensely and silently and I felt like Clint Eastwood before the fateful shootout. The average shot in this film needed about 4-5 crewmembers: a cameraman, assistant cameraman, recorder, boom-man and grip. For a tank shot, I needed many more: Four to rock the contraption, two to turn the turret, one to spread smoke, one to drip fluids, one to blink lights.

On the last day, we had an especially complicated shot. The entire crew was involved in it and the actor was the only person on the set who was free to man the clapper. But the strongest and most emotional moments were the ones in which the actors stopped acting, I stopped directing, the set was enveloped in a sacred silence and everyone was riveted to blinking monitors.

Samuel Maoz

BIOGRAPHY

By Samuel Maoz – Writer-Director

I was born in Tel Aviv in 1962. At the age of 13, I received a 8mm movie camera and four minutes worth of film for my Bar Mitzvah. I wanted to recreate an impressive gunfight scene I had seen in a western that opened with a shot of a train approaching the camera and passing overhead. I attached my new camera to the tracks of the approaching train that ran right over it and smashed it to smithereens. The experience did not break me. By the time I was 18, I had already made dozens of short films.

The Armored Corps is the proletariat of the Israel Defense Forces. If you're healthy and don't want to volunteer for the Paratroopers, you'll most likely wind up in the Armored Corps. That's how I became part of a tank crew. I was trained as a gunner, but the significance of the job didn't really penetrate. We fired at barrels full of gasoline that exploded like giant fireworks. It felt like an amusement park for big boys. People thought it was cool.

War broke out in June of 1982. When I returned, my mother embraced me, weeping and expressing her gratitude to my deceased father, to God and to all who watched over me and returned me home safe and sound. At the time, she did not realize that I did not come home safe and sound. In fact, I did not come home at all. She had no idea that her son had died in Lebanon and that she was now embracing an empty shell.

In 1987, I completed my cinema studies at the Beit Zvi Academy of the Arts. I released a few short films, but it took me 20 years to finally "return home" by creating LEBANON.

CREATING THE TANK

Ariel Roshko, Production Designer

At our first meeting, Shmuel asked me: “Do you think you can build this tank with the meager budget and resources we have?” I looked straight into his worried eyes and lied decisively: “Of course.” I really wanted to work on this film. To the best of my knowledge, there had never been any previous attempt at producing a full-length feature film within a confined space like that of a tank. I aspired to create a space that would look like a tank without necessarily reproducing the features of any specific tank. The set consisted of a sheet metal shell divided into segments that could be dismantled for filming purposes. At the center of the shell was a compartment for the tank crew. The overall atmosphere was dark and gloomy, with dim flashes of light from the few lighting elements and blinking indicators on the instrument panel – a kind of underground world, a rusty metallic tomb clanking along in hell. Various devices, found in all conventional tanks, were attached to this shell. In addition, a complex system of beating, vibrating pipes was installed, conveying the notion of pumping the tank’s “bloodstream.”

The leaky pipes and liquids seeping into the walls created a viscous, murky and oily atmosphere. We wanted to show the tank as a machine with human/monstrous qualities. Humanizing the machine somehow promoted it to the status of an actor. To construct the tank, I devised a computerized model, as well as a physical, cardboard one that helped me understand the kind of technology with which I had to contend.

The passage of time only increased my apprehension and doubts. Perhaps we really needed to invest in sophisticated, state of the art technology rather than the lo-tech I had adopted for building the tank. Perhaps the machine would not work without all the electronic systems and hydraulic devices used in big-budget films. The set needed to accommodate six actors and an unspecified number of crewmembers working on and inside the tank. It was also supposed to rotate on its axis, vibrate and incline in every direction. To my regret, the weight of this ugly metallic creature kept increasing to proportions that I never imagined. I had to struggle with excess weight and look for ways and means of decreasing the overall mass.

Besides tackling the weight problem, we tried to decide the ideal dimensions for preserving the crowdedness and claustrophobia that prevail in a real tank. We wanted a set that did not look too spacious but still provided optimal convenience for camera movement and positions. I hoped that the actors they hired would not be too tall. The tank was made of authentic materials whose source I cannot reveal, as well as bits and pieces obtained from various junkyards. With the help of creams, metal smiths and paint, they acquired new life and identity. The monster was not always well disciplined and did not always suit our fantasy world. Many defects and constraints were fixed, hidden, improved or downplayed, to my good fortune, thanks to Giora the cameraman and Arik the editor. Alex, our soundtrack specialist, added numerous special audio effects. My greatest apprehension concerned the safety of the monster we created in the event of some kind of malfunction, such as collapse and the like, leading to disaster. Luckily, everything worked properly, without a flaw. Construction of the tank used up most of the

art budget and only minimal funds remained for building the other sets and the world seen through the tank sights. With the help of creative solutions, lots of Styrofoam, thick smoke and many miracles, we managed to adapt the available locations to the script's demands.

Shmuel, who began his career as an art director, understood what I was facing and helped develop the visual concepts. We had a productive and creative dialogue going between us, yielding a film that we consider to be a true tour de force.

THE PAST REVISITED

Giora Bejach – Director of Photography

Four of us were on the way back from a location tour, when we started reminiscing about the Lebanon War. Shmuel had been part of a tank crew, the art director a combat medic, the gaffer a paratrooper and I, an Air Force intelligence controller. I told them that one night, I got a report about a lone tank that had gotten lost in the industrial zone of Beirut. I was very familiar with that area. It was considered a “most unpleasant” place to be. We were aware that there was an encampment of eight Syrian tanks there. They were very passive, so we decided to avoid confrontation. We simply detoured around them and entered Beirut. But that one unfortunate, confused tank lost its way and headed right into the encampment, where it clashed with the Syrian tanks and remained trapped among them. The tank commander opened the emergency radio channel. I spoke with them and realized that they could not survive there for more than a minute. I dispatched a patrolling fighter plane to the site. It took the pilot half a minute to start diving towards the encampment. The Syrians, who saw an F-16 coming straight at them, leaped from their tanks and ran away. The tank crew had been saved. The encampment was not bombed and we avoided sparking a conflict with Syria. It was clean work, carried out to perfection in less than a minute without having to pull the trigger. That’s the end of the story. Shmuel was silent for a moment and then began to tell the story from his own point of view. He quoted the exact words that I had said over the radio during that entire long minute. I was dumbstruck! It had been his tank!

When we filmed *LEBANON*, Shmuel told me: “In this film, you will be two cameramen. Inside the tank, you’re the film cameraman and in the war scenes you’re the scorched eye of the gunner and his shaking hand on the trigger. Camera motion will depend on the hydraulic rotation of a heavy turret, but will not be mechanical in nature. It will express the feelings of Shmuel the gunner, who is tense, hesitant; he freezes, and then recovers. The camera will not be telling a story here. It will support the emotional state of the actor and create an experience.” The practical meaning of the assignment was nearly chaotic. It was like driving in London (on the left side of the road) and coming to a traffic circle. I had to act against all my instincts to create a choppy film that flowed nonetheless. I learned that it is far easier for me to film “well” than to film “badly,” but after all, what won’t you do for a comrade in arms?

CUTTING LEBANON

Arik Lahav-Leibovich, Editor

Reading the script of LEBANON was my first experience with the film. I sat down with it one Friday afternoon, in a rare moment of silence, as everyone else in the house was preoccupied. As I read it, I kept thinking about Uri, my youngest son. I tried to imagine him within all this horror. How would he have conducted himself? What would his feelings have been? As I finished reading, with tears in my eyes, I suddenly saw him standing in front of me. He asked: "Papa, what's the matter?" I embraced him at once, so that he wouldn't ask too many questions, as I murmured "Uri, my dear Uri ...". At that moment, I promised myself that I would do all that was within my power to make sure that he would never be put to that test. When I started editing the film, Shmuel the director, was still filming. He sent for me to edit an urgent trailer for ARTE France, our production partners, using material he had already filmed. These were outdoor shots, from the gunner's point of view. When I viewed the material for the first time, I felt that it was much more powerful than I had imagined when reading the script.

Each shot suddenly acquired meaning. The sight of people staring straight at me from the screen with the gunsight aimed at them was positively riveting. I finished editing the trailer quickly and was very pleased with the job because it focused my overall approach to the film, namely: Keep quiet and let the visuals speak for themselves. This principle applies to any film, but is particularly valid in this case because the picture has so much to say, and we have to give them enough time to express themselves. This is why once filming was completed I kept information and dialogue to a minimum. Entire expositions were removed in order to clear the stage for the picture. For this film, the rules of the game are: Sit and watch! Don't look for a story or logic because there is no logic in war! We recreated the chaos of war by cutting out many of the segments designed to explain and give order to the narrative logic. In conventional films, I struggle fiercely to ensure clarity. When working on LEBANON, however, I assumed no responsibility whatsoever to give the audience any kind of orientation. There's no map saying, "You are here." You see the world through a narrow cone, with no long shots to show you what is happening around you. That's why the audience experiences constant discomfort. Crowdedness and chaos reach a peak in the last part of the film, when the tank crew is abandoned. All we see are tight close-ups of people being fired at from an unclear source. Music is heard from somewhere... and everything essentially turns into a psychedelic hallucination. To me, these final moments, when neither viewers nor the tank crew understand anything, are the essence of the entire film and the core experience of war.

Our last shift of editing took place at night. When we were finished, I took Shmuel home on my motorcycle. When we stopped, Shmuel told me to wait a moment. He climbed up the stairs to his apartment and returned a minute later with a plastic rifle that was used in the filming. "Give it to your son as a present from me," he said. "Tell him that these are the only rifles that he should ever hold in his life. Amen."

BEING SHMUEL

Yoav Donat, Actor

Reading the script of LEBANON was a most moving experience. I was totally drawn in. I felt that someone was sharing the most difficult challenges of his life with me. It excited me more than any other script I had ever read. I told myself that it's essential for me to become a part of this creation. My powerful desire to participate in the film became even stronger when I met Shmuel. The moment that Shmuel said "Welcome to Lebanon!" at the end of my fourth audition was one of the happiest moments of my life. This was the first part I received after completing my acting studies and it turned out to be the fulfillment of all my dreams!

Shmuel spoke directly to me as the shots were being filmed, shouting out the horrible thoughts that were supposed to be going through my head: "It's my fault that a paratrooper was killed! What will they tell his mother? That I made a mistake? That I got confused? I'm worthless! I'm a coward! A murderer." He thrust me into an extreme situation and continued relentlessly. At the end of scenes like these, many people on the set were in tears. Everyone knew that it was actually Shmuel shouting at himself.

Towards the end of the shoot, I was in such a state of emotional oversaturation that I burst out crying. Shmuel comforted me, telling me that he now feels healed through me. When he sees me on his monitor, it arouses empathy within him and he becomes able to forgive himself. I consider it a privilege to have been involved in a process of such profound significance. My participation in Shmuel's healing and in telling his story was vital experiences that will accompany me throughout my life.

Cast

Yoav Donat	SHMULIK
Itay Tiran	ASSI
Oshri Cohen	HERTZEL
Michael Moshonov	YIGAL
Zohar Strauss	JAMIL
Dudu Tassa	SYRIAN CAPTIVE
Ashraf Barhom	PHALANGIST MEMBER
Reymonde Amsellem	LEBANESE MOTHER

Crew

Written and Directed by	SAMUEL MAOZ
Produced by	URI SABAG EINAT BIKEL MOSHE EDERY LEON EDERY DAVID SILBER BENJAMINA MIRNIK ILANN GIRARD
Director of Photography	GLORA BEJACH
Editor	ARIK LAHAV-LEIBOVICH
Production Designer	ARIEL ROSHKO
Sound Designer	ALEX CLAUDE
Original Score	NICOLAS BECKER
Piano	BENOIT DELBECQ
Casting by	HILA YUVAL
Make-up Artist	ORLY RONEN
Costume Designer	HILA BARGIREL
Gaffer	AVI DASSBERG
Key Grip	ROL MANO
Sound Mixer	DAVID LISS
First Assistant Directors	AVICHAL HENIG, SHIR SHOSHANI
Stunt Coordinator	DIMA OSMOLOVSKI
Special Effects	PINI KLA VIR