

THE ZIONIST OCCUPATION OF WESTERN GALILEE, 1948

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The Zionist occupation of most of Palestine during the first Arab-Israeli war and the dispersal of the majority of its Arab inhabitants from their lands have been a matter for considerable debate. The reasons behind the flight of so many Arabs from Palestine, the role of the Arab Liberation Army and the ability of the Arab villages to defend themselves are all subjects of controversy, but some light may be thrown on the events of 1948 by concentrating one's attention on a few specific cases of occupation. For the purposes of this article, I have chosen to describe the experiences of the inhabitants of six villages in Western Galilee: al-Sumeiriya, al-Bassa and al-Zib, which were occupied on May 14, 1948; al-Ghabisiya and Kabri, which were taken on May 21; and al-Birwa, which after having fallen to the Jews and being retaken, was finally occupied on June 24.

From these villages I have interviewed twenty families who are now living in Lebanon — in 'Ain al-Hilweh, Bourj al-Barajneh and Shatila refugee camps. The large majority of the heads of these families were farmers, although they also included a former policeman, a carpenter and a construction worker. I tried to select those villagers who participated in the defence of their villages individually or through a locally trained "militia."

Arab response to the adoption of the UN Partition Plan for Palestine on November 29, 1947 was hostile.¹ In Palestine itself, Haj Amin al-Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem and head of the Arab Higher Committee, denounced the resolution, while in the wider Arab world, the prime ministers of the Arab

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¹ The partition plan established an Arab majority in the proposed Jewish state as well as in the proposed Arab state, if the estimated 105,000 Bedouin resident in the proposed Jewish state are included. The proportion of Arabs to Jews in the Jewish state would then have been 509,780 Arabs (as against the lower totals usually given by counts which exclude the Bedouin) to 499,020 Jews, and in the Arab state, 749,010 Arabs to 9,520 Jews. For further information see the Institute for Palestine Studies' *The Partition of Palestine: 29 November 1947* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1967), Appendix II, p. 52.

League states (Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Transjordan and Yemen) met in Cairo on December 8, 1947,² and issued a communiqué condemning the resolution:

... the heads and representatives of [the Arab] governments have decided that partition is void from its very beginning. They have also decided, in deference to the will of their people, to take such drastic measures as would, with the will of God, defeat the unjust partition plan and give support to the right of the Arabs.³

According to Jon and David Kimche, the Haganah High Command had considered their strategy to meet such a threat as early as March 1945:

Ben Gurion, Galili, Yadin, and other Haganah strategists assumed that the main aim of the Arabs would be to isolate and, if possible, capture the Negev and Eastern Galilee, to penetrate the Sharon and Hefer valleys from Qalqilya in the direction of Natanya and Herzlia, to isolate the three large cities — Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa — and to interrupt the essential services throughout the country — water, electricity, and, particularly, petrol supplies.⁴

Three years later, in March 1948, a new operational plan was devised, known as Plan Dalet. It called for the new KHISH brigades (Khayl Sadeh — the Jewish field army) and the Palmach forces,

to... gain control of the area allotted to the Jewish state and defend its borders and those of the blocs of Jewish settlements and such Jewish population as were outside those borders, against a regular or pararegular enemy operating from bases outside or inside the area of the Jewish state.⁵

Two prerequisites were essential for the implementation of the plan: full mobilization and an additional supply of arms. By the end of March 1948 the first consignments of Czech arms had been safely delivered, and six new

² The Arab League states had held a meeting in Aley, Lebanon in October 1947 to review the report of the United Nations Special Committee on Palestine. They decided that the Palestinians should be responsible for the defence of their country and that "the Arab governments would furnish their share of military financing (Egypt, 42 per cent; Iraq, 7 per cent; Lebanon, 11 per cent; Saudi Arabia, 20 per cent; Syria, 12 per cent; Transjordan, 5 per cent; and Yemen, 3 per cent) in the defence of Palestine, ... that Arab states should make the necessary military preparations, and that their armies should be stationed on the frontiers of Palestine...." 'Arif al-'Arif, *al-Nakba* (The Tragedy) (Beirut and Sidon: al-Maktaba al-'Asriya, 1956-1960), Vol. I, pp. 14-16 (my translation).

³ Full text in Muhammad Khalil, *The Arab States and the Arab League: A Documentary Record* (Beirut: Khayats, 1962), Vol. II, pp. 550-51.

⁴ Jon Kimche and David Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1960), p. 92.

⁵ Lt. Col. Netanel Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence 1947-1949* (Hartford, Conn.: Hartmore House, Inc., 1968), p. 89. Of the thirteen operations in Plan Dalet, eight were in the area of the proposed Arab state or the international zone. See Walid Khalidi, ed., *From Haven to Conquest* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1971), p. 856.

KHISH brigades were almost ready for the offensive.⁶ Of the thirteen military operations undertaken by the Haganah within the framework of Plan Dalet,⁷ four operations — Yiftah, Matateh, Gideon and Ben Ami — were successfully carried out in the Galilee prior to the termination of the British Mandate and the establishment of the Jewish state on May 15, 1948.

Most of the people of Western Galilee were farmers who worked their own land. Economically, the villages of Western Galilee were largely self-sufficient, and although excess produce was sent to the cities of Acre and Haifa, few villagers had contacts with the outside world; travelling was rare and seldom done out of curiosity or for pleasure.

Like most Arabs in Palestine, the people of Western Galilee were not armed on the eve of the partition of Palestine, as a result of British preventive measures; the inadequacy of arms and ammunition was thus a major difficulty confronting them. As of May 15, 1948, the total rifle strength of Arab forces in Western Galilee was estimated at about 140 rifles with the rural forces,

⁶ Kimche and Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill*, pp. 92-94.

⁷ W. Khalidi catalogues the operations as follows beneath. Although Zionist historians dispute the contention that a number of these operations included provisions for the eviction of Arabs, the facts of the 1948 war, which resulted in the reluctant exile of the overwhelming majority of Palestinians from Jewish-occupied areas, indicate that expulsion or incitement to leave was part of the policy put into practice. Documentation from non-Arab sources of specific instances of expulsion in various parts of Palestine is included in Khalidi, *op. cit.*

Operations carried out within the framework of Plan Dalet were: 1. Operation Nachshon: April 1 — To carve out a corridor connecting Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and by so doing, to divide the main part of the Arab state into two (Defeated). 2. Operation Harel: April 15 — A continuation of Nachshon, but centred specifically on Arab villages near Latrun (Defeated). 3. Operation Misparayim: April 21 — To capture Haifa and rout its Arab population (Successful). 4. Operation Chametz: April 27 — To destroy the Arab villages around Jaffa and so cut Jaffa off from physical contact with the rest of Palestine, as a preliminary to its capture (Successful). 5. Operation Jevussi: April 27 — To isolate Jerusalem by destroying the ring of surrounding Arab villages and dominating the Ramallah-Jerusalem road to the north, the Jericho-Jerusalem road to the east, and the Bethlehem-Jerusalem road to the south. This operation would have caused the whole of Jerusalem to fall and would have made the Arab position west of the River Jordan altogether untenable (Defeated). 6. Operation Yiftach: April 28 — To purify Eastern Galilee of Arabs (Successful). 7. Operation Matateh: May 3 — To destroy Arab villages connecting Tiberias to Eastern Galilee (Successful). 8. Operation Maccabi: May 7 — To destroy the Arab villages near Latrun, and, by an outflanking movement, to penetrate into Ramallah district north of Jerusalem (Defeated). 9. Operation Gideon: May 11 — To occupy Beisan and drive out the semi-sedentary Bedouin communities in the neighbourhood (Successful). 10. Operation Barak: May 12 — To destroy the Arab villages in the neighbourhood of Bureir on the way to the Negev (Partially successful). 11. Operation Ben Ami: May 14 — To occupy Acre and purify Western Galilee of Arabs (Successful). 12. Operation Pitchfork: May 14 — To occupy the Arab residential quarters in the New City of Jerusalem (Successful). 13. Operation Schifon: May 14 — To occupy the Old City of Jerusalem (Defeated). Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, Appendix VIII, pp. 856-57.

commanded by Abu Mahmoud Saffouri, and about 30 rifles in the city garrison of Acre.⁸ The Jewish strength consisted of the Carmeli Brigade, commanded by Moshe Carmel, which comprised 1,667 men as of April 1, 1948, and was intended to be 2,750 men by the beginning of May⁹ although this total was never reached.

The occupation of Haifa was completed on April 22, 1948.¹⁰ Jewish convoys going to the settlements north of it were safeguarded by the British who were stationed at Napoleon Hill, east of Acre, and at St. James police post to the north. The Haganah High Command feared that upon the evacuation of the British from their military bases, their settlements in the north along the coast would be besieged after the entry of Arab armies. The situation demanded immediate action and on the eve of May 14, operation Ben Ami was initiated.¹¹ The objectives of the operation were: to reach the settlements of Nahariya and Yechiam (Khirbat Jiddin); to carry supplies and ammunition from the city of Haifa to the northernmost settlement of Hanita; to demolish the transportation routes leading into Western Galilee, thus preventing a Lebanese invasion from the north; and to evacuate the women and children from the settlements bordering Arab villages.¹²

During the night of May 13, a supply convoy accompanied by Haganah forces left Haifa overland with the mission of occupying Napoleon Hill. Simultaneously, another unit carried in trucks set out from the settlement of Ein Ha-Mifraz, south of Acre, in the direction of the Nahariya intersection of the roads to Acre and Safed. It was to bypass Napoleon Hill (which by this time was supposed to be occupied by the Jewish forces) and the city of Acre, and would then proceed north towards the Arab village of al-Sumeiriya. A third seaborne force left the port of Haifa towards the settlements of Shavei Zion and Nahariya, north of Acre. This force was also to bypass Acre and capture the villages of al-Sumeiriya and al-Zib, securing the road for the forthcoming convoy travelling north. But when this unit reached al-Sumeiriya, its men were too seasick to fight and capture the village. Consequently, as the convoy from

⁸ Khalidi, *From Haven to Conquest*, pp. 859-60.

⁹ Kimche and Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill*, p. 158.

¹⁰ See Major Roland D. Wilson, *Cordon and Search: With the 6th Airborne Division in Palestine* (Aldershot, England: Gale and Polden Limited, 1949), pp. 191-94. Also Walid Khalidi, *Why Did the Palestinians Leave?* (Cairo: The General Union of Palestine Students, 1965), pp. 21-56.

¹¹ The operation was carried out entirely in an area allotted to the Arab state under the partition plan. Ben Ami ("Son of My People") was named after the fallen commander of the Yechiam (Khirbat Jiddin) convoy who died in the Battle of Kabri on March 28, 1948. Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence*, p. 113.

¹² Ephraim Talmi, *A Lexicon of the War of Independence* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Davar, 1970), p. 40.

Ein Ha-Mifraz approached the village, it was surprised to discover that the village was still in the hands of its Arab inhabitants.¹³

I. AL-SUMEIRIYA

Al-Sumeiriya was a village about an hour's walk (six kilometres) north of the city of Acre on the main road between Acre and the Lebanese border. At this time it had a population of about 760 Arabs and a total land area of 8,542 dunums — 7,935 dunums belonging to the Arab villagers and 607 dunums listed as "public property."¹⁴

The people of al-Sumeiriya heard on the radio of the village mukhtar, Mahmoud Amin, about the Jewish attack on the village of Deir Yassin.¹⁵ They were further terrified to hear of the fall of Tiberias, Haifa and Safed, but were somewhat heartened by the news of the Arab states' intervention in Palestine.

During the day of May 13, Yusuf Nafa'a, believed to be an officer in the Arab Liberation Army¹⁶ stationed at Acre, visited the village¹⁷ and assured the villagers of military aid in case of a Jewish attack. At dawn the next day, a Jewish force approached the village from the north-west. The few families remaining in the village began to flee to the neighbouring villages of 'Amqa, al-Ghabisiya and Kafr Yasif and to the town of Acre; only about thirty-five

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42. Also see Israel Army, Department of History of the General Headquarters, *History of the War of Independence* (Hebrew) (Tel Aviv: Marachat, 1970), pp. 140-42; and Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence*, pp. 113-14.

¹⁴ Population estimated as of December 31, 1944, and landownership as of April 1, 1945. Palestine Government, *Village Statistics, 1945: A Classification of Land and Area Ownership in Palestine* (ed. by Sami Hadawi) (reprinted in Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Centre, 1970), p. 41. "Public property. . . are all those lands which are subject to the control of the Government of Palestine by virtue of treaty, convention, agreement and succession, and all lands which are acquired for the public service or otherwise." For further information see *ibid.*, pp. 29-33.

¹⁵ On April 9, 1948, an armed force composed mainly of the Irgun and Stern Gang attacked Deir Yassin and massacred more than 250 of its villagers. For further information on Deir Yassin see Jacques de Reynier, *A Jérusalem un drapeau flottait sur la ligne de feu* (Neuchâtel: Éditions de la Baconnière, 1950), pp. 69-74; Sabri Jiryis, *The Arabs in Israel* (Beirut: The Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), p. 91; Jon Kimche, *Seven Fallen Pillars: The Middle East, 1915-1950* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1950), pp. 217-18 and 222-24.

¹⁶ The ALA was an army of volunteers from the various Arab countries, formed by the Arab League on January 1, 1948 under the control of the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus. For further information on the ALA, see Hani al-Hindi, "The Arab Liberation Army, 1947-1949," *Shu'un Filastiniya* (Arabic), 23 (July 1973), pp. 27-58.

¹⁷ I was told that by that time many of the villagers had already moved their families out of the village. A few armed men remained in the village to protect it while others came in and out of the village. (Hussein Khalil 'Awad, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, February 28, 1973.)

armed men remained in the village to repel the Jewish attack. At sunrise, however, the villagers saw an armoured unit approaching from the south, along the road from Acre. Believing it to be the Arab force coming to their rescue (the men wore the red and white Arab headdress), Saleh Sa'id Ka'boush, positioned south of the village, began to fire into the air in welcome. But when he was fired upon and instantly killed, the villagers entrenched east of the village realized that the armoured unit was the enemy's and began to withdraw. Ahmad Ibrahim Yusuf, a farmer and a member of the village militia, related what followed:

It was impossible to withstand the Jewish attack on two fronts. We were very few in number and very poorly armed. We attempted to repel the attack from the north-west, but we never expected this armoured unit to approach our village on the main road from Acre, since we assumed that Acre was still in Arab hands.... We retreated, leaving behind many killed and injured.¹⁸

The people of al-Sumeiriya had counted on the Arab Liberation Army to come to their rescue, and they were severely demoralized when it did not. Hussein Khalil 'Awad took his family to Acre: "I thought they would be safe because the Arab Liberation Army was stationed there." After the fall of the village, he went back to Acre and took his family to the neighbouring village of al-Ghabisiya. From that time, he lost confidence in the Arab regular forces and their ability to safeguard the city. He stayed in al-Ghabisiya until it too fell; then he fled again with his family to the village of 'Amqa. He decided to return to al-Ghabisiya to bring out a few of his belongings which were left behind.

I had to return to the village.... I had kept the keys of my rented house with me when we fled. At the village, I met a few elderly people who told me that the Jews were not near the house.... I went to the house and was glad to fetch my belongings from there.¹⁹

He then took his family to the village of Abu Sinan, remaining there until it surrendered. With a few villagers he marched north-eastward, to the village of Tarshiha, where he stayed until it was captured. Now the whole of Galilee had fallen into Israeli hands. With his family he left for Lebanon, never to return to his village.

¹⁸ Among those killed during the fight were Saleh Sa'id Yusuf, Ahmad Muhammad al-Haj, Muhammad 'Ali Shana'a, Sa'id Muhammad Khatib, Muhammad Lemuneh, Mahmoud Saleh 'Awad, Saleh Sa'id Ka'boush, the wife of the former mukhtar, Hamadeh Abdul Fadi and the two children of Muhammad 'Ali Felous. Those injured were Muhammad Abu-Fuad, Rajab al-Tariwi, Muhammad Khalil 'Awad and Mustafa Ahmad Khatib. (Ahmad Ibrahim Yusuf, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, February 28, 1973.)

¹⁹ Hussein Khalil 'Awad, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, February 28, 1973.

Some villagers returned to al-Sumeiriya; Ahmad Ibrahim Yusuf was one of them. He recalled:

We returned to the village to get our dead. We were able to bring the body of Mahmoud Khalil 'Awad because it was in the southernmost section of the village. The rest of the bodies had to remain in the centre of the village as we could not get them out.²⁰

Ibrahim Taher Sa'iyah returned to the village with Ahmad Saba, a farmer, three days after the village was captured.

Few people were in the village. Most of the village was destroyed. The Jews entrenched themselves in the south and east close to the Acre-Beirut Road.... We went in and out of the village without being seen.²¹

2. AL-ZIB

The village of al-Zib was about fourteen kilometres north of Acre. It had a population of 1,910 and a total land area of 12,607 dunums, with 12,438 dunums belonging to the Arabs and 169 dunums listed as "public property."²²

The people of al-Zib were too close to Jewish settlements to avoid clashes. After the battle of the Yechiam convoy at Kabri,²³ the Jews of Nahariya took revenge by attacking an Arab truck loaded with grain on its way from the village of al-Zib to the city of Acre, killing the driver and four of the six passengers.²⁴ Henceforth, the villagers patrolled the road and tried to prevent the Jewish convoys from reaching the settlements of Ma'sub and Hanita. The villagers began to post guards around the village around the clock. But

²⁰ A day after the village had fallen, he returned with Hussein Khalil 'Awad, 'Ali 'Abass, Yusuf Sa'id Yusuf and Muhammad Sa'id 'Amer. (Ahmad Ibrahim Yusuf, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, February 28, 1973.)

²¹ I was told that among those who remained in the village were Zaynab al-Zayneh, her husband, and their three children. Her oldest son left the village with the rest of the villagers. The family is still separated. (Ibrahim Taher Sa'iyah, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 1, 1973.)

²² Estimated as of December 31, 1944. See *Village Statistics, 1945*, p. 41.

²³ On March 28, 1948, the Arab villagers of Western Galilee ambushed a Jewish convoy near Kabri on its way from Nahariya to Yechiam (Khirbat Jiddin). The villagers killed most of its members in a battle which lasted for over ten hours. This was one of the few important defeats the Jews suffered in Western Galilee. For further information on the Battle of the Convoy, see Lorch, *Israel's War of Independence, 1947-1949*, pp. 68-70.

²⁴ It was the custom of farmers to accompany the truck with their produce to its destination, riding on top of the sacks. Those killed in the attack were: Haj Mustafa al-Faqhir, Khalid al-Khatib, Yunis Khatab and Muhammad 'Ali 'Ataya. Injured were Fayez Omar Yusuf and Khalil Muhammad Khalil. Only one person, Muhammad Yamani, fled the scene without injury. (Muhammad As'ad Qiblawi, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, March 1, 1973.)

they were unprepared to withstand a full-scale attack.²⁵ The village strength was estimated at between seventy and seventy-five men,²⁶ armed with some sixty rifles of different kinds, three or four Bren guns²⁷ and one machine gun,²⁸ with fifty to seventy rounds of ammunition for each man.

At dawn on May 14, a company of the Carmeli Brigade attacked al-Zib and immediately occupied the house of Muhammad 'Ali al-Sheikh Taha, in the southernmost section of the village.²⁹ Soon after, a Jewish armoured unit approached the village from the south; the soldiers wore the red and white Arab headdress.

We knew that our Arab brothers would not let us down. But when the approaching soldiers began to shoot at us, we realized that they were Jews.... They had fooled us with their headdresses.... Our Arab brothers did not come to our rescue. Only thirty-five to forty men remained to defend the village. We could not withstand the Jewish attack. The armoured cars really terrified us. We began to retreat north, leaving behind our dead and injured.³⁰

A few villagers who were "too old and could not escape" remained in the village. Muhammad As'ad Qiblawi recounted:

I slipped into the village about a month after it had fallen into Jewish hands, to bring a few things from my home. I talked to the elderly people

²⁵ Many of the villagers had taken their families to Ras al-Naqla, just within the borders of Lebanon, soon after hearing of the massacre at Deir Yassin and Nasr al-Din (a small village near Tiberias which was attacked on April 10, 1948; the Zionists blew up all of the houses in the village, killing ten of the ninety inhabitants, trapped within doors). At the time of the Jewish attack, almost all of the villagers had left al-Zib, except for the armed men and a few elderly people. I was given the names of those who stayed on: Khalil Safrawi and his wife, 'Abdul Hafez Hassan, Umm Ahmad Mansour, Umm Kamleh Shaheneh and Shahena 'Abdul Razeq. (Ahmad Bakri al-Barjawi, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 2, 1973.)

²⁶ Few of the armed men in the village had any systematic training. However, six of the villagers had served in the British Police Corps or the Transjordanian Frontier Force. Their names were given to me: Sami Yusuf, Ahmad Darwish, Suleiman 'Awad, Mustafa Bakr, Sa'd al-Din Nabulsi and Hussein al-Masri. *Ibid.*, March 3, 1973.

²⁷ These were supplied by one of the richer villagers, Abu Fayez 'Ataya.

²⁸ The machine gun was owned by Fathallah al-Sheikh Taha. The villagers had to buy most of their own guns and ammunition. The cost of a rifle was between 100 to 120 Palestinian pounds (\$400-\$480), while a single bullet cost ten piasters (\$0.40). Many of the villagers sold part of their livestock, land or their wives' jewellery to purchase a gun and some ammunition. (Muhammad 'Abed, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 1, 1973.)

²⁹ Eyewitnesses (Muhammad As'ad Qiblawi, Ahmad Bakri al-Barjawi and Muhammad 'Abed) told me that Muhammad 'Ali al-Sheikh Taha was bayoneted to death by the Jews and his wife fled through a window, breaking a leg in the process. ('Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 1 and 2, 1973.)

³⁰ Muhammad As'ad Qiblawi, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 2, 1973.

who had remained; they were all placed in Abu Saleh's house. They said that the Jewish soldiers had destroyed most of the al-Ramel area, south of the village, and the eastern section... and that a few of them were still in the village and were stationed at Sa'di's house, on the Acre-Beirut road.³¹

My informants commented that a few people had recently (Autumn 1972) gone to Western Galilee via the West Bank to see their village and discovered that it had "disappeared."³² The few who had stayed behind had been moved to the village of al-Mazra'a, just south of the Jewish town of Nahariya.

3. AL-BASSA

Al-Bassa was about eighteen kilometres north of Acre and quite close to al-Zib. Its population was estimated on December 31, 1944 at 2,950 Arabs³³ and 150 Jews, residing at nearby Ma'sub, and it had a total land area of 29,535 dunums, with 25,258 dunums belonging to the Arabs, 4,178 to the Jews, and ninety-nine dunums listed as "public property."³⁴

The people of al-Bassa did not expect any trouble from their Jewish neighbours at Ma'sub and Hanita; the Jews had assured the mukhtars of the village that they wished them no harm. They were in the habit of visiting the village from time to time and must have known that its people harboured no ill will toward the Jews.

I was told that the villagers first heard of Jewish atrocities committed against Arab villages over the radio at Ahmad Hussein Maghribi's coffee-house. They became all the more anxious when they learnt of the fall of Tiberias, Safed and Haifa. Hussein As'ad Khalil reported that they did not trust the Jews because the latter "had a plan to convert Palestine into a Jewish state.... They wanted our land as well and did not want us there."

When the Jews attacked al-Bassa, most of the villagers had been evacuated to Lebanon. Hussein As'ad Khalil remembered: "I took my mother, wife and children to Lebanon when the Jews of Nahariya killed my father, who was a policeman with the British, on his way to Acre. I did not want any

³¹ *Ibid.*, March 1, 1973.

³² Al-Zib was pulled down and converted into Kibbutz Gesher Hazaf, now inhabited by American, British and South African Jewish immigrants. See Anis Sayegh, ed., *Buldaniyat Filastin al-Muhtaleh* (Towns of Occupied Palestine) (Beirut: Palestine Liberation Organization Research Centre, 1968), p. 127.

³³ About two-thirds of the villagers were Christians and one-third Muslims. The Christians resided in the eastern section of the village and had two mukhtars, Wadi 'Azzam and Jabbour al-Haroun. The Muslims lived in the western part of the village and had Khadr 'Issa as their mukhtar.

³⁴ *Village Statistics, 1945*, p. 40.

harm done to the rest of my family. At the village remained about forty armed men and a few elderly people."³⁵

At dawn on May 14, as the men were preparing to go off duty after being on guard all night, a Jewish infantry unit attacked from Jubeil to the south-east, overlooking the village. At first the armed villagers were able to halt the attack, but only until an enemy armoured unit approached from the west. Believing that the coastal villages were still in Arab hands, an attack from this direction was totally unexpected. According to Abdullah Hussein Dukhi, who took part in the fighting:

At first, we thought the armoured unit was Jordanian [the Arab Legion] because the men wore red and white headdresses. When they began shelling our positions, we knew they were not Arabs. . . . We felt helpless and decided to retreat north, the only way open to us.³⁶

As in most of the villages of Western Galilee, only a few people from al-Bassa were able to infiltrate back to their village to bring out their relatives and to retrieve some of their belongings. Mahmoud Hassan Dukhi returned two days after the village had fallen to fetch his mother, only to find her a burnt corpse at his home. Hussein As'ad Khalil, who also returned, reported:

My uncle and his wife were not in the village. The village was empty. . . . I saw the bodies of Abdullah Isma'il Muhammad, Ahmad Muhammad Khalil, and 'Ali Hussein 'Ali, who were killed by Jewish snipers as they tried to infiltrate into the village. . . . The Jews were entrenched at Jubeil, overlooking al-Bassa.³⁷

Hussein As'ad Khalil's uncle and his uncle's wife, who stayed on after the fall of al-Bassa, described the Jewish occupation of the village:

The day the village fell, Jewish soldiers ordered all those who remained in the village to gather in the church. They took a few young people — including Salim Darawes and his sister Ellen — outside the church and shot them dead. Soon after, they ordered us to bury them. During the following day, we were transferred to al-Mazra'a. . . . There we met other elderly people gathered from the surrounding villages.³⁸

³⁵ Only four of the armed men could use their weapons effectively. They were As'ad Ibrahim Musa, 'Ali Khalil 'Issa, Dawud Ghezzuh and Ismail Khalil Hamureh. The old people who remained were Haj 'Ali Khalil, Nuha Mukluh, Zuhra al-Bahthi, 'Aysha al-Qaysiyah, Sa'ida Huwila, Wadi 'Azzam and his brother, and Hussein As'ad Khalil's uncle and his wife, who, after living ten years at the village of al-Mazra'a, were permitted to join their family at 'Ain al-Hilweh camp in Lebanon. (Hussein As'ad Khalil, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 2, 1973.)

³⁶ Abdullah Hussein Dukhi, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, March 1, 1973.

³⁷ Hussein As'ad Khalil, interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, March 1, 1973.

³⁸ I was told that among those killed at this time were Qudes al-Bayk, Musa Salim Khalil, Yunis Hussein Yunis, As'ad Khalil 'Issa and Mikha'il 'Audeh. (Hussein As'ad Khalil's uncle and his wife (I was asked not to reveal their names), interviewed at 'Ain al-Hilweh, Lebanon, March 4, 1973.)

Three days after the capture of al-Bassa, the city of Acre surrendered to the Jews.³⁹ In order for the Jews to forestall a possible attack from Lebanon by way of Ras al-Naqura, the rest of Western Galilee had to be occupied. On May 24, the Carmeli Brigade attacked and seized the frontier post of Ras al-Naqura; in the same operation the villages of Kabri and al-Ghabisiya were captured.

4. KABRI

The people of Kabri⁴⁰ were disheartened when they heard that all the Arab villages along the coast, including the city of Acre, had fallen into Jewish hands. They were very poorly armed; there were between forty to fifty men sharing between them some forty to forty-five different kinds of rifles, with seventy to one hundred rounds of ammunition each, and a few hand-grenades.

The Jews had attacked Kabri earlier in the year (on February 1, 1948) when a small Jewish force attempted to blow up the house of Faris Sirhan, a village notable and a supporter of the Mufti of Jerusalem. In the following weeks the people of Kabri often blocked the main highway leading to Khirbat Jiddin and to the other settlements in the north.

On the morning of March 28, Ibrahim Ya'qoub saw a Jewish armoured car leaving Khirbat Jiddin to the main Nahariya-Safed road; the villagers had learned earlier that a convoy was on its way from Nahariya. They asked Officer 'Alush, in charge of the Arab Liberation Army group stationed at Kabri, to have his thirty-five to forty men assist them in preventing the passage of the convoy through Kabri on its way to Khirbat Jiddin, but 'Alush refused, claiming that he had no orders to attack.

Determined nonetheless to block the road, the villagers gathered together in the al-Rayas area, two kilometres south-west of Kabri, and, placing rocks in the road, one group positioned itself on both sides of the road, and another entrenched itself at the cemetery behind the stone tombs, overlooking the road.

At noon, the Jews brought a bulldozer to al-Rayas to clear the way. Soon after a convoy composed of three armoured cars, two trucks and a bus approached the village. The people of Kabri, now joined by villagers from the surrounding villages, opened fire but were unable to stop the convoy. An eyewitness, 'Ali Qadureh, reported that at about this time a hand-grenade was thrown at the armoured car ahead, but it failed to explode. Then "a second hand-grenade was thrown, but it fell short. . . . We did not hit any of the armoured cars. But suddenly as one of the armoured cars was turning around,

³⁹ For further information see Kimche and Kimche, *Both Sides of the Hill*, p. 129.

⁴⁰ *Village Statistics, 1945* combines the villages of Tarshiha and Kabri in its figures. Thus Tarshiha and Kabri had a total population of 5,360 Arabs, owning 37,308 dunums, with ninety dunums owned by Jews and 10,030 dunums listed as "public property."

it turned over and caught fire, blocking the road and the Assal Water Canal, the water source of our village."⁴¹ The rest of the convoy stopped and could not turn back because the vehicles were too close to each other. As the villagers continued to shoot at the stalled cars, the Jewish soldiers began to jump out of their armoured cars and run toward the village orchards. The villagers began to run out of ammunition. They urged those back in the village to send their women to the Arab Liberation Army to shame them into joining the fight. By mid-afternoon, the Arab Liberation Army and villagers from around about joined the fighting. Jamil Ya'qoub, a local villager who took part in the fighting, reported:

We kept fighting until we killed almost all of them . . . Two injured Jewish soldiers, hiding in the fields, killed Ahmad Muhammad Hassan, the camel driver, as he was coming back to Kabri from the village of Kafr Yasif. . . . We destroyed all of their armoured cars and trucks except the bus. Officer Kallas, of the Arab Liberation Army, asked those in the bus to surrender, but they refused; they shot at him and he was wounded. We brought gasoline and set the bus on fire, with the soldiers in it It was God's will that we should win that day.⁴²

At nightfall, a British force, accompanied by an Arab policeman, approached the village and stopped at the roadblock. They demanded passage to al-Rayas, but were not permitted to pass. Soon after, they retreated a few kilometres and began to shell the area from al-Mazra'a. The next morning, the British soldiers came back and were handed the bodies of about seventy-four Jewish soldiers.⁴³ My informants said that all the weapons captured on the battlefield were seized by the Arab Liberation Army.

A few days later, General Ismail Safwat, Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Liberation Army, visited the village and inspected the area. When he left, he took with him Mahmoud Dib (the mukhtar's son), 'Uthman Muhammad Kassem, and Ahmad Rashid to headquarters in Damascus; they returned a few days later with a gift to the village of eleven rifles and some ammunition.

The expected Jewish attack came on May 21, simultaneously from the south-west, the south-east and the north.⁴⁴ There were about twenty or

⁴¹ 'Ali Qadureh, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 22, 1973.

⁴² Jamil Ya'qoub interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 28, 1973.

⁴³ Arab losses were two Arab Liberation Army soldiers and one villager killed and two injured. ('Uthman al-Jesheh, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 26, 1973.) The fate of the Jewish convoy is described by Lorch, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

⁴⁴ Women and children of Kabri had been evacuated to Tarshiha soon after the fall of Acre. Only a few old people remained, among them: Haja Umm Hussein, Umm Hassan Dabajeh, Abu Isma'il 'Arkeh, Umm Kazneh Dabour, Kassem al-Hashimeh and Fatimeh al-Kheshfeh. (Amina Muhammad Mousa, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 23, 1973.)

twenty-five villagers entrenched east of the village. A member of this group, 'Uthman al-Jesheh, reported that when the Jews attacked,

... We could not confront [them]. They were too many and well-armed. After all, didn't they occupy most of the villages along the coast, including the town of Acre? We decided to hide and not to fire. . . . We later retreated to Tarshiha.⁴⁵

When the Jews entered the village, they captured a number of the old people who could not make their way to the orchards. Amina Muhammad Musa (Umm Sa'id Ra'di) was one of those who got out in time. Her story is worth relating in detail.

My husband and I left Kabri the day before it fell. We walked a few hours to the east on the main Kabri-Tarshiha road. As it got dark, my husband suggested that we spend the night in the village orchard and proceed after the morning prayer. He said that no harm would come to us if we spent the night there. At dawn, while my husband was preparing for his morning prayer, our friend Rajeh passed us and urged us to proceed, urging that we run. My husband made his prayers, then we started to walk towards Tarshiha. It was not too long before we were met by the Jews, who were coming from the north and south towards Kabri. They stopped and searched us. We had no weapons. They took my jewellery — gold earrings, a necklace, and four bracelets . . . and forty pounds we had with us. One of the Jews, who spoke broken Arabic, kept saying: "I will give this necklace to *habibti* (my girl friend)." I did not say a word to him because I knew they were our enemies and that they had no mercy on us. Another soldier said, as the shelling started, destroying almost everything: "Kwayis, kwayis Kabri." [Expressing delight at the shelling of Kabri.] They took us and a few other villagers, Ibrahim Dabajeh, Hussein Hassan al-Khubeyziyeh, his wife and three children, and a man from the village of al-Nahr called Khalil al-Tamlawi, in an armoured car back to the village. There a Jewish officer interrogated us and, putting a gun to my husband's neck, said: "You are from Kabri?" We told him that we were from the village of Sheikh Dawud. However, 'Ali Abu 'Aziz of the village of al-Ghabisiya, who was working for the Jews, said that we were lying and that we were from Kabri. The Jews took away my husband together with Ibrahim Dabajeh, Hussein Hassan al-Khubeyziyeh, Khalil al-Tamlawi, 'Uthman Ibn As'ad Mahmoud and Rajeh. They left the rest of us — Umm Hassan Dabajeh, Abu Isma'il 'Arkeh, Kassem Shahineh, Umm Khazneh Dabbour, Umm Hussein al-Khubeyziyeh and myself — to the main Kabri-Tarshiha road. The Jewish soldiers were dancing in the streets. . . . They came to us and asked us about our boys. . . . An officer came and asked me not to cry. He said he would bring my husband back, except that he had already been killed. . . . He showed me a picture of Faris Sirhan and asked me if I knew him "Tell Faris," he said, "we will occupy Palestine and will follow him to Lebanon." We slept in the village orchards that night. The next morning, Umm Hussein and I went to the village. The chickens were in the streets, and Umm Hussein

⁴⁵ 'Uthman al-Jesheh, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 23, 1973.

suggested that I go and bring some water. I saw Umm Taha on my way at the village courtyard. She cried and said: "You had better go see your dead husband." I found him. He was shot in the back of the head. I pulled him to the shade and went to bring Umm Hussein to help me bury him. I did not know what to do. I could not dig a grave for him. We carried him on a piece of wood to the cemetery and buried him sideways in his mother's grave. . . . Until today I worry and pray that I buried him in the right way, in the proper position.⁴⁶ I stayed in Kabri six days without eating anything. I decided to leave and join my sister, who had fled earlier with her family to Syria. I asked Abu Isma'il 'Arkeh, an elderly man, to accompany me to Tarshiha, and he did. We left the others in the village. I do not know what happened to them. Abu Isma'il remained with his son in Tarshiha, and I proceeded to Syria.⁴⁷

5. AL-GHABISIYA

Al-Ghabisiya was a village about sixteen kilometres north-east of the city of Acre. Its population was estimated on December 31, 1944 at 1,240 Arabs; it had a total land area of 11,786 dunums, with 11,771 dunums belonging to the Arabs and fifteen dunums listed as "public property."⁴⁸

The people of al-Ghabisiya fought with the villagers of Kabri against the Jewish convoy to Khirbat Jiddin on March 28, 1948. They knew that the Jews would sooner or later attack their village. As elsewhere the villagers of al-Ghabisiya were not well-armed and sought the aid of the Arab regulars and other volunteers. Their strength was estimated at forty men sharing among them thirty rifles of different makes and one Bren gun,⁴⁹ and between forty and sixty rounds of ammunition each.

The Jews attacked al-Ghabisiya on May 21, the same day as they did Kabri.⁵⁰ They approached from the north and south-west, and immediately

⁴⁶ Facing the city of Mecca.

⁴⁷ Amina Muhammad Musa, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 24, 1973.

⁴⁸ Estimates include the population and land area of the neighbouring village of Sheikh Dawud. *Village Statistics, 1945*, p. 40.

⁴⁹ I was told that the Bren gun and a rifle were salvaged during the fight in Kabri. A representative of the Arab Liberation Army came to the village and took the rifle from Ahmad Hijazi and the Bren gun from Dib Jesh'a. My informant said: "That was the only time the Arab Liberation Army came to our village." (Hussein Shehada, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 26, 1973.)

⁵⁰ Most of the villagers had taken their families to the neighbouring villages or to Lebanon soon after the city of Acre had fallen. A few remained in the village. Ahmad Dib Kassim was one of them: "I did not take my family out of the village until the last minute because I continued to believe that the Arab armies would enter Palestine, protect us, and recapture the occupied villages and towns." (Ahmad Dib Kassim, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 25, 1973.)

captured 'Uthman As'ad 'Abdul 'Al's house, in the southernmost corner of the village, and arrested the owner and his son.⁵¹ They shelled the village from the house, killing and injuring many of the villagers as they were fleeing.⁵² Hussein Shehada said: "We did not resist the Jewish soldiers; we were too few and very poorly armed. We decided not to confront the Jews in order to be able to retreat."⁵³

Many of the villagers returned to the village a week after its occupation. Hussein Shehada recalled: "I returned to bring a few blankets, some pillows and food for my family. We left in such a hurry that I was unable to take anything with me."⁵⁴ Most of the people of al-Ghabisiya remained in the Galilee until it was completely captured on October 31, 1948. Then they moved to Lebanon.

6. AL-BIRWA⁵⁵

Al-Birwa was a village on the Acre-Safed road, ten kilometres east of Acre. It had a mixed population of Muslims and Christians numbering 1,460, and a total land area of 13,542 dunums, of which 546 dunums were in Jewish possession.⁵⁶

The people of al-Birwa had followed the news of the fighting in the Galilee with mounting anxiety. They had heard of the fall of Haifa, Acre and the villages along the coast. They were told by the people of Tamra that "the Jews were mean and unkind to the old men, women and children. . . that they had killed a woman and her children in the village."⁵⁷

Soon after the fall of Acre, the villages north-west of al-Birwa — al-Makr, Judeida, Julis, Kafr Yasif and Abu Sinan — surrendered. The villagers of al-Birwa decided to contact the nearby villages — Sha'b, Mi'ar, Majd al-Kurum, al-Bi'na, Deir al-Asad, and Nahf — to organize a common defence against the expected Jewish offensive which would have al-Birwa as its first target. At this time the people of al-Birwa received a delegation composed of Arab Druze, sent by the Jews from Druze villages that had decided to surrender and to cooperate with the Jews. They were advised to do likewise. The villagers were unable to agree because they were divided into followers

⁵¹ About twenty armed men had stationed themselves in the village to confront the Jews. (Hussein Shehada, interviewed at Bourj al-Barajneh, Lebanon, February 23, 1973.)

⁵² *Ibid.*, February 22, 1973.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, February 26, 1973.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, February 22, 1973.

⁵⁵ A version of this section appeared in Arabic in *Shu'un Filastiniya*, 21 (May 1973), pp. 104-107.

⁵⁶ *Village Statistics, 1945*, p. 40.

⁵⁷ Mahmoud Sa'd, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 4, 1973.

of the Darwish-Sa'd and al-Kayyal families. Some favoured surrender, and the others were for fighting.

Like other villages, al-Birwa was not prepared for a Jewish attack. It had a strength of about forty men,⁵⁸ armed with different makes of rifles, with between thirty and forty rounds of ammunition each, and one machine gun.

The people of al-Birwa prepared for the attack by taking their old men, women and children out of the village. Haj 'Ali Fayyad took his family as early as May 23 to the village of al-Bi'na, about ten kilometres to the east. 'Abed Bishr sent one of his wives with six children to Beirut on May 24 and sent his second wife and four children there a week later. Mahmoud Sa'd sent his family to al-Bi'na on June 1, while Najib Sa'd sent his on June 6. About forty-five elderly people, both Muslim and Christian, stayed on in the village, hiding in the church with Father Gibran.

On the afternoon of June 10, three armoured cars approached al-Birwa from the west. As they came closer, the villagers began shooting at them, and forced the Jews to turn back. At about sunset, the Jews, now numbering over one hundred men, returned. The villagers were able to engage the attacking force only for a short time. "We ran out of ammunition and did not know what to do. Our men began to retreat one by one to the east."⁵⁹

The Jews remained on the outskirts of the village all night. At dawn on June 11 — just before the first United Nations truce was to come into effect — the Jews entered the village and occupied it.⁶⁰

The villagers who fought left everything behind and retreated to join their families. But they did not expect the Jews to stay in their village long. As Haj 'Ali Fayyad recalled:

We left our homes open and our fields unharvested. We had a great hope of returning with the help of our brothers, the Arab Liberation Army,

⁵⁸ As in the other villages, only a few of the men were trained, having been members of the British Police Corps or the Transjordanian Frontier Force. Among these were: Salim Sa'd, Yusuf al-Kayyal, Muhammad Isma'il al-Sheikh Khalil, Mustafa Mahmoud Mi'ari, Najib Sa'd, Mahmoud Judeh, Hassan Muhammad Safya, Saleh Mi'ari, Salim As'ad Abdullah, Musa Hurani and Ahmad As'ad. ('Abed Hussein Bishr, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, January 31, 1973.)

⁵⁹ Many were killed; my informants are not sure how many. Among those known to have been killed are: 'Ali Hussein Judeh, 'Ali Muhammad Yunis, Ahmad Muhammad Nijun, Muhammad Taha Ihsan and Nimr Mustafa. Muhammad 'Ali Yusuf Hussein, Muhammad 'Ali Ihsan and 'Ali Ihsayat were injured. (Mahmoud Sa'd, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 3, 1973.)

⁶⁰ Fawzi al-Qawuqji, Commander-in-Chief of the Arab Liberation Army, gives June 11, 1948 (supported by my informants' accounts) as the date of the fall of al-Birwa. "Memoirs, 1948," No. 153, July 12, 1948 (unpublished manuscript, Archives of the Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut). The Palestinian historian, 'Arif al-'Arif, mistakenly and without any supporting data, gives the fall of al-Birwa as May 23. *Al-Nakba*, Vol. II, p. 425.

who were stationed at Tell al-Liyat, about six kilometres east of al-Birwa.⁶¹

The people of al-Birwa waited for about thirteen days. During this time they depended upon the hospitality of the neighbouring villages. On the morning of June 23, the villagers decided to recapture their village. It was almost the end of the harvest time, and they wanted to harvest their fields before the crop was ruined. The news of the plan spread throughout the surrounding villages. My informants report that over two hundred men and women assembled and made preparations to fight for their village and their harvest. About ninety-six men were armed with different makes of rifles, and they had about thirty to forty-five rounds of ammunition each. Officer Jassem, an Iraqi of the Arab Liberation Army stationed at Tell al-Liyat, gave the villagers some ammunition, but told them he could not join them because he had no orders.⁶² They then made their way through the Arab Liberation Army's line, marching towards the village shouting "Allahu Akbar."⁶³

When the shooting started, many people from the surrounding villages joined the attackers. 'Abed Hussein Bishr said: "This is a local tradition. When you hear shooting, you join in."⁶⁴

The Jews were taken by surprise; many of them were in the fields. The villagers attacked them from three directions: from Jebal al-Tawil, to the north of the village, from Sha'b, to the south-east, and from Tell al-Liyat, to the east. The Jews retreated to the village. The villagers pressed on their attack, forcing the Jews back to Tell Kissan and to the area of Abu Leban, about half a kilometre west of al-Birwa.⁶⁵ In the village the Jews left behind three positioned machine guns and seven mechanical harvesters at the fields of Ahmad Isma'il Sa'd that had been used to harvest the villagers' wheat, besides a few sacks of wheat gathered from the fields. In the house of Ahmad Isma'il Sa'd and 'Abed Darwish (where the Jews had stayed), the villagers found bags filled with their wives' dresses and their own clothes, twenty to thirty fresh cups of tea, much tinned food, and a great quantity of sugar, tea and coffee.

⁶¹ Haj 'Ali Fayyad, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 4, 1973.

⁶² At this point about eleven Palestinians of the Arab Liberation Army from the village of 'Aqraba deserted their unit and joined the villagers. ('Abed Hussein Bishr, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, January 31, 1973.)

⁶³ Mustafa al-Nimr, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 3, 1973.

⁶⁴ I.e., "faz'a." For further information see Hisham B. Sharabi, *Palestine and Israel: The Lethal Dilemma* (New York: Pegasus, 1969), p. 190.

⁶⁵ The villagers lost many killed, including women. Among them were: Jamileh Muhammad Khamziyeh, Muhammad Sa'id of Sakhnin, Faraj Isma'il Abdullah of Majd el Kurum, Saleh Rabeh of Deir al-Asad, Radwan 'Audeh and Labibah Radwan. Saleh Duki, Ahmad 'Issa and Kassem Helu were injured. (Najib Sa'd, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 3, 1973.)

The people of al-Birwa were delighted to find some of their wheat already harvested and packed in sacks. They rushed to take as many sacks as possible to their homes. Najib Sa'd recalled:

The reason why we fought for our village was because we were hungry. It was harvest time. . . . Why should we leave our crops to the Jews? . . . We tried to take the mechanical harvesters into the village. However, the Jews, west of the village, began to shoot at us, forcing us to leave the machines where they were.⁶⁶

The villagers remained in the village for two days. On June 23, soon after the retaking of the village, four United Nations representatives came to the village, carrying white flags. They spoke with Salim As'ad Abdullah, Musa Hurani and Ahmad As'ad, formerly policemen during the British mandate. The United Nations representatives asked to speak with the leader of the group who attacked.

We laughed. . . . We told them that we had no commander, that this was our village, and that we came back to harvest our fields and take the village back from the Jewish invaders. . . . They wanted to go through our village to speak to the Arab Liberation Army's commander at Tell al-Liyat, but we stopped them.⁶⁷

On the afternoon of the following day, about one hundred Arab Liberation Army men entered the village of al-Birwa. As they were approaching the village, they shelled the Jewish positions west of the village.

We were so happy and proud to see our Arab brothers coming to help us. We knew that they would come to our aid and would not let us down. We were tired and nearly out of ammunition. . . . The Arab soldiers were led by Officer Jassem and a Lebanese officer known as Mahdi. . . . They were armed with modern weapons.⁶⁸

Officer Mahdi complimented the people of al-Birwa on their courage and fighting spirit, but he suggested that they leave and join their families in the surrounding villages for a short rest. "We were certain that he was sincere and trusted the soldiers of the ALA to protect the village." So for a second time the people of al-Birwa left their village. That evening, the villagers heard shooting in the village. Mahmoud Sa'd recalls:

We wanted to return to the village, but some of us were confident that our Arab brothers, who were well armed, would withstand a Jewish attack. But before long, we saw them retreating from the village. We could not believe our eyes. . . . They came to aid us and protect our village; instead, they handed over the village to the enemy.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, February 2, 1973.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, February 1, 1973.

⁶⁸ Mustafa al-Nimr, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 4, 1973.

⁶⁹ Mahmoud Sa'd, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 2, 1973.

The people of al-Birwa remained in the surrounding villages. Najib Sa'd's family stayed on the outskirts of the village for almost a week before deciding to go north to Lebanon. His wife refused to go anywhere, hoping they would return to their home soon. Haj 'Ali Fayyad stayed on a month (at al-Bi'na) after the village had been occupied the second time, before deciding to leave to Lebanon. Some villagers infiltrated into their village to "steal" some of their belongings from their own homes. Others were not so successful. Najib Sa'd remembered:

We took refuge in Lebanon and life was not what we expected it to be. Conditions were bad. We had nothing to live on. I became desperate, and one night, I decided to leave my family and go back to the village to bring some money I had buried outside my house before the Jews attacked. . . . But I never reached my village. I was caught by the Jews and put in jail. I did not stay long in jail. One day, the Jews filled a truck with prisoners, blindfolded us, and drove us to the borders of Gaza. . . . On our way, the Jews beat us and took our watches and rings. When we arrived at our destination, they assembled us, chose a man at random, and shot him in front of us. They ordered us to run as fast as possible to the other side of the border and not to look back. They were shooting in the air, and I ran as I had never run before. . . . I worked in Gaza for a short time, saved some money, and used it to travel back to Lebanon to join my family.⁷⁰

In 1950, the Israelis, in accordance with Article 125 of the Defence Regulations of 1945, declared the village of al-Birwa a "closed" area for security reasons. In 1972 Haj 'Ali Fayyad went to visit al-Birwa and found that it had suffered the same fate as that of countless others in Palestine. "When I arrived there, there was no al-Birwa. The village was levelled and the few Arabs who remained behind had been transferred to other villages. The Jews had built a new village in place of ours."⁷¹

⁷⁰ Najib Sa'd, interviewed at Shatila, Lebanon, February 1, 1973.

⁷¹ Al-Birwa is now inhabited by Yemeni Jews; see Sayegh, *Buldaniyat Filastin al-Muhtaleh*, p. 20.