Battle of Atarot 1948: The Holy Jihad Besieges the Settlement on the Jerusalem–Ramallah Road



The battle of Atarot was an attack launched on 15 March 1948 by Holy Jihad fighters and volunteers from Jenin and Syria on the Zionist settlement of Atarot on the Jerusalem–Ramallah road, after Zionist gunmen dug into the quarries east of it and began firing on Arab passers-by and cars. The fighters drove the gunmen out of the quarries, besieged the settlement and cut it off from Jerusalem until early May; when the British withdrew on 14 May, the Haganah command ordered it evacuated. [1]

Contents

1. At a glance
2. The Ramallah road
3. The Arab forces
4. 15 March: the battle of the quarries
5. Siege and evacuation
6. Results
7. Differences between the accounts
8. Timeline
9. Frequently asked questions about the Battle of Atarot

At a glance

Item	Details
Date	15 March 1948, with the siege lasting until early May
Place	The Atarot settlement and its quarries, on the Jerusalem–Ramallah road, near al-Ram and Qalandiya
Arab forces	The Holy Jihad under Kamel Erekat, a force from Jenin under Fawzi Jarrar, and Syrian volunteers under Mustafa al-Sibai
Enemy	Zionist gunmen in the quarries, and the settlement’s residents
Arab losses	One wounded
Outcome	The gunmen driven from the quarries; the settlement besieged, then evacuated on Haganah orders after 14 May

Sources: [1][2]

The Ramallah road

The Atarot settlement had been built on the Ramallah–Jerusalem road north of the city. In early March 1948 the Holy Jihad command learned that Zionist gunmen had dug into the quarries east of the settlement and were firing on passers-by and on the cars using the road, so that the road linking Jerusalem to the north of Palestine

came under threat. [1]

The Arab forces

Three forces converged on the village of al-Ram, east of the settlement: a Holy Jihad force under Kamel Erekat, a son of Jerusalem and deputy to the army's commander Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini; a force from Jenin under Fawzi Jarrar; and a force of Syrian volunteers under Mustafa al-Sibai. [1][2]

Kamel Erekat was one of the Holy Jihad's leading commanders; he appears in a well-known photograph taken by Khalil Rassas in the town of Biddya in January 1948, standing in the front row between Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini and Malik al-Husseini. [3]

15 March: the battle of the quarries

On 15 March 1948 the fighters began shelling the quarry area. The exchange lasted several hours; then they advanced and drove the Zionist gunmen out, turned their fire on the settlement itself, and kept up the shooting until morning. Only one of the fighters was wounded. [1]

Siege and evacuation

After the battle the fighters cut the settlement off from Jerusalem until early May, so that its crops and produce piled up unsold. When its residents expected it to fall, they asked the British for help, and the British moved the women and children to Jerusalem. [1]

On 14 May 1948 the British army withdrew from the area and evacuated the Qalandiya airfield, which the settlement's residents then occupied; the Haganah command then ordered them to withdraw from the settlement at once, and it was evacuated. [1]

Results

By driving the gunmen from the quarries the fighters secured the Jerusalem–Ramallah road, and they besieged the settlement for some two months until the Zionists had to abandon it. The battle coincided with other fighting north of Jerusalem, including the battle of Shu’fat on 24 March, when the fighters attacked a convoy heading from Jerusalem to the settlement of Neve Yaakov. [1]

Timeline

Date	Event
Early March 1948	Zionist gunmen dig into the quarries and fire on the road [1]
15 March	The battle of the quarries; the gunmen driven out [1]
March – early May	The settlement besieged and cut off from Jerusalem [1]
May	The British move the women and children to Jerusalem [1]
14 May	The British leave Qalandiya airfield; the Haganah orders the settlement evacuated [1]

Frequently asked questions about the Battle of Atarot

When was the Battle of Atarot?

On 15 March 1948, followed by a siege of the settlement until early May. [1]

Where is Atarot?

On the Jerusalem–Ramallah road north of Jerusalem, near al-Ram and Qalandiya. [1]

Who took part in the battle?

The Holy Jihad under Kamel Erekat, a force from Jenin under Fawzi Jarrar, and

Syrian volunteers under Mustafa al-Sibai. [1]

What was the outcome?

The Zionist gunmen were driven from the quarries and the settlement besieged, then evacuated on Haganah orders after the British withdrawal on 14 May. [1]

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Sources and references

1. WAFA – Palestinian National Information Centre, “Battles of the Nakba”: “The Battle of Atarot” (in Arabic).
2. “The Holy Jihad: How the First Army to Confront the Occupation and Partition of Palestine Was Founded,” Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, 29 December 2022 (in Arabic).
3. “The Nakba Was ‘Not Only Defeats’: Untold Stories of Heroism in Jerusalem,” Al Jazeera Net, 14 May 2020 (in Arabic).