Al-Khisas Massacre 1947: Palmach Blows Up Homes over Families

On the night of 18 December 1947, a force of the Palmach, the Haganah's strike force, raided the village of al-Khisas in the northern Hula Valley under cover of darkness, opening fire, throwing hand grenades and blowing up several homes on their occupants. Ten people were killed, mostly women and children, some of them buried under the ruins of their homes. [1] [2]

The al-Khisas massacre was one of the first Zionist massacres, weeks after the Partition Resolution and months before the Nakba. When some voices objected to the operation, the majority view in the Haganah leadership was that the use of force, however unpleasant, "would pay off in the long run." [2]

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The al-Khisas massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	The night of 18 December 1947 [1] [2]
Place	The village of al-Khisas, in the northern Hula Valley, Safad district [1] [2]
Perpetrator	A force of the Palmach, the Haganah's strike force [1] [2]
Method	Gunfire, hand grenades, and blowing up several homes under cover of darkness [2]
Killed	10–12, mostly women and children, some buried under the ruins of their homes [1] [2]
Fate of the village	Partial flight in May 1948, then forced expulsion of those remaining on 5 June 1949 [2]

Al-Khisas

Al-Khisas was a Palestinian village of the Safad district, in the northern Hula Valley, on a natural terrace with the Hasbani River flowing to its west. Its cultivated land and orchards covered 1,438 dunums. [2]

The massacre: the night of 18 December 1947

On the night of 18 December 1947, members of the Haganah's strike force (the Palmach) raided the village under cover of darkness, opening fire, throwing hand grenades and blowing up several homes. [2] The dead, according to WAFA, were all women and children. [1]

The Haganah claimed the raid was retaliation for the killing of two Jewish policemen in the Safad area; it first denied that children had been killed, then a spokesman admitted it, while claiming it was "regrettable" that children had been sleeping in what he described as "a small military post." [2]

The toll

Source	Killed
Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA)	10, all women and children [1]
New York Times (via *All That Remains*)	10, including 5 children, some buried under collapsed homes [2]
Another estimate (via *All That Remains*)	12 civilians, including 4 children [2]

“Force will pay off”

At a Haganah leadership meeting on 1–2 January 1948, attended by David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan, some officers and civilian leaders objected to the operation, but the prevailing view was that the use of force, however unpleasant, would pay off in the long run. [2] Al-Khisas thus became an early model of the policy of raids on Arab villages that intensified in the following months.

Expulsion and the erasure of the village

On 25 May 1948, at the end of Operation “Yiftach,” part of al-Khisas’s population fled under psychological warfare, while others stayed. In the middle of the night of 5 June 1949, Israeli army trucks surrounded the village; the remaining residents were forced onto them, made to demolish their own homes, and treated “like animals,” then dumped on a sun-baked hill near Akbara, where they lived for years in miserable conditions. [2]

In 1948 the settlement of “HaGoshrim” was established a few hundred meters south of the village site, on its land, and its settlers still farm al-Khisas’s fields. All that remains of the village are piles of stones, cactus, the remains of an old building and a large vaulted stone dam. [2]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

On a December night in 1947, months before the Nakba, the Palmach blew up the homes of al-Khisas over its women and children, killing at least ten, and its leadership then concluded that force “would pay off.” Less than two years later, the village’s remaining people were expelled by force and made to demolish their own homes. The al-Khisas massacre remains a testament that the ethnic cleansing of the Galilee began with massacres before the formal war had even started.

Frequently asked questions about the al-Khisas massacre

When did the al-Khisas massacre take place?

It took place on the night of 18 December 1947, weeks after the UN Partition Resolution.

Who carried out the al-Khisas massacre?

It was carried out by a Palmach force, the strike force of the Zionist Haganah organization.

How many people were killed in the al-Khisas massacre?

Ten according to WAFA and the New York Times, mostly women and children; another estimate gives twelve civilians, including four children.

Where is al-Khisas?

It lies in the northern Hula Valley in the Safad district, near the Hasbani River.

What happened to al-Khisas after the massacre?

Part of its population fled in May 1948, the rest were expelled by force on 5 June 1949, and the settlement of HaGoshrim was built on its land.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Israeli Massacres,” Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA).
2. Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948*, Institute for Palestine Studies, entry “al-Khisas,” as published by Palestine Remembered.