Nahalin Massacre 1954: A Night Raid on a West Bank Village

At about midnight on 28–29 March 1954, a militarily trained Israeli force attacked the village of Nahalin west of Bethlehem, then under Jordanian administration. The attackers raked the village with machine-gun fire for about an hour and a half, threw hand grenades, blew open the doors of homes and the village mosque with explosives, and planted a mine on the road that blew up a Jordanian relief lorry. At least nine were killed and fourteen wounded. [1] [2]

The massacre came five months after the Qibya massacre , and WAFA says the raid was led by Ariel Sharon himself. [3] The Mixed Armistice Commission condemned Israel “in the strongest terms,” and its chairman said the evidence “establishes guilt without question.” [1]

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The Nahalin massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	The night of 28–29 March 1954, at about midnight [1] [2]
Place	The village of Nahalin, west of Bethlehem, then under Jordanian administration [3] [1]
Perpetrator	A militarily trained Israeli force, estimated by witnesses at about 200; WAFA says 300 paratroopers under Ariel Sharon [1] [3]
Method	Machine guns and hand grenades, blowing open the doors of homes and the mosque with explosives, and mining the road [1]
Killed	9 according to the UN, 11 according to WAFA, and 14 according to villagers [1] [3]
Wounded	14–19, including women and children [1] [2] [3]
International response	The Mixed Armistice Commission condemned Israel “in the strongest terms” [1]

Nahalin

Nahalin is a Palestinian village in the Bethlehem governorate, west of the city, with about 620 inhabitants in 1945. When the massacre took place, the village was not under Israeli occupation, but part of the Jordanian-administered West Bank, guarded by the National Guard and the Jordanian army. [3]

The massacre: the night of 28–29 March 1954

At about midnight on 28 March 1954, a well-armed Israeli force crossed the armistice line toward Nahalin. Witnesses estimated it at about 200 men, most of whom stayed outside the village while small patrols attacked it. [1] WAFA says 300 paratroopers pushed 3.5 kilometers into the West Bank and surrounded the village on three sides. [3]

The attackers fired automatic weapons into the village for about an hour and a

half, threw hand grenades, blew open the doors of seven houses with explosives, and used a large charge to destroy the double doors of the village mosque, shattering all its window panes. UN observers found bullet and grenade-fragment damage on eight buildings. [1]

The village's National Guard confronted the attackers. [1] [3] When an Arab Legion (Jordanian army) lorry rushed to the village's aid, it was blown up by a mine the attackers had planted on the road about three kilometers from the village, killing three soldiers and wounding the officer in charge and four soldiers. Observers found at the scene an incendiary bomb, a working hand grenade, and a prepared TNT charge marked with Hebrew letters. [1]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Killed	Wounded
Mixed Armistice Commission (UN)	9: five National Guardsmen and a woman in the village, and three soldiers in the lorry	14 villagers, plus the officer and four soldiers [1]
Jordanian Foreign Minister's cable	9	18 civilians: men, women and children [2]
Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA)	11: eight civilians and three Jordanian soldiers	15, including five soldiers [3]
A source from the village (via WAFA)	14	19 [3]

As usual, the occupation claimed the raid was retaliation for fedayeen operations launched from the village against its settlements. [3]

The Armistice Commission and the Security Council

On 30 March 1954 the Jordan-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission held an

emergency meeting, boycotted by the Israeli representative, and adopted a resolution describing the attack as a “most flagrant breach” of the Armistice Agreement, condemning “Israel in the strongest terms for this latest aggression,” and calling on the Israeli authorities to apprehend and punish those responsible. Its chairman said the evidence “establishes guilt without question.” [1]

Jordan lodged a complaint with the Security Council, demanding “drastic and efficient action” by the United Nations. [2] The complaint was placed on the Council’s agenda, and Lebanon submitted a draft resolution finding the attack a “flagrant breach” of the Armistice Agreement and calling for Israel’s censure and for compensation. But the discussion stalled, and the Council took no decision by the end of 1954. [4]

The second Nahalin massacre in 1989

The 1954 massacre was not the last in Nahalin. At 2:30 a.m. on 13 April 1989, during the month of Ramadan, Israeli occupation forces raided the village and opened fire on its people, some of whom were shot in their homes, and the village remained under armed siege for hours. [5] WAFA says five young men and boys were killed and about a hundred wounded. [3] Palestine’s letter to the United Nations said seven were killed and more than fifty wounded, naming among them Subhi Muhammad Shakarneh, Riyad Muhammad Ali Ghayaza, Fuad Yusef Najajrah, Ibrahim Yusef Najajrah, Mahmoud Hassan al-Sheikh and Waleed Muhammad Safi. [5]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

On a single night in March 1954, an Israeli force attacked a border village that was not under occupation, firing on its homes, blowing open their doors and those of its mosque, and mining the road its rescuers took, killing at least nine. The Armistice Commission condemned it in the strongest terms, but the Security Council took no decision. Thirty-five years later, occupation soldiers returned to Nahalin on a

Ramadan dawn and killed its young men and boys once again.

Frequently asked questions about the Nahalin massacre

When did the Nahalin massacre take place?

It took place on the night of 28–29 March 1954, at about midnight; a second massacre took place in the village at dawn on 13 April 1989.

How many people were killed in the 1954 Nahalin massacre?

Nine according to UN documents, 11 according to WAFA, and 14 according to a source from the village.

Was Nahalin under occupation when the massacre took place?

No; it was part of the Jordanian-administered West Bank, guarded by the National Guard and the Jordanian army.

Who led the attack on Nahalin?

WAFA says the raid was led by Ariel Sharon, who had led the Qibya massacre five months earlier.

What did the United Nations decide on the Nahalin massacre?

The Mixed Armistice Commission condemned Israel “in the strongest terms,” while the Security Council took no decision despite placing Jordan’s complaint on its agenda.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Attack on Nahhalin village: Jordan-Israel Mixed Armistice Commission

resolution and UNTSO report," United Nations, 1954.
2. Cablegram from the Jordanian Minister for Foreign Affairs to the UN Secretary-General, 30 March 1954.
3. "Israeli Massacres," Palestinian National Information Center (WAFA).
4. "Yearbook of the United Nations 1954–55" (excerpts), United Nations.
5. Letter from the Permanent Observer of Palestine to the United Nations, 13 April 1989.