Balad al-Shaykh Massacre 1947: A Palmach Raid on New Year's Eve

On New Year’s Eve, 31 December 1947, a 170-strong Palmach force surrounded the village of Balad al-Shaykh near Haifa, under explicit orders to “harm the largest possible number of men.” The attackers fired inside homes, blew up dozens of them, and pulled men out and shot them; between 60 and 70 Palestinians were killed, including women and children. [1] [2]

The Balad al-Shaykh massacre was the first large attack by the Haganah after the Partition Resolution, [2] and one of the Haifa massacres that preceded the city’s fall. In the village itself lies Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. [1]

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The Balad al-Shaykh massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	New Year’s Eve, 31 December 1947 – 1 January 1948 [1] [2]

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Place	The village of Balad al-Shaykh, Haifa plain, at the foot of Mount Carmel [1]
Perpetrator	The Haganah, with a 170-strong Palmach force [1] [2]
Orders	Encircle the village and “harm the largest possible number of men” [1] [2]
Killed	60–70 according to Khalidi, including women and children [2] [1]
Destruction	Dozens of homes blown up [1] [2]
Fate of the village	Occupied on 24 April 1948, settled by Jewish immigrants in 1949 and now part of “Nesher” [1]

Balad al-Shaykh

Balad al-Shaykh was a Palestinian village on the Haifa plain, at the foot of the northwestern extension of Mount Carmel. [1]

In 1945 Balad al-Shaykh was the second-largest village in the Haifa subdistrict, with 4,120 inhabitants, all Muslim. Some 4,410 dunums of its land were devoted to cereals, and 368 dunums to irrigated farming and orchards. [1]

The massacre: New Year’s Eve 1947

The massacre came in a chain of events: on 30 December 1947 the Irgun threw a bomb at the gate of the Haifa refinery, killing six Palestinian workers; Arab workers responded by killing Jewish workers at the refinery; and the Haganah decided to “retaliate” against Balad al-Shaykh, home to many of the refinery’s workers. [1]

A 170-strong Palmach force was ordered to “encircle the village, harm the largest possible number of men.” [1] On New Year’s Eve the force stormed the village, firing weapons, blowing up houses, and pulling men out and shooting them. [2] Dozens of houses were destroyed, and more than sixty villagers were left dead or wounded. [1]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Toll
Walid Khalidi, *All That Remains* (via Al Jazeera English)	60–70 killed [2]
Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question	More than 60 [1]
Al Jazeera Net massacres list	60 [3]
Haganah General Staff figures (via Al Jazeera English)	Two women and five children among the dead, about 40 wounded [2]
Safa News Agency	About 600 [4]
Palestine Remembered	About 30 killed and wounded, mostly women and children [5]

This article adopts the figure of 60–70 given by Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi. Notably, the Haganah itself acknowledged killing women and children, even though its orders targeted “men.” [2]

The occupation and depopulation of the village

After the massacre many families fled the village on 7 January 1948. [2] “Plan Dalet” assigned the Carmeli Brigade to occupy Balad al-Shaykh as part of the capture of Haifa. At dawn on 24 April 1948 Haganah units surrounded the village and demanded its weapons, and at 5 a.m. opened fire with mortars and machine guns. The British then negotiated an agreement under which the villagers were evacuated under British escort. [1]

In 1949 Jewish immigrants were settled in the village’s houses, which was renamed “Tel Hanan” and is now part of the town of “Nesher.” Many Arab houses and shops still stand, occupied by settlers. [1]

The al-Qassam cemetery

In the cemetery of Balad al-Shaykh lies Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam, killed in 1935. Today the cemetery lies within the town of “Nesher,” in a state of neglect, and al-Qassam’s grave has been stripped of its marble slabs. [1] [2]

Read about the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

Conclusion

On New Year’s Eve 1947 the Palmach stormed Balad al-Shaykh under orders to “harm the largest number of men,” blowing up homes, pulling men out and killing them, and killing women and children with them. Four months later the village was occupied and its people driven out, settlers moved into their homes, and al-Qassam’s grave was neglected. The Balad al-Shaykh massacre remains a testament that the Haganah, not only the Irgun, began the massacres months before the Nakba.

Frequently asked questions about the Balad al-Shaykh massacre

When did the Balad al-Shaykh massacre take place?

It took place on New Year’s Eve, 31 December 1947 – 1 January 1948.

Who carried out the Balad al-Shaykh massacre?

It was carried out by the Haganah with a 170-strong Palmach force.

How many people were killed in the Balad al-Shaykh massacre?

Between 60 and 70 according to historian Walid Khalidi, including women and children, with other estimates ranging from 30 to 600.

How is the Balad al-Shaykh massacre related to the Haifa refinery?

It was a retaliation for the killing of Jewish workers at the refinery, which itself followed an Irgun bomb that killed six Palestinian workers at its gate.

Where is the grave of Shaykh Izz al-Din al-Qassam?

In the cemetery of Balad al-Shaykh, which now lies within the town of “Nesher,” in a state of neglect.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Balad al-Shaykh,” Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, Institute for Palestine Studies.
2. “The Nakba: Five Palestinian Towns Massacred 75 Years Ago,” Al Jazeera English, 15 May 2023.
3. “Israeli Massacres against the Palestinian People,” Al Jazeera Net, 3 October 2004.
4. “73 Years since the Balad al-Shaykh Massacre and the Expulsion of Its People,” Safa News Agency.
5. “Zionist Massacres between 1947 and 1996,” Palestine Remembered.