The Samuaa' Massacre

The Samu Massacre, 1966

On **November 13, 1966**, Israeli occupation forces launched a large-scale military attack on the town of **al-Samu** and other areas south of Hebron in the West Bank, which at the time was under Jordanian administration.

The attack involved armored forces, infantry, and paratroopers, supported by artillery and warplanes, making it one of the largest Israeli military operations to cross the Jordan–Israel Armistice Line since the Tripartite Aggression against Egypt in 1956.

Later historical and military sources link the operation to Israeli paratrooper units and officers including **Rafael Eitan**, while Jordanian military sources document the participation of the **Israeli 7th Armored Brigade** in the force that advanced toward the southern Hebron area.

Units of the **Jordanian Arab Army** confronted the attack, particularly forces associated with the **Hittin Brigade** under the command of Colonel **Bahjat al-Muhaysin**, turning what had been planned as an Israeli attack to destroy targets in the area into a major ground and air battle.

Al-Samu Before the Attack

The town of al-Samu lies south of Hebron and, in 1966, formed part of the West Bank under Jordanian rule.

The area was relatively close to the armistice line established after the **Nakba and the occupation of large parts of Palestine in 1948**, making the villages of southern Hebron part of a highly sensitive military zone during the 1950s and

1960s.

During this period, the area witnessed armed crossings, Palestinian fedayeen operations, and repeated Israeli attacks across the armistice line, amid the increasing deterioration of the armistice system established in 1949.

The Immediate Background to the Attack

The Israeli government presented the attack on al-Samu as a reprisal for a mine explosion that struck an Israeli military patrol near the border with the West Bank.

During the night of **November 11–12, 1966**, an explosive device or mine detonated beneath an Israeli military vehicle on patrol, killing **three of its occupants and wounding six others**, according to information Israel presented to the United Nations Security Council.

Israel attributed the incident to armed men who had crossed from territory under Jordanian administration and linked it to Palestinian fedayeen activity.

The subsequent attack on al-Samu, however, was not a limited operation aimed at locating those responsible for the explosion. It developed into a **large-scale military assault inside the West Bank** involving armored forces, paratroopers, artillery, and aircraft.

The Israeli Attack Begins

In the early morning hours of **November 13**, Israeli forces crossed the armistice line toward the southern Hebron area.

According to the report of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, Israeli forces began firing on the Jordanian police post at **Rujm al-Madfa** at approximately 6:15 a.m., using artillery and heavy machine guns.

United Nations officials attempted to contact the Israeli side to arrange a ceasefire, but these efforts did not halt the operation during its initial stages.

Israeli forces then advanced toward al-Samu and neighboring areas, while the operation spread to other communities and positions in southern Hebron.

The Scale of the Israeli Force

The historical encyclopedia of the Jordanian Armed Forces states that the **Israeli 7th Armored Brigade** concentrated its forces in the area and that two armored columns crossed the armistice line, one advancing toward al-Samu while the other moved toward the Yatta area as part of an attack conducted along more than one axis.

The United Nations report independently documents the presence of armored forces, artillery, and aircraft, and quotes a Jordanian military commander in the area describing the attack as being supported by large numbers of tanks, armored personnel carriers, artillery pieces, and aircraft.

The Jordanian Arab Army Confronts the Attack

Units of the Jordanian Arab Army moved toward al-Samu after the attack began.

The **Hittin Brigade** was responsible for a broad sector that included the Hebron and Bethlehem areas and was commanded at the time by Colonel **Bahjat al-Muhaysin**.

Jordanian forces advanced toward the battle zone from several directions while under Israeli air attack.

When Jordanian forces reached the vicinity of al-Samu, they entered into direct clashes with Israeli armored forces and paratroopers.

Hittin Brigade commander Bahjat al-Muhaysin was wounded during the battle, while a number of Jordanian Arab Army officers and soldiers were killed.

The Air Battle Over Al-Samu

The confrontation was not confined to the ground.

The Jordanian Air Force sent fighter aircraft in an attempt to relieve pressure on the ground units and confront Israeli aircraft supporting the attack.

Air clashes took place over the al-Samu area and southern Hebron.

Jordanian pilot **Muwaffaq Badr al-Salti** was killed after his aircraft was shot down during the aerial engagement, and he later became one of the most prominent figures associated with the memory of the Battle of al-Samu in Jordan.

Military sources differ over some details of the aerial engagement and aircraft losses, and it is therefore important to distinguish between what is established in United Nations records and what is reported in the military accounts of the two sides.

The Storming of Al-Samu and the Demolition of Homes

After Israeli occupation forces entered al-Samu, extensive demolition operations began inside the town.

Engineering and demolition units used explosives to destroy houses, buildings, and other structures.

The destruction was not limited to military positions but included a large number of civilian homes and institutions providing direct services to the population.

When United Nations observers reached the area and conducted their investigation, they recorded extensive destruction in al-Samu and its surroundings.

125 Houses Completely Destroyed

According to the official report of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, investigators observed the following destruction in and around al-Samu:

- **125 houses completely destroyed.**
- **The town medical clinic completely destroyed.**
- **A six-classroom school completely destroyed.**
- **A workshop completely destroyed.**
- **The mosque damaged.**
- **28 additional houses damaged.**

The observers also documented the destruction of **20 Jordanian military trucks, two military jeeps, and one civilian bus**.

The report further documented demolitions in other areas affected by the attack, including Khirbat Jinba and the police post at Rujm al-Madfa.

Casualties of the Attack on Al-Samu

Some Arab and Jordanian sources differ in their accounts of the number of dead and wounded, but the corrected United Nations report provides a contemporary official figure for the casualties documented by its observers.

According to the report after its official correction, **18 people were killed**:

- **15 military personnel.**
- **3 civilians.**

The number of wounded was **54**:

- **37 military personnel.**
- **17 civilians.**

The original report contained a typographical error that gave a much higher figure

for civilian wounded, but on **November 21, 1966**, the United Nations issued an official correction confirming that the correct figures were 17 wounded civilians and 37 wounded military personnel.

Jordanian Arab Army Dead

Most of those killed, according to the United Nations report, were members of the military forces that confronted the attack.

Jordanian military sources name among those killed in the battle Major **Muhammad Dayf Allah al-Habahbeh** and Lieutenant Pilot **Muwaffaq Badr al-Salti**, along with a number of other Jordanian Arab Army soldiers.

Colonel **Bahjat al-Muhaysin**, commander of the Hittin Brigade, was also wounded during the battle.

Israeli forces, in turn, suffered casualties during the confrontation. One commander of the paratrooper forces participating in the operation was killed, and a number of Israeli soldiers were wounded.

The United Nations Investigation

Observers from the **United Nations Truce Supervision Organization in Palestine (UNTSO)** began investigating the attack on the same day.

They visited al-Samu and the affected areas, inspected destroyed houses and facilities as well as damaged military and civilian vehicles, visited wounded people in hospitals, and collected testimony from military personnel and civilians.

The investigation was completed on **November 16**, after which the Chief of Staff of the Truce Supervision Organization submitted his report to the United Nations Secretary-General.

The report was transmitted to the Security Council on **November 18, 1966**, followed by the official correction concerning the number of wounded on November

21.

Al-Samu Before the Security Council

The attack was quickly brought before the United Nations Security Council.

Jordan presented details of the operation, destruction, and casualties, describing what had occurred as a major military assault on territory under its administration.

Israel, meanwhile, linked its attack to infiltration, sabotage, and the mine explosion that had killed three of its soldiers, arguing that Jordan had failed to prevent armed activity originating from territory under its control.

Members of the Security Council, however, distinguished between condemning violence across the armistice line and accepting the legitimacy of large-scale military reprisal operations against the other party.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 228

On **November 25, 1966**, the United Nations Security Council adopted **Resolution 228** by 14 votes in favor, none against, with one abstention.

The Council described the attack as a **large-scale and carefully planned military action carried out by the Israeli armed forces on territory under Jordanian administration**.

It expressed regret over the loss of life and heavy damage to property resulting from the operation.

The Council also issued a **formal censure of Israel** for the military action, stating that it violated the **Charter of the United Nations and the Jordan–Israel General Armistice Agreement**.

The resolution particularly emphasized that **acts of military reprisal could not be tolerated** and warned that repetition of such actions could prompt the Security Council to consider further and more effective measures.

The Attack Was Not Merely a Border Incident

The nature of the forces involved and the scale of destruction documented by the United Nations demonstrate that the attack on al-Samu clearly went far beyond the scope of a limited border incident.

Regular military forces crossed the armistice line, using tanks, artillery, aircraft, paratroopers, and engineering units, while dozens of civilian homes and other structures were destroyed.

For this reason, the Security Council itself described the operation as **“large-scale and carefully planned.”**

In Palestinian memory, the event became known as the **Samu Massacre** because of the deaths, injuries, and extensive destruction inflicted on the town, while Jordanian military memory also preserves it as the **Battle of al-Samu** because of the confrontation fought by the Jordanian Arab Army against the attacking forces.

Al-Samu and the Escalation of Tensions in the West Bank

The consequences of the attack did not end with the withdrawal of Israeli forces.

The scale of the operation and destruction inflicted on al-Samu triggered widespread anger in the West Bank, and protests and demonstrations erupted during the following days, expressing outrage both at the Israeli attack and at the Jordanian government’s inability to prevent it.

The operation also intensified tensions between Jordan and Israel and reinforced the sense that the armistice-line system established after 1948 was no longer capable of preventing border incidents from developing into large-scale military operations.

From Al-Samu to the Occupation of the Remaining Parts of Palestine in 1967

The Samu Massacre and Battle took place less than seven months before the major transformation that Palestine and the region experienced in June **1967**.

During the following months, tensions continued on the Syrian and Jordanian fronts, while fedayeen operations, military reprisals, aerial clashes, and mutual threats intensified.

In June 1967, Israel occupied **the remaining parts of Palestine, including the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and the Gaza Strip**, along with Egypt's Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights.

Al-Samu is therefore considered one of the important episodes in the chain of regional escalation that preceded the 1967 occupation, without reducing the causes of that occupation and the subsequent regional conflict to the Samu incident alone.

Al-Samu in Palestinian and Jordanian Memory

The events of **November 13, 1966** remained deeply present in Palestinian and Jordanian memory.

For the people of al-Samu, the memory is associated with the homes that were blown up, the civilian facilities that were destroyed, and the dead and wounded who fell during the attack.

In Jordanian military memory, al-Samu is associated with the confrontation fought by the Hittin Brigade and other Jordanian Arab Army units against Israeli forces that possessed superior weaponry and were supported by aircraft and armored units.

International documentation likewise demonstrates that what occurred was not

merely a local account of a border confrontation. The Security Council formally described it as a **large-scale and carefully planned Israeli military attack** and determined that it violated the Armistice Agreement and the Charter of the United Nations.

From a Palestinian historical perspective, the **Samu Massacre** became one of the most significant Israeli attacks preceding **the occupation of the remaining parts of Palestine in 1967**, and a reminder of the fragility of the armistice lines and the military escalation experienced by Palestinian towns and villages in the years preceding the occupation.