Abu Zaabal Factory Massacre 1970: Phantoms Napalm Egyptian Workers

Early on the morning of Thursday, 12 February 1970, Israeli Phantom jets struck the factory of the National Company for Metal Industries at Abu Zaabal, near Cairo, with rockets, napalm and time-delayed bombs. Dozens of civilian workers were killed, with estimates ranging from 70 to 88, dozens more were wounded, and the factory burned. [1] [2] [3]

The massacre was among the deadliest Israeli deep-penetration raids on Egyptian civilians during the War of Attrition, and was followed two months later by the Bahr al-Baqar school massacre. [1] [3] It is one of the Zionist massacres.

Contents

1. The Abu Zaabal massacre at a glance
2. Deep raids in the War of Attrition
3. The massacre: the morning of 12 February 1970
4. The toll: what do the sources say?
5. The Israeli account and the Egyptian response
6. Frequently asked questions
7. Sources and references

The Abu Zaabal massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	Thursday, 12 February 1970, early morning [1] [2]
Place	The National Company for Metal Industries factory at Abu Zaabal, near Cairo [1] [4]

Item	Details
Perpetrator	The Israeli air force, with US-made Phantom jets [4] [1]
Weapons	Rockets, napalm incendiary bombs and time-delayed bombs [1] [2]
Killed	Between 70 and 88 workers, depending on the source [3] [4] [2] [1]
Wounded	Between 69 and 150, half with permanent disabilities according to Al-Bawaba News [3] [2] [1]
Damage	The main hall destroyed and the factory burned [1] [3]

Deep raids in the War of Attrition

After the June 1967 aggression, Egypt fought the “War of Attrition” along the Suez Canal front. Between January and April 1970 the Israeli occupation extended its attacks into the Egyptian interior, with air raids aimed at breaking Egyptian morale and pushing the government to halt the war. [1] [5]

For these raids the occupation used the Phantom jets it had received from the United States in 1969. [1]

The massacre: the morning of 12 February 1970

In the early hours of 12 February 1970 Phantom jets attacked the Abu Zaabal factory, owned by the National Company for Metal Industries. [1] [2] Egypt told the United Nations that the factory was “situated far from any military installation.” [4]

The aircraft fired rockets and dropped napalm incendiary bombs, destroying the production halls and warehouses, and the factory collapsed on the workers. [2] [5] They also dropped time-delayed bombs buried in the ground, set to explode later among rescue and ambulance teams. [1]

President Gamal Abdel Nasser said the wounded suffered napalm burns, that about two thousand workers were employed at the factory on three shifts, and estimated the losses at about 350,000 Egyptian pounds. [1]

The toll: what do the sources say?

Source	Killed	Wounded
Gamal Abdel Nasser (via Diwan al-Arab)	88	150 [1]
Al-Bawaba News	83	150, half with permanent disabilities [2]
Egypt’s letter to the UN	80	A larger number than those killed [4]
Akhbar El-Yom	70	69 [3]

The Egyptian press commonly cites 70 killed and 69 wounded out of 1,300 workers, while Nasser’s account and Egypt’s letter to the UN point to a higher toll. [3] [1] [4]

The Israeli account and the Egyptian response

An Israeli military spokesman said: “It appears that one of the Israeli pilots made a mistake and hit a civilian target,” a justification the Egyptian writer Abd al-Hamid Kamal called cold-blooded. [2]

Egypt protested to the Security Council, saying the raid was a misuse of aircraft supplied to Israel for “so-called defensive purposes” and belied the occupation’s claim that its forces were under strict orders not to strike civilian targets. [4]

On Labour Day, 1 May 1970, Nasser gave his last speech on the occasion in Shubra al-Khaima, addressing the massacre and declaring: “We are building the energy of life, hope and freedom.” [1]

Conclusion

On a winter morning in 1970 the workers of Abu Zaabal were at their factory when they were met by Phantom rockets and napalm; between 70 and 88 of them were killed and dozens more burned. The occupation then called it a pilot’s “mistake.”

Two months later its aircraft struck the Bahr al-Baqar school, killing its children.

Frequently asked questions about the Abu Zaabal factory massacre

When did the Abu Zaabal factory massacre take place?

Early on the morning of Thursday, 12 February 1970, during the War of Attrition.

How many people were killed in the Abu Zaabal massacre?

Between 70 and 88 workers, depending on the source; Nasser gave 88 killed and 150 wounded.

What weapons were used against the Abu Zaabal factory?

Rockets, napalm incendiary bombs and time-delayed bombs, dropped by US-made Phantom jets.

Who owned the Abu Zaabal factory?

The National Company for Metal Industries; according to Egypt, it was a civilian factory far from any military installation.

How did the occupation justify the bombing?

An Israeli military spokesman claimed one of the pilots “made a mistake and hit a civilian target.”

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. Ibrahim Khalil Ibrahim, “The Bombing of the Abu Zaabal Factory,” Diwan al-Arab, 7 July 2016.
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Memory,” Al-Bawaba News, 22 February 2020.

3. Eman Hammam, “Zionist Crimes,” Akhbar El-Yom, 5 July 2023.
4. “Yearbook of the United Nations 1970,” Chapter XI: The Situation in the Middle East.
5. Mohammed Abu al-Ela, “Why Did Okasha Forget Israel’s Crimes?,” Parlmany, 26 February 2016.