Battle of Beit Surik 1948: Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini's Ambush on the Jerusalem Convoy



The Battle of Beit Surik was one of the first battles of the Holy Jihad Army in the Nakba. It was fought on 19 January 1948 near the village of Beit Surik north-west of Jerusalem. Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini personally led an ambush on a Zionist supply convoy heading to Jerusalem under Zionist and British guard; the fighters detonated mines under its vehicles, and its guards fled, abandoning them. [1][2]

Then the people of the neighbouring villages rushed to break the siege the Palmach had thrown around the fighters, and the attackers withdrew before sunset; only British intervention stopped the resistance from pressing its attack further. [2][3]

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At a glance

Item	Details
Date	19 January 1948
Place	Near the village of Beit Surik north-west of Jerusalem, about 2.5 km from the Jaffa–Jerusalem road
Commander	Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, with his deputy Kamil Erekat
Field commanders	Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh, Fawzi al-Qutub and Fawzi Jarrar
Arab force	The Holy Jihad Army and fighters from Saris, al-Qastal, Qalunya, Suba and Beit Surik, with reinforcements from nearby villages
Enemy	A Zionist supply convoy under Zionist and British guard, then Palmach forces and British armoured cars
Zionist losses	34 killed and 29 wounded
Arab martyrs	One killed and five wounded; WAFA gives seven martyrs
Booty	8 rifles and 4 machine guns
Outcome	The convoy was destroyed, the siege broken and the Zionist forces withdrew

Sources: [2][3][1]

Background: the birth of the Holy Jihad Army

About a month after the partition resolution, the Holy Jihad force was founded on 25 December 1947 in the Surif area of the Hebron district under the command of Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini. Its first aim was to cut the supply routes to the Zionist neighbourhoods and settlements in Jerusalem, above all the Jaffa–Jerusalem road. [2][3]

Beit Surik lies north-west of Jerusalem and overlooks the main Jaffa–Jerusalem road from about two and a half kilometres away, making it an ideal position for the fighters' ambushes. [2]

The plan and the ambush

Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini's intelligence learned that on 19 January 1948 the Zionists would send a large convoy of supply vehicles, many of them carrying food, to Jerusalem under Zionist and British guard. Al-Husseini held a meeting with the commanders of the Saris, al-Qastal, Qalunya and Suba sectors, attended by his deputy Kamil Erekat and by Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh. [1][2]

The original plan was to destroy the convoy at a point on its route, but the convoy changed course towards Beit Surik, so the fighters moved there and set up their headquarters in the neighbouring village of Beit Anan at dawn that day. They laid an ambush on both sides of the road, the demolition team under Fawzi al-Qutub planted mines during the night, Abu Dayyeh served as a field commander, and Kamil Erekat coordinated the forces. [1][2][3]

The course of the battle

Around noon the convoy reached the ambush site. The fighters struck it from every side and detonated the mines under its vehicles. The Zionists abandoned their vehicles and fled into the hills towards the settlement of al-Khams (Ma'ale HaHamisha); the fighters pursued them and fierce fighting followed, despite the other side's superiority in grenades and submachine guns. [1][2]

Palmach forces then entered the battle and surrounded the village and the fighters with machine guns. Eyewitnesses said two British armoured cars mounted with machine guns joined the attack on the fighters and were a main cause of their casualties. [2][3]

The villages break the siege

When word of the siege spread, reinforcements rushed in from the surrounding villages, among them Beit Duqqu, al-Qubeiba, Beit Anan and Qatanna, from Ramallah and its villages, and from Jenin a relief force under Fawzi Jarrar. The siege was broken before sunset and the Zionist forces withdrew. [2][3]

As the fighters prepared to attack the al-Khams settlement, a British police unit intervened, and a second battle followed with British security forces in which the fighters could not match British superiority in arms and training, so Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini ordered a withdrawal. [3][2][1]

Results

According to Al Jazeera Net and Arabi Post, 34 Zionists were killed and 29 wounded, while one fighter was martyred and five wounded, among them the field commander Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh; the WAFA file gives seven martyrs. The fighters seized eight rifles and four machine guns, and WAFA speaks of large quantities of ammunition, rifles and machine guns. [2][3][1]

The battle showed that the Holy Jihad Army, less than a month after its founding, could mount successful ambushes to cut supplies to Jerusalem, and it was a prelude to larger battles on the Jaffa–Jerusalem road, chief among them Bab al-Wad and al-Qastal. [3]

Differences between the accounts

The sources differ on the number of martyrs: Al Jazeera Net and Arabi Post, drawing on eyewitnesses and the historian Aref al-Aref, give one martyr and five

wounded, while the WAFA file gives seven martyrs and no exact figure for the other side’s dead. Some accounts claim Chaim Weizmann was in the convoy; we have not used this because it is undocumented. [2][3][1]

Timeline

Date	Event
25 December 1947	The Holy Jihad force is founded in the Surif area [2]
Dawn, 19 January 1948	The fighters set up headquarters in Beit Anan and mine the road [2]
Noon, 19 January 1948	Mines detonated under the convoy; its guards flee towards al-Khams [1]
Afternoon, 19 January 1948	The Palmach besieges the fighters; the villages break the siege before sunset [2]
19 January 1948	British police intervene to protect al-Khams; the fighters withdraw [3]

Frequently asked questions about the Battle of Beit Surik

When was the Battle of Beit Surik?

On 19 January 1948. [1][2]

Where is Beit Surik?

A village north-west of Jerusalem overlooking the Jaffa–Jerusalem road from about 2.5 km away. [2]

Who led the battle?

Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini, commander of the Holy Jihad Army, with his deputy Kamil Erekat and the field commanders Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh, Fawzi al-Qutub and Fawzi Jarrar. [2][3]

What were the Zionist losses?

34 killed and 29 wounded, according to Al Jazeera Net and Arabi Post. [2][3]

What role did the British play?

They helped guard the convoy, two British armoured cars joined the attack on the fighters, and British police then intervened to protect the al-Khams settlement. [2][3]

Why does it matter?

It was one of the Holy Jihad Army's first successful battles to cut supplies to Jerusalem and a prelude to Bab al-Wad and al-Qastal. [3]

Read also on Palestinuna

- Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini
- The Battle of al-Qastal
- The Battle of Bab al-Amud, 1947
- Battles archive

Sources and references

1. WAFA – Palestinian National Information Centre, "Battles of the Nakba": "The Battle of Beit Surik" (in Arabic).
2. Mohammed Shaaban Ayoub, "From the Battles of the Nakba: The Battle of Beit Surik," Al Jazeera Net, 13 May 2019 (in Arabic).
3. Shaimaa al-Abyad, "The Palestinians Nearly Won but for British Intervention: What Was the Battle of Beit Surik?" Arabi Post, 13 November 2023 (in Arabic).