The Battles of Radar Hill 1948: The Yarmouk Battalion and Biddu's Fighters Retake the Hill

Radar Hill is a hilltop between the Arab village of Biddu and the settlement of Ma’ale HaHamisha, north-west of Jerusalem, where the British army built a radar station and a small camp, hence its name. Whoever held it dominated the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv road and threatened the Ramallah–Jerusalem road, so in 1948 it saw a succession of battles between the fighters and Arab forces on one side and the Zionist militias on the other. [1][2]

On 28 April 1948 the militias seized the hill together with Beit Iksa and Beit Surik; the people of Biddu and the nearby villages resisted all night, and then the Third Yarmouk Battalion of the Arab Liberation Army under Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi counter-attacked, forcing them back and, according to Arab sources, inflicting some 185 dead. The position held against the attacks of May until the Jordanian Arab Army took it over. [1][2][3]

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At a glance

Item	Details
Date	28 April 1948, the attacks of May, then the Jordanian army’s takeover of the position
Place	Radar Hill between Biddu and Ma’ale HaHamisha, with Beit Iksa, Beit Surik and al-Nabi Samwil
Arab forces	Fighters from Biddu and nearby villages, the Arab Liberation Army’s Third Yarmouk Battalion, then the Jordanian Arab Army
Commander	Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi, commander of the Third Yarmouk Battalion
Enemy losses according to Arab sources	About 185 killed and many wounded, and three armoured cars destroyed
Spoils	A large quantity of weapons and ammunition
Outcome	The hill retaken and control of the main road restored; the May attacks failed

Sources: [1][2][3]

The hill and the road

The hill stands on the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv road next to the settlement of Ma’ale HaHamisha, and holding it meant, in theory, complete control of that road. From the start of April 1948 the Zionist militias turned to limited attacks to seize key points securing their settlements and the roads between the towns, and Radar Hill and the heights north of Jerusalem were among their targets. [2][1]

28 April: loss and recapture

On the night of 28 April 1948 a large Zionist force launched a broad attack on the heights north of Jerusalem, seizing Radar Hill and the villages of Beit Iksa and Beit Surik, reaching the edge of Biddu and nearly taking the shrine of al-Nabi Samwil, which would have given it full control of the Ramallah–Jerusalem road. [1][2]

The fighters of Biddu and the nearby villages rose to meet the attackers fiercely, and the battle went on all night. At dawn the Arab Liberation Army's Third Yarmouk Battalion under Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi, which had reached the area three days earlier, counter-attacked the positions the Zionists had taken and forced them to withdraw. [1][2]

Arab sources say the Zionists lost some 185 killed and many wounded and had three armoured cars destroyed, while the Yarmouk Battalion captured a large quantity of weapons and ammunition; the Arabs regained control of the main road and blocked Zionist movement on it. [1][2]

May: attacks with aircraft

In May 1948 the Zionists attacked the hill again several times with larger forces, and their aircraft bombed the Arab positions, but their attacks failed. [1][2]

With the entry of the Jordanian Arab Army, its 2nd Battalion took up positions in Biddu on 15 May, spreading its companies across al-Qubeiba facing Radar Hill, the heights of al-Nabi Samwil and the Biddu ridge. The General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces says an Arab Army force seized Radar Hill at dawn on 26 May 1948, driving out its Zionist garrison, and that the enemy kept trying at night to take it during the truce. [3]

Differences between the accounts

The Palestinian Encyclopedia and WAFA say the Arab Liberation Army retook the hill on 28 April and that the Jordanian army later took over the position, while the General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces says the Arab Army captured the hill from a Zionist garrison on 26 May, suggesting the Zionists regained it during the May attacks. The Jordanian source itself differs on the unit that carried out the attack, between the 1st Battalion and the 4th Battalion under Habis al-Majali. We found no figure in the available sources for the fighters martyred in these battles, and the figure of 185 dead remains an Arab account not confirmed by an independent source. [1][2][3]

Timeline

Date	Event
Early April 1948	The militias turn to attacks to seize key points [1]
25 April	The Third Yarmouk Battalion reaches the area [1]
Night of 28 April	Radar Hill, Beit Iksa and Beit Surik seized; Biddu’s people resist [1]
Dawn, 28 April	The Yarmouk Battalion’s counter-attack; the hill retaken [1]
May	Zionist attacks with aircraft fail [2]
15 May	The Jordanian army’s 2nd Battalion takes up positions in Biddu [3]
26 May	The Arab Army takes Radar Hill [3]

Frequently asked questions about the battles of Radar Hill

Why is it called Radar Hill?

Because the British army built a radar station and a small camp on it. [1][2]

Where is Radar Hill?

Between the village of Biddu and the settlement of Ma’ale HaHamisha north-west of Jerusalem, overlooking the Jerusalem–Tel Aviv road. [1]

Who retook the hill in April 1948?

The Arab Liberation Army’s Third Yarmouk Battalion under Abd al-Hamid al-Rawi, after the people of Biddu and nearby villages had resisted all night. [1][2]

What were the Zionists’ losses?

Some 185 killed, many wounded and three armoured cars according to Arab

sources. [1][2]

What was the Jordanian army’s role?

Its 2nd Battalion took up positions in Biddu on 15 May, and one of its forces seized Radar Hill at dawn on 26 May 1948. [3]

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Sources and references

1. “Radar Hill (battles of),” Palestinian Encyclopedia, after Aref al-Aref, al-Nakba, and Abdullah al-Tall, Karithat Filastin (in Arabic).
2. WAFA – Palestinian National Information Centre, “Battles of the Nakba”: “The Battle of Radar Hill” (in Arabic).
3. General Command of the Jordanian Armed Forces, “The 1948 War” (in Arabic).