Lydda Massacre 1948: The Dahmash Mosque and the Death March

On 11 July 1948 Zionist forces stormed the city of Lydda and opened fire on anything that moved in its streets, then killed those sheltering in the Dahmash mosque; more than 400 Palestinians were killed inside the city. Two days later they expelled all its people on foot towards Ramallah, in what became known as the "death march." [1] [2]

The Lydda massacre was one of the largest crimes of the Nakba, and it is one of the Zionist massacres against the Palestinian people.

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The Lydda massacre at a glance

Item	Details
Date	11–13 July 1948, in Operation Dani [1] [2]
Place	The city of Lydda and the Dahmash mosque at its centre [1] [2]

Item	Details
Perpetrator	Zionist occupation forces, including a commando unit led by Moshe Dayan [2] [1]
Killed in the Dahmash mosque	Between 80 and 176 [1] [3]
Killed inside the city	More than 400; about 426 according to Arab sources [1] [2] [3]
Including the death march	Close to 1,000 [1]
Expelled	About 70,000 from Lydda and neighbouring towns, Ramla among them [1]
Who remained	About 1,000 Palestinians in Lydda and Ramla combined [4] [3]

11 July: the assault

On the morning of 11 July 1948 Zionist aircraft dropped leaflets calling on Lydda's people to surrender and leave the city "before it falls on their heads." At midday the attack began from the east at the village of Daniyal; the defenders repelled it after a fierce battle, but their meagre ammunition ran out. [1]

In the evening a commando unit led by Moshe Dayan stormed the city under a barrage of shells, its jeeps firing "at everything that moves." [2] The assault came after the volunteers and the soldiers of the Arab Legion abandoned Lydda's residents, on the orders of the Legion's British commander, Glubb Pasha. [2]

12 July: the Jordanian armour and the revenge

On 12 July Zionist forces took up positions around the city centre. Although Lydda had not surrendered and scattered resistance continued with modest means, the occupation took control of the city, detained dozens of civilians, ordered the men to gather in the Great Mosque, the Dahmash mosque and the churches, and imposed a curfew. [1]

Then a small Jordanian armoured force entered the city to assess the situation. Residents thought it was the vanguard of an attack to save the city and attacked the Zionist forces. But the armour withdrew after a short time, and the fighters holed up in the police station had to retreat to the hills when their ammunition ran out. The occupation then intensified its brutality, taking revenge on the population on the pretext that several of its soldiers had been killed. [1]

The Dahmash mosque massacre

A soldier toured the streets with a loudspeaker promising residents protection if they stayed in their homes and in the two mosques where hundreds had taken refuge. But soldiers began throwing hand grenades into homes on the pretext of snipers inside; terrified residents ran out trying to flee, and the soldiers shot them. [1]

Those sheltering in the Dahmash mosque in the city centre were fired on inside the mosque, and between 80 and 176 of them were killed. [1] [2] The bodies of men, women and children piled up in the streets and lay in the open under the sun for more than ten days. [1]

More than 400 people were killed inside the city, [1] and Arab sources give about 426, among them women, children and the elderly. [2] [3]

“Expel them”: the expulsion

On 12 July Yigal Allon, the Palmach commander, asked David Ben-Gurion what was to be done with the people of Lydda and Ramla. Ben-Gurion answered with a firm wave of his hand: “Expel them.” Yitzhak Rabin, the operations officer, immediately signed a military order: “The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly, without regard to age.” [1] [3]

The death march

On 13 July soldiers forced the people of Lydda and neighbouring towns, Ramla among them, about 70,000 in all, to leave within half an hour and take a rugged road towards Ramallah. [1] In Ramla, soldiers pounded on doors shouting: “Go to Abdullah, go to Ramallah!” [5] the Ramla massacre

The expelled walked in a long line under the July sun while a military aircraft flew low overhead to force them onward; hundreds died on the road of thirst and exhaustion. [1] Including the victims of the march, the dead numbered close to 1,000. [1]

After the expulsion only about 1,000 Palestinians remained in Lydda and Ramla. [4] [3] Today about 30,000 Palestinians live in Lydda, alongside more than 50,000 Israelis. [6]

Conclusion

In three days the occupation killed hundreds of Lydda’s people in its streets and its mosque, then drove tens of thousands out on foot under the sun, and hundreds died on the road. The Dahmash mosque still stands as a witness to the massacre. Read about the city’s history in Lydda and Ramla before the Nakba.

Frequently asked questions about the Lydda massacre

When did the Lydda massacre take place?

Between 11 and 13 July 1948, in Operation Dani.

How many people were killed in the Lydda massacre?

More than 400 inside the city (about 426 according to Arab sources), between 80 and 176 of them in the Dahmash mosque, and close to 1,000 including the victims

of the death march.

What happened in the Dahmash mosque?

Hundreds took refuge there after a promise of protection; soldiers opened fire on them inside, killing between 80 and 176.

What was the death march?

The expulsion of about 70,000 people from Lydda and Ramla on foot towards Ramallah on 13 July 1948; hundreds died on the road.

Who ordered the expulsion of Lydda’s people?

David Ben-Gurion, telling Allon “Expel them,” after which Yitzhak Rabin signed the expulsion order.

Sources and references

Arabic-language sources are listed with translated titles.

1. “Lydda, 9–13 July 1948,” Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestine Question, Institute for Palestine Studies.
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3. Jeremy Salt, “Kristallnacht in ‘Lod’? What Would You Call Lydda, 1948?” The Palestine Chronicle.
4. “‘Mixed Cities’ in Israel: The Product of Plunder, Looting and the Expulsion of Palestine’s Coastal Cities,” Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 6 June 2021.
5. Sandy Tolan, “The Fall of an Arab Town in 1948,” Al Jazeera English, 19 July 2008.
6. Merfat Sadiq, “Lydda Rises: An Explosion Against Ethnic Cleansing and Occupation Violence in the ‘Mixed Cities’,” Al Jazeera Net, 16 May 2021.