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THE TANTURA MASSACRE, 22–23 MAY 1948

On the night of 22–23 May 1948, a week after the declaration of the State of Israel, the Palestinian coastal village of Tantura (population 1,500) was attacked and occupied by units of the Israeli army's Alexandroni Brigade. The village, thirty-five kilometers south of Haifa, lay within the area assigned to the Jewish state by the UN General Assembly's partition resolution. In its occupation, depopulation, subsequent destruction, and seizure of all its lands by Israel, the fate of Tantura was similar to that of more than 400 other Palestinian villages during the 1948 war. But it also shared with some two score of these villages the additional agony of a large-scale massacre of its inhabitants.

*Word of the Tantura massacre was completely overshadowed at the time by the fighting between Israel and the regular armies of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, and Syria, which had entered the country after the state had been proclaimed. The first written reference to it was made by Haj Muhammad Nimr al-Khatib, a Muslim cleric who had been an active member of the Arab National Committee of Haifa (the highest local political body) before its capture by the Haganah on 23–25 April. In about 1950, Khatib published in Damascus under the title *Min Athar al-Nakba* (Consequences of the Catastrophe) a compendium of writings, including his own memoirs on Haifa and several eyewitness accounts by Palestinian refugees from various parts of the country. Khatib's work, along with those of two other Arab authors, was translated into Hebrew in 1954 by the Israel Defense Forces, General Staff/History Branch, and published under the title *Be'einei Oyev* (In Enemy Eyes). Khatib's references to the Tantura massacre comprise a short account by Iqab al-Yahya (a notable of the village) and a longer and more detailed account by his son Marwan (pp. 118ff. in *Min Athar*). Khatib also reports cases of Tantura female rape victims being treated in a Nablus hospital. Later, using Marwan's testimony, Walid Khalidi referred to "the methodical shooting and burial in a communal grave of some forty young men in Tantura village" in the famous triangular Spectator correspondence between Erskine Childers, Jon Kimche, and himself (12 May–4 August 1961; republished in *JPS* 18, no. 1). Nonetheless, the entry under Tantura in Khalidi's *All That Remains* (Washington, IPS, 1992), inadvertently omitted mention of the massacre.*

The issue of the Tantura massacre has come into recent prominence because of the work of an Israeli researcher, Teddy Katz, who dealt with it at length in his 1998 master's thesis at Haifa University. A summary of his research, particularly his finding that more than 200 Tantura villagers,

mostly unarmed young men, had been shot after the village surrendered, was published in an article in the Hebrew press in January 2000. The article unleashed a storm in Israel, culminating in a 1 million shekel libel suit brought by veterans of the Alexandroni Brigade against Katz (though his research was based on taped testimonies not only of survivors but also of members of the brigade). What happened at the December 2000 trial is dealt with in an article in this issue by Israeli historian Ilan Pappé, who also discusses the research itself and its ramifications.

The fate of Tantura was sealed long before the night of its fall. It was one of the tens of Palestinian villages and towns inside and outside the boundaries of the UN-envisaged Jewish state specifically targeted for capture under the notorious Plan Dalet, the Haganah master plan for the military establishment of Israel on the largest area possible of Palestine (see JPS 28, no.1 for the full text). Tantura itself fell within the zone of operation of the Alexandroni Brigade, one of the erstwhile Haganah's six *Khish* (field force) brigades (to be distinguished from its strike force, the three Palmach brigades). The official history of the Haganah, *Sefer Toldot Haganah* (vol. 3, pp. 1474–75), summarizing the operational orders to the brigades under Plan Dalet, lists the assignments of the four battalions constituting the Alexandroni Brigade. These include the "occupation of al-Tantura and al-Furaydis" as well as the capture of "twenty villages in enemy territory" (i.e., land assigned to the Arab state under the UN General Assembly partition plan). Plan Dalet was put into operation in the first week of April, six weeks before the end of the Mandate and the entry of the Arab regular armies. The task of capturing Tantura was assigned to the Alexandroni Brigade's 33rd Battalion.

After the fall of the village and the massacre, the women and children were taken to the nearby village of Furaydis, which had already fallen but whose inhabitants had not been expelled. The surviving men were held in prison camps and were eventually transported under prisoner exchanges out of Israel; their families followed. Today most live in refugee camps in Syria or in the al-Qabun quarter of Damascus. In June 1948, a few weeks after Tantura's fall, the kibbutz of Nachsbolim was established on its lands by Holocaust survivors. The village itself was razed, except for a shrine, a fortress, and a few houses. The site of the village is now an Israeli recreational area with swimming facilities, and the fortress houses a museum.

The evidence provided by the testimonies published below supplements the evidence of the two Yahyas and the research of Katz, albeit from the inevitably fragmented and narrow perspective of individual villagers caught in the vortex of events beyond their capacity to comprehend. The testimonies were selected from tens of interviews collected during the summer of 2000 by Mustafa al-Wali, a Palestinian researcher living in Damascus. First published in the autumn 2000 issue of *Majallat al-Dirasat*

al-Filastiniyya, JPS's sister quarterly, they form part of a larger oral history project on 1948 to be published later this year.

THE TESTIMONIES

Mubammad Abu Hana, born in 1936, resident of the Yarmuk camp

We were awakened in the middle of the night by heavy gunfire. The women began to scream and ran out of the houses carrying their children, and they gathered in several places in the village.

I also left the house during the fighting and went around the streets trying to see what was going on. Suddenly a woman shouted to me, "Your uncle is wounded! Quick, bring some alcohol!" I saw my uncle with a wound in his shoulder and the blood gushing out like a fountain. Because I was young, I didn't know fear. I grabbed an empty bottle and ran to the clinic. The nurse, a Christian from the village named Zahabiyya, filled the bottle with rubbing alcohol and I ran back to my uncle. The women cleaned the wound and took my uncle to our house, where they hid him from the Israelis in the grain attic.

But the soldiers saw the trail of blood and soon burst in, asking my grandfather where my uncle was. My grandfather said he didn't know. They left but came back several times with the same question. At some point my uncle, who was in pain, asked for a cigarette, and my grandmother gave him one. When the soldiers came back again, the smell of burning tobacco clinched the matter. They grabbed him and took him away. On their way out they insulted my grandfather, shouting that he was a liar, and he answered back that he had only tried to defend his son, as anyone would.

My uncle survived thanks to the intervention of the mukhtar of Zichron Yaacov.* He had good relations with my grandfather, who was the mukhtar of Tantura.

By morning, the shooting had stopped and the attackers rounded everyone up on the beach. They sorted them out, the women and children on one side, the men on the other. They searched the men and ordered them to keep their hands above their heads. Female soldiers searched the women and took all their jewelry, which they put in a soldier's helmet. They didn't give the jewelry back when they expelled us toward Furaydis. During the entire operation, military boats were offshore.

On the beach, the soldiers led groups of men away, and you could hear gunfire after each departure.

Toward noon we were led on foot to an orchard to the east of the village, and I saw bodies piled on a cart pulled by men of Tantura who emptied their cargo in a big pit. Then trucks arrived, and women and children were loaded

* A Jewish settlement slightly more than five kilometers from Tantura.

onto them and driven to Furaydis. On the road, near the railroad tracks, other bodies were scattered about.

Muhammad Ibrahim Abu 'Amr, born in 1935, resident of the Yarmuk camp

We had gathered at the center of the village, in the house of Hajj Mahmud al-Yahya. When the village fell and the soldiers entered, they herded us to the beach. On the way, near the house of Badran on the street leading to the mosque, I counted the bodies of seven young people from the village.

A woman, 'Izzat Ibrahim al-Hindi, started to scream at the horror of the sight, but a burst of gunfire silenced her for good. This woman was the mother of the martyr 'Abd al-Wahhab Hassan 'Abd al-'Al, who had been killed at the end of 1947 by bombs planted by the Jews at the Haifa market.

When they loaded us onto trucks, we saw bodies piled along the road like stacked wood. A woman recognized her nephew among the dead—it was Muhammad Awad Abu Idriss. She started to scream. She didn't know yet that her three sons had met the same fate. Her sons, Ahmad Sulayman, Khalil, and Mustafa, had been killed, but we only learned this later, in exile. But the mother always refused to believe it and insisted that they had escaped to Egypt and would come back to find her one day. She spent the rest of her life waiting for them.

Amina al-Masri (Umm Mustafa), born in 1925, resident of the Qabun quarter of Damascus

From the time that the village of Kafr Lam was captured after the fall of Haifa, we began to fear an attack on Tantura. The night of the assault, men were on guard duty at the various entrances to the village, but they were poorly armed. I heard gunfire and thought it came from al-Bab [the gate], that is to say from southeast of the village. I woke up my husband. At first he thought I was dreaming, but the firing grew louder, and there were explosions and all. They came from the hill of Umm Rashid in the south and from the direction of al-Burj [the tower], on the coast to the north, where the Roman ruins are located. We got the children out and hurried to the house of my parents. They were terrified. The shooting had died down a little and people thought that the battle was over. How naive we were! Abu Khalid 'Abd al-'Al even believed that the Jewish attack had been countered, and cried out, "We won! We got them!" A few minutes later the gunfire resumed with a vengeance, accompanied by shelling. People began running in all directions shouting, "The Jews are inside the village! The Jews are in the village!"

In the morning, when they were leading us to the collection point on the beach, they killed Fadl Abu Hana at the place known as the Marah. Fadl was unarmed, but he wore a khaki jacket. Before our eyes, they took a group of men away and shot them all except for one. To him they said, "Go tell the others what you saw."

In their search for money and gold, they even went through the swaddling clothes of our infants, and when a little girl tarried in taking off an earring, a woman soldier ripped it off, and the little one began to bleed.

They then herded us to a piece of land that belonged to the Dassuki family. We had walked there barefoot over stones and brambles, and then they loaded us onto trucks that took us to Furaydis. There, my grandfather, Hajj Mahmud Abu Hana, sent one of his daughters to find him a shroud in 'Ayn Ghazal or Ijzim, for he sensed that his hour had come. She couldn't find one in either place and returned empty-handed. But he had already drawn his last breath after having bowed to the ground twice and read verses of the Quran, calling on the Almighty not to let him die outside Palestine. We then found a coverlet, which we split open to remove the wool filling to make a shroud with the material and wrapped him in it for burial.

In Furaydis, a military vehicle driven by a female soldier purposely ran down a woman of Tantura, Amina Muhammad Abu 'Umar, the wife of Falih al-Sa'bi, who had been returning from the field with a bundle of wheat on her head that she had gathered to feed her children. A woman who witnessed the scene rushed to pull the dead woman's body off the roadway. Another vehicle barrelled toward her. It missed her but ran over the dead woman a second time.

That day, I told myself that the End of Days had come and that none of us would survive these events.

We spent a month in Furaydis. A child was born there, the first child of Tantura born after the massacre. The family, the Abu Safiyyas, had lost most of their menfolk the day the village fell.

Farid Taba Salam, born in 1915, resident of the Qabun quarter of Damascus

After we heard the news that Haifa and the surrounding villages had fallen, we took up a collection to buy arms. What we had was a few rifles and one automatic weapon, a Brenn. Most of the weapons were English, guns that had been owned by the police demobilized by the English. We also had a few hunting guns.

We organized ourselves for night watches but had more men than guns. The guard posts were Qarqun, Talat Umm Rashid, the water tower, the church, al-Bab, al-Burj, and al-Warsha. At each lookout post, there were only a few men, as many as there were weapons. Our training didn't go beyond the stage of assembling and disassembling rifles, and even then, those who had mastered this skill were practically seen as professionals. The best were the ones who had served in the English police.

When the attack began, our guards returned fire until the ammunition ran out. Because of our lack of experience, a lot of ammunition was wasted with firing too quickly. Most of the defenders fell back toward the center of the village, others managed to get out of Tantura altogether, and a third group

did not leave their posts until they were martyred on the spot or taken prisoner and liquidated.

The population had been rounded up by the victors. Groups of men were led away one by one, and we didn't know what happened to them. I remember that the last group counted about forty men. Taha Mahmud al-Qasim was one of the ones who came back alive. He told us that a Jew had asked his group, "Who here speaks Hebrew?" When Taha said he did, the Jew said, "Watch how these men die and then go tell the others." Then they lined up the other men against a wall and shot them.

Later Yaacov, who was the mukhtar of Zichron Yaacov, came on the beach where we were being held. My father, who knew him, said, "Abu Yussef, the village has fallen, and you have taken all the weapons. What more do you want?" He replied, "Taha, we have to reconcile you with the Haganah in order to be able to stop the fighting."

Later, when we were prisoners at the Sarafand camp, I got to know a young Jew who must have been about seventeen years old. One day I said to him, "Where are you from? Why did you come to Palestine?" He told me he had come from Russia and added, "If someone hears that he now has a state, who wouldn't rush to go there?" I then remembered Rothschild, who had visited Tantura one day in the 1920s. When he found only Arabs there, he reproached the Jews of Zichron Yaacov because they hadn't succeeded in buying any of the land of our village. Even Musa, who was Jewish, who had come to our village, who had lived there, worked the land, built a house there, and whom we called "Musa the Tanturi"—even he left because he felt like a stranger among us.

Musa 'Abd al-Fattab al-Khatib, born in 1924, resident of Yarmuk camp

The night of 23 May 1948, Muhammad al-Hindi, who was the head of the guard of the village, had me called to take position at Dabbit al-Bi'r, between the water tower and the school. There I found Issa al-Fakhri, who had a hunting rifle, 'Abd al-Jabbar Taha al-Shaykh Mahmud, who had a German rifle and fifty bullets, the son of the mukhtar of Qisarya,* also armed with a hunting rifle, and Hasan Faysal Abu Hana, who was unarmed.

I had an English gun and seventy-five bullets. At midnight I gave my weapon to the man who came to replace me, and I was about to go home when 'Abd al-Jabbar suddenly told me to be still and listen. Voices speaking in Hebrew reached us from the field close by. We left our position and crept toward the field to investigate. Suddenly a volley of fire rang out from the direction of the water tower and Qaqun. We hastily regained our position and started firing toward the fields in the east.

* Qisarya (Caesaria) had already fallen on 15 February, one of the first villages to be captured by the Jewish forces.

After a few minutes, we thought that the attackers had withdrawn. But then we saw vehicles unloading armed men near the school, and the attack on this last position began. We were a few dozen meters from the school, and at one point I thought that our position there had fallen. Then I saw military vehicles advancing on the road from al-Bab.*

'Abd al-Jabbar and I thought the village had fallen. It was then that 'Abd al-Rahman Zaydan reached us with 300 bullets, which he gave to me. I stopped firing to take stock of the situation. I then heard Faysal Abu Hana say to Issa al-Hamdan, "Brother, I'm hit, I'm dying." Sulayman and Ahmad al-Masri came at that moment and said they were going back into the village to see what was happening. I warned them, but they left anyway and never returned. Later I learned that both had been killed.

Soon 'Abd al-Jabbar had only five bullets left. There were only three of us now, and only my gun had ammunition. An armored vehicle started coming down the dirt track nearby, and we thought we had been spotted. Two men got out, and we fired on them and hit them. A second armored vehicle with a white flag approached, and they tried to pick up the two bodies but couldn't because we were firing on them with our only gun. Then intensive shelling of our position began, and the armored vehicle pulled off the dirt track and onto the plowed fields. A man from the village had hidden himself under some straw, and the vehicle crushed his leg, but he didn't even cry out so as not to be discovered.

It was then that I suggested to 'Abd al-Jabbar that we change position. We came back to the first hill, where Issa al-Hamdan joined us. The soldiers were advancing toward us. Issa asked me for my gun and gave me his, which had jammed. I tried to get it working again, but couldn't. That's why it was Issa who began firing on them after taking cover.

Little by little, we were falling back toward the water tower. We reached a cave, where we found 'Atiyya 'Amshawi and Muhammad Shihada. We remained there until nine in the morning, when we left our two comrades and advanced toward the water tower a few dozen meters from the cave. Suddenly I heard Hebrew and someone say to 'Abd al-Jabbar, "Hands up!" We hit the ground instantly and managed to get to a crevasse in the quarry, where we hid. We didn't move and could not be seen from their side. But Issa had continued to fire on them until he was out of ammunition. They ordered him to put up his hands and asked where the other gunman was. He said he was alone. They asked if he had served with the British police. He said yes. Then they ordered him to undress and led him to an unknown destination.

Soldiers had taken up position a few meters from our hiding place. We held our breaths. At sundown, they left the position and moved toward the water tower. We then decided to try to make it to the village of Furaydis,

* This road, which led into the Haifa-Jaffa road, was the only one in the village suitable for motor vehicles.

where 'Abd al-Jabbar's uncle lived. That's where we learned the fate of our village. We stayed at Furaydis for three days, spending the day at Mount Carmel and the night in the village. Then we left for 'Ayn Ghazal, where we found others who had withdrawn from Tantura—'Ali Taha, Nimr al-Jamal, Mahmud 'Abd al-Rahim, Yahya al-Hindi, and Kamil al-Dassuki.

'Adil Mubammad al-'Ammuri, born in 1931, resident of Yarmuk camp

Lots of things happened before the attack on Tantura the night of 23 May 1948. I especially remember watching the train go by loaded with armored vehicles, supplies, and ammunition for the colonies of Khudeira, Ramat Gan, and Netanya. During the same period, armed men would fire at Tantura villagers working their fields. As'ad Abu Mdayriss was killed during one of those incidents.

The night of the attack, I was in our house at the center of the village. I tried to go to the southern part but was stopped by machine-gun fire. People were rushing about, old men and children, asking God to grant us victory. They weren't so much in a state of panic as confused, not knowing what to do and what was really happening.

During the earlier clashes, the villagers of the Haifa district had gone to the aid of the others. This time, we thanked God that the neighboring villagers didn't come, because they would have been cut down at the Israeli positions set up on all the roads leading to our village. Later I learned that the inhabitants of Jaba' and 'Ayn Ghazal had tried to come to our aid but had been unable to reach the village.

When they rounded us up on the beach, the Jews asked us, "Are there any Syrians among you? Have you received Syrian help from the sea?"

Once we were captured, we were taken to the camp that had been set up in Umm Khalid. Later they transferred us to the Jalil prison camp, where a Red Cross representative registered our names and informed us of our rights as prisoners of war. The soldiers then made us harvest Arab fields on behalf of a Jewish army contractor. They paid us with coupons with which we could get food items at the canteen. This allowed us to satisfy our hunger, because our daily prison rations were woefully insufficient. One day, several buses arrived in the camp loaded with men. They were made to get down so they could drink at the camp's only water tank. Because they were parched with thirst, they were pushing and shoving to get to the tap. The soldiers opened fire on them and blood mixed with water. Tens of men fell dead before our eyes. It was only later that we learned that the men were from Lydda and Ramla.*

* Lydda and Ramla, which fell within the boundaries of the Arab state according to the UN partition resolution, were conquered on 11–12 July 1948. Except for those taken prisoner (like the men referred to here), the populations of the two towns and their surrounding villages were systematically expelled.

When we left the camp for exile, we had to cover the distance between Wadi al-Milh and Jinin* by foot. I saw numerous Arab corpses along the road.

Mahmud Nimr ‘Abd al-Mu’ti, born in 1930, resident of Yarmuk camp

My father and I took turns on sentry duty. The night of the attack, it was my father’s shift, and he was posted at Qarqun, south of the village. When the attack began I left the house, and people were running in all directions, congregating in groups. I ran into Muhammad Shihada near the Marah. He gave me his rifle and told me that our position at al-Warsha had not yet fallen. I ran to join the defenders.

On the road, my uncle stopped me and told me that al-Warsha had fallen. We returned to the village, and he hid my weapon in the tomato patch inside the walled garden of our house. When we were coming out we ran face-to-face into Israeli soldiers. They searched us and confiscated my identity card as well as seven Palestinian pounds. Then they took us and other prisoners to bury our martyrs, one of whom was Mustafa al-Salhud. Later I learned that they had already killed his two brothers. One of those who had been spared was Taha Muhammad Abu Safiyya, but when they sent him back his hair had turned white, even though he was only sixteen. On the road leading to the cemetery, I saw a number of bodies that I was not able to identify.

I also remember seeing an old man from the Yahya family known as Abu Rashid. He had been badly wounded and had leaned up against a stack of sugar cane. He died in a sitting position and looked like he was alive, and seemed to be smiling. I saw one of the Jewish soldiers take a picture of him.

Later, they took us from the camp at Umm Khalid to the Jalil prison camp, where they exploited our labor by making us take in the harvest. A number of groups that had been taken out to work in the fields never came back. One day while we were still at the Umm Khalid camp we were ordered to dig a big pit, which we did at gunpoint. The Jewish soldiers were talking among themselves in Hebrew, and some of us understood that they were intending to finish us off. One of us managed to get word to the camp commander, who immediately had them replaced.

One day they took us to the village of Qaqun, where the stench of corpses was overpowering.† We began digging a hole to bury the dead, but suddenly an Iraqi mortar shell landed nearby—the Iraqis were positioned five kilometers from there.‡ A Jewish soldier was killed. I myself was hit by

* About forty kilometers.

† He refers to some ninety Iraqi officers and soldiers who fell defending Qaqun, which fell to Israel in early June.

‡ The Iraqi army, which entered Palestine along with the other Arab armies after the declaration of the Israeli state, deployed in central Palestine in the area of the Jinin-Nablus-Tulkarm triangle (within the area allotted to the Arab state under the UN partition plan) to protect the right flank of the Jordanian army operating in the Jerusalem area. They main-

shrapnel, but I didn't realize how badly until Issa 'Abd al-'Al told me I was bleeding from my hand, chest, and shoulder and I lost consciousness.

They treated me along with their wounded and plastered my arm. The Red Cross visited us a little later in the camp. They asked me about my wound. The man in charge of the camp, whose name was Punstein, said that I had been wounded while fighting against his men in Tantura. But the Red Cross delegate was not satisfied with his answer and asked if any of us spoke English, and Fuad al-Yahya told him what really happened.

The Red Cross then told me that I was to be freed, but at first I didn't believe it. As for Fuad al-Yahya, he was punished for speaking up.

The men from Tantura started writing letters to their loved ones. But I was at a loss—where to hide all these letters? My clothes were in rags and the only pocket was small. One of my companions suggested my arm sling, and that's where we hid the letters.

The Red Cross turned me over to the Iraqi army, which closely questioned me. How many Iraqis had been killed at Qaqun? How many tanks did the Jews have? How many machine guns, how many artillery pieces?

I was afraid that they would discover the letters, since it was very easy then to be accused of espionage or working with the enemy. Once I was released, I managed to get the letters, one by one, to the ones they were for. I remained in Jordan into 1949, and then we were moved to Syria.

Yusuf Salam, born in 1924, resident of Yarmuk camp

A week before the attack, my brother Mustafa and my cousin Muhammad, who were staying with some of our relatives at Kafr Lam,* were killed by the Jews in an attack on the village. My father was wounded while trying to bring back their bodies.

I was awakened by the sound of bullets. I asked my aunt, who was staying with us to take care of my wounded father, what was happening. She said: "Don't worry, it's not very serious."

I saw them enter the village and even though a white flag had been hung from the minaret of the mosque, they killed every man who crossed their path.

While we were being held on the beach, and after they had selected a last group for execution, the mukhtar of Zichron Yaacov arrived and spoke to Samson† and warned him against killing them. Samson replied that he had orders to kill the whole lot. Yaacov left and soon returned with a piece of paper and handed it to Samson. That's how this last group, which numbered about forty men, escaped death.

tained a largely defensive posture throughout the rest of the 1948 war, since their front extended in a long arc from the Jordan River in the east via Jinin, Tulkarm, and Qalqilya to Ras al-'Ayn just north of Lydda in the West.

* The all-out attack on Kafr Lam did not come until July, when the village fell.

† Shimon Mashavitz, a Haganah intelligence officer in charge of cleaning up operations in Tantura.

Besides the bodies that I saw in the mass grave that had been dug in the Dassukis' field, I myself counted twenty-five bodies of our people.

In Umm Khalid, the deserted village they had transformed into a prison camp, some people from Zichron Yaacov came one day and tried to convince the head of the camp, whose name was Ashkenazi, to treat us more kindly and with less insults and humiliation, but he refused to listen and made them leave.

While we were being kept at Umm Khalid, 'Arif Salam and Muhammad al-Malah managed to escape, so they decided to punish us collectively. We were then transferred to Jalil. One day, a soldier started firing and killed a number of prisoners. Yusuf Abu 'Ajjaj was one of the victims. Later we learned that the soldier wanted to avenge the Israeli losses at the battle of Tirat Bani Sa'b against the Iraqis.

Another time, the guards became very nervous. A group of Irgun wanted to occupy the camp to liquidate all the Arab prisoners. I remember hearing threatening words between the Haganah and the Irgun people at the entrance of the camp.

When I learned from my comrades that the Jews were taking prisoners to work outside the camp and that a number of them never came back, I resolved to escape. So one night I went near the bungalow of the Egyptian prisoners, because it was unlit. Three other prisoners had decided to flee with me: Anwar Farhat, Ahmad al-'Ammuri, and a man from the village of Yazur. We were counting a lot on the Yazuri because he knew his way around the area. Three rows of barbed wire surrounded the camp and my companions held back. I got through the first row without difficulty. My face and chest got cut up going through the others, but I plunged ahead until I got out. I had no idea about the region, and the weather was cold and wintry. I wandered aimlessly around for three days until I was stopped by soldiers who turned out to be Iraqi. A Palestinian was with them who knew my village and confirmed my account of what had happened. They took me to Tirat Bani Sa'b. When the villagers saw me coming, bleeding and accompanied by soldiers, they thought I was an Israeli prisoner captured by the Iraqis and tried to attack me, but an officer stopped them.

Life was not easy there, either. There wasn't enough food or bedding, and no clothing.

Muhammad Kamil al-Dassuki, born in 1935, resident of Raml camp, Lattakieh

People were screaming: "The Jews are attacking, the Jews are attacking!" Bullets were whistling all around, and you could hear explosions in the village. At dawn, I saw boats unloading soldiers near al-Burj, north of the village, and they advanced toward the various entrances of Tantura.

While we were carrying the dead, a young man—it was Mustafa al-Salbud—started to weep. A soldier asked him what was the matter. He replied: "My two brothers have been killed. Here's the body of my brother

Khalil, and here is my brother Muhammad. My mother has no one but me now." "What use is your life then?" the soldier asked. And he shot him.

In the cemetery, I saw cars filled with Jews, some of them laughing and singing, but others were terribly silent.

When we were rounded up on the beach, young Jews, boys and girls, climbed on the beached fishing boats and began crowing their victory, while their chief, a tall man with pale skin, asked us, "Where are the Syrian soldiers? Were you fighting alone?" Later, he turned us—that is, the women and children—over to the mukhtar of the village of Furaydis. The people of Furaydis welcomed us as best they could, and the people of the nearby villages of Jaba', Ijzim, and 'Ayn Ghazal* sent food and blankets for us.

We spent a month at Furaydis. One day, an old Jewish man came to the village. He gathered all the boys between twelve and fourteen and led us to Tantura to harvest the garlic and potatoes, under the guard of Jewish soldiers.

A soldier approached me: "You're from Tantura. Do you know anyone from the Dassuki family?" "Me," I replied. "Do you know Abu 'Aql?" "He's my mother's brother." He put down his rifle and said, "Where is he?" I said he was at Furaydis. He then started to cry, "Greet him for me. I know him, I'm the son of Abraham Hallaq, the train conductor on the Haifa-Jaffa line and my father is a friend of your uncle!" Then he asked after my cousins and I told him that Salim and Nimr had been killed. He immediately cursed the murderers and added, "Me, too. Two of my brothers were killed." Later, he came to Furaydis to visit my uncle.

My father, who was one of the defenders of the village, had managed to get to 'Ayn Ghazal. I decided to try to join him. I started walking, barefoot. When I got to my father, a man from 'Ayn Ghazal, Hajj Hasan, seeing that I was barefoot, took me with him and bought me a pair of shoes.

Abd al-Razzaq Nasr, born in 1931, resident of Raml camp, Lattakieh

The night of the attack, I was on guard duty north of the village, at Bi'r Jamus, not far from Dibbit al-'Ijra. Shots were coming from the south near Talat Umm Rashid and then got closer to our position. About 2:30 A.M., a train brought soldiers who took position above us, where they started firing and shelling us. We attempted to withdraw but lost two men. I stayed with Muhammad 'Awad. During our failed retreat, I saw two other bodies. One of them was Muhammad Shihada. When we got near al-Burj, we passed a group of our people—if my memory serves, there was Hasuna Sa'id Salam, Hadi Abu Ghazala, Abu Subhi 'Ashmawi, Hajj 'Abd al-Rahman al-Dassuki, and Fayiz Ayyub. The hajj was wounded in the head and Sa'id Salam in the shoulder. I tried to help them. When we got near the hajj's house, near the Marah, he asked us to leave him there. It was about six in the morning.

* These three villages were not captured until late July 1948.

I went home and hid my gun and asked where people were. I learned that many were at the house of 'Iqab al-Yahya but that soldiers had found them there. They had burst through the front entrance facing the sea and the back door at the same time, firing in all directions and shouting, "Get out, out!"

Everyone was herded to the beach. Their officer, Samson, came and asked for Muhammad Yusuf al-Hindi. He put a revolver to his temple and asked where weapons were hidden. Muhammad was forced to give a few names, including mine. They led me, my arms tied with my shirt, so I could find my rifle, and they took it. On the way I saw bodies near the Abu Safiyya house, and on the way back, at the Marah, I saw the bodies of Fadl Abu Hana, Fawzi Abu Zamaq, and Muhammad 'Awad Abu Idriss. In the alley by Abu Juayd's barbershop, I saw a long trail of blood running some twenty meters to where more than ten bodies had been piled up.

Yusra Abu Hana, born in 1915, resident of Yarmuk camp

The shooting began near midnight. Mudallala arrived from Zuluf. She told us, "Issa al-Dassuki is wounded, maybe dead. And when Su'ad al-Filu ran to him to give him something to drink, they fired at her and killed her."

One of my brothers, Fadl, also was killed; the other, Faysal, was wounded. He had hidden in the stable, but he was caught: he was smoking, and the smell of his cigarette gave him away. They wanted to kill him, but the mukhtar of Zichron Yaacov, who had good relations with my father, interceded for him. It should be remembered that we treated the people of his colony well when they came on the beach of Tantura.

Hasan al-'Ammuri was an only child and his mother had been forty-five years old when she gave birth to him. He took part in the fighting. They promised him his life if he surrendered, but they shot him the minute he gave them his weapon.

On the beach, they stripped us of everything: watches, bracelets, money, identity papers. On the way to the beach, the door of one of the houses was open, and I saw a pile of bodies inside. Not to mention the people they had gathered and executed in the cemetery. More than fifty. All the ones they killed had no weapons, shot down in the streets or inside houses. On the beach, they led men away in groups, but no one came back. Toward noon, the killing ended when the mukhtar of Zichron Yaacov came with a written order. Some forty men who had just been led away thus were saved.

Wurud Sa'id Salam, born in 1937, resident of Yarmuk camp

It was Saturday night, and we were sleeping when the battle began. We immediately got up and my mother called on God for protection. My father was a member of the Resistance. We hurried to a house where a lot of people had gathered. Then soldiers arrived and ordered us out. We walked along the Marah. My mother suddenly started to scream: she had recognized the body of my uncle, Fadl Abu Hana. A Jew aimed his gun at her and threatened to kill her if she didn't shut up.

Leaving our house, we took a few things with us for fear that the Jews would steal them—a gold pen, a ring with the name of my father engraved on it, some earrings, and eight Palestinian pounds. When we got to the beach, my mother buried them in the sand, marking the hiding place. Later, at Furaydis, a colonist from Zichron Yaacov who had a restaurant that my father supplied with fish recognized us. My mother told him where she had hidden our valuables, and he brought them to us. Nothing was missing. I remember that his name was Lolik.

To come back to the massacre, when we were passing the cemetery, my mother said, “There’s the body of Salman al-Shaykh!” In my panic, I had almost stepped on him, but my mother held me back by my clothing. It was also near the cemetery that we saw my father carrying the body of Hajj ‘Abd al-Rahman al-Dassuki, but he didn’t get very far and laid the body down among the prickly pears for fear of being shot himself. He was already wounded. Near the low wall of Umm Fakhriyya, we saw twelve bodies, all from the Abu Safiyya family.

After we were handed over to the Red Cross at Tulkarm, we had to set off again. We were barefoot. The asphalt burned so hot that we were hopping about like sparrows.

Sabira Abu Hana, born in 1933, resident of Raml camp, Lattakieh

We had spent the evening at our neighbor’s, Umm Khalid, the wife of Sa’id al-Din Abu al-Hasan. We were preparing the charcoal fire to boil the laundry, because in the morning we had to help with the harvest. Nimr Frahat suddenly burst in and shouted, “What are you still doing here? The Jews are already at Talat Umm Rashid!” We ran toward the center of the village where my maternal uncle, Sa’id Salam, had his house. We stayed there until six in the morning. An hour later, we saw a Jew tie up a man from the village and take him away at gunpoint.

My grandfather, Mahmud Abu Hana, was shot in front of the entrance of the house. My paternal uncle, Fadl Abu Hana, was liquidated after the fall of the village and rolled in a straw mat. Amina ‘Awad Abu Idriss discovered the body of her brother near the cemetery. She smoothed his hair, kissed him, and yelled her grief. The bodies that I saw at the cemetery in the first lot were more than fifty. On our way there, I saw Abu Jawdat al-Samra carrying his dead son on a bier he had fashioned from a ladder.

Those who died after leaving Tantura were more than forty in number, most of them children. This was on the road between Furaydis and the towns of the West Bank, including Tulkarm and Khalil. Every hour you would hear that the child of so-and-so had died. I remember that in the village of the Russian monastery, we buried more than twenty bodies.

What happened to our village isn’t less horrible than the massacre of Dayr Yasin, but by the time our village fell people were more preoccupied with the fate of the living and the loss of the country, and no one talked about the massacre of Tantura, until recently.