

Pathfinder

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Battle of Jerusalem



Holy city street. *Wired for the sound of death.*

The tiny shops of the Arab quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem did business as usual last week. Ragged youngsters hawked copies of the Arabic daily, "*The Struggle*." Moslem elders munched on mutton broiled over charcoal, sipped thick coffee, smoked water pipes and talked about the battle of Palestine.

In contrast, the Jewish quarter of the Old City was a fiery cauldron. From bases in the catacombs, Jerusalem's Jews were fighting a valiant, but futile, last-ditch fight against the fierce Bedouin warriors of Transjordan's Arab Legion.

At week's end, the Legion, led by British-born Glubb Pasha, held 80% of the one-time "City of Peace" which has been destroyed, sacked and besieged more than 20 times in its 35-century history. Eager to deliver the decisive blow, the Arabs pounded the Jewish quarter with artillery and small arms fire.

Across the Jordan. The battle began early last week. At the head of his British-armed troops, Glubb Pasha crossed the River Jordan and laid siege to Jerusalem. The Jews of the Holy City were in a bad way long before the Arab Legion marched past shrines sacred to Arabs, Jews and Christians, along the Way of Sorrows (Via Dolorosa), where Christ carried his cross. For weeks the Jews, short of food and ammunition, had been besieged by Arab irregulars. Last week Glubb Pasha cut off water and electricity, blocked the road over which the Jews got arms and food from Tel Aviv.

With ranks spread thin, Haganah, the army of the two-weeks old "Independent Republic" of Israel, had to resist the armed forces of four other Arab states. The Lebanese swept down from the north. Syrian and Iraqi armies converged near the Sea of Galilee. Egyptians invaded Jerusalem from the south. And Egyptian planes bombed Tel Aviv, the capital of Israel, and settlements in the south. Dropping 50-pounders, the Egyptians scored their biggest strike on a Tel Aviv bus station, killing 41, wounding 65.

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Victory. Haganah could scrape up only one big victory in the first week of fighting. In northern Palestine, the Israeli took Acre, whose walls, 40 feet thick in places, had stopped Napoleon in 1799. The Arabs inside, stricken by typhoid, ran up a white flag. Capture of Acre gave the Israeli control of most of Palestine's Mediterranean coast, south of Lebanon.

Meanwhile, at Lake Success, the thorny Palestine issue got the biggest play of a hectic week for U.N. The U.S., first to recognize Israel, took the lead. The American delegate, Warren Austin, proposed that the Security Council use its biggest gun, Chapter VII of the U.N. charter, to restore peace to the Holy Land (economic sanctions and, if necessary, military intervention by the armed forces of U.N. member nations).

The Soviet Union promptly backed the U.S., demanded an immediate vote. Britain, anxious to keep Arab friendship, backed away. But Austin stuck to his guns, branded Transjordan, Egypt, Syria, Iraq and Lebanon as "aggressors," finally succeeded in forcing a vote.

Shy Two Votes. With seven votes needed to pass, the resolution got but five (The U.S., Russia, France, Colombia and the Ukraine). The other six members of the Security Council (Britain, Argentina, Belgium, Canada, China, Syria) abstained, killing the resolution.

Then Britain stepped in with a resolution for a cease-fire order to the Jews and Arabs. It passed unanimously. Immediate acceptance of the order's terms by the Jews was provisional—if the Arabs ceased firing also. They didn't.

After 36 hours the order expired, but was extended, at the Arabs' request, until Wednesday noon. They wanted more time for discussion. But in Jerusalem time had already run out for many a dead Arab and Jew.