

# **The Saga of Deir Yassin: Massacre, Revisionism, and Reality**

By

Daniel A. McGowan  
and Matthew C. Hogan

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# Dedication

To Alfred M. Lilienthal, Jr.

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# INTRODUCTION

## Landmark, Symbol, and New Revisionist Fantasy

“How could you have done it?” berated Natan Friedman-Yellin, joint supreme commander in 1948 of the Lehi (Stern Gang), a Jewish nationalist guerrilla group in the Palestine Mandate. “It was inhuman.” The subordinate he addressed had taken part in the organization's April 9 takeover of the Arab town Deir Yassin (Kr 149). An experiment in military cooperation between his group and a larger allied militia, the Irgun (Etzel), had turned into “a landmark of the Israeli-Arab conflict and a symbol of the horrors of war,” in the words of Israeli historian Tom Segev (Sg 25). “I am and was repelled by the fact,” the Lehi chief reflected later, “that the Deir Yassin massacre was a turning point in the history of the 1948 war” (Pr 217).

The moral, historical, and political significances of the Deir Yassin massacre continue to be examined and debated. The tragedy symbolized and continues to affect issues at the heart of the unresolved Arab-Israeli conflict. These include the hazards of war, the suffering of Palestinians, conflicts within Israeli political identity, and American foreign policy interests. In the Deir Yassin incident, each viewpoint offers an occasion for reflection, a case for argument, and a slogan for propaganda.

What has not been a focus of serious debate is whether the massacre actually occurred. It is a sad and indisputable fact that over a hundred Palestinian men, women, and children, most or all nonresistant at the times of their deaths, were deliberately slaughtered by units of Irgun and Lehi fighters on April 9, 1948. The slaughter is as immune to serious historical doubt as are such atrocities as the My Lai massacre, the Bataan Death March, and the Holocaust.

Sadly, however, fraudulent revisionism lives in the form of revisiting an event with the aim of altering or amending an original truth. And it has now touched Deir Yassin, armed with all revisionism's defects of blaming the victim, excusing the guilty, and twisting the facts. It appeals to the partisan's desire to feel that “our side doesn't do that” and “those other people are lying.” Harry Levin, a Jewish journalist in Jerusalem at the time of the massacre, recorded that the reports of the massacre were direct, fresh, and convincing, but “some still refuse to believe it” (HL 59). A tract published in 1998 by the Zionist Organization of America (ZOA), “Deir Yassin: History of A Lie” is itself dishonest in its attempt to reignite that old and discredited refusal to believe. The arguments in the tract are self-defeating but vigorously put forth.

**The ZOA Tract.** In “Deir Yassin: History of A Lie” (ZOA tract), author and organization president Morton Klein insists that the massacre of Deir Yassin did not happen. Instead, he asks us to believe that the scores of victims—old men, women, and children scattered throughout the town—died from repeated combat accidents that killed unintended victims, oddly with a lethal efficiency virtually unparalleled in military history. And it occurred, we are told, when a force of 120 untested troops with insufficient ammunition and inadequate weaponry successfully managed to storm fortified stone houses but who miraculously suffered only 5 percent lethal casualties. Then we are asked to believe that a vast conspiracy instantaneously sprouted among the International Red Cross, the Haganah, Arab villagers, Palestinian leaders, and British colonial

police to smear the guerrillas with the charge of massacre. In the end, however, we are to conclude that the entire massacre story was manipulated by a Jewish Communist spy in search of a job.

Serious debate about Deir Yassin may not be affected by the ZOA tract, but such efforts can affect popular discussion and understanding. Columnist Sydney Zion wrote a piece in the New York *Daily News* on March 23, 1998, commending the tract as a great research exposé. The article was no doubt read by hundreds of thousands of people. Our purpose here is to set the record straight with information and analysis for those who are sincerely interested.

The ZOA's revisionist effort is fed by the fact that few institutions or persons who esteem the concept of Zionism have denounced the tract issued in the ideology's name. One significant exception is the herculean research of Ami Isseroff of Rehovot, Israel, who studied the issue independently and with original skepticism. Inspired by his identification with Zionist, Israeli, and Jewish values, he sought the published record and new witness information and made important material available in English. He eventually came to the only realistic conclusion possible: A large-scale deliberate massacre had occurred at Deir Yassin. His work is published on the Internet's World Wide Web at [www.ariga.com/peacewatch/dy](http://www.ariga.com/peacewatch/dy).



**Fraudulent Scholarship and Self-Defeating Reasoning.** The ZOA tract is demonstrably fraudulent and frequently ridiculous. The tract concludes there is no evidence of prisoner mistreatment or excess at Deir Yassin, all the while basing that conclusion primarily on the research of an Israeli historian (Uri Milstein) who calls the Deir Yassin affair a “massacre” in which Irgun and Lehi forces “murdered Arabs” (MI 273, 276). It is difficult to call the ZOA anything but dishonest when it informs its readers of this alleged lack of evidence of prisoner atrocity while its major source provides many specific examples of prisoner executions, a number of which are admitted to unambiguously by the Lehi and Irgun guerrillas themselves (MI 263, 267, 276). The tract also conveniently omits numerous other direct testimonies of reliable evidence of a massacre (MI 275-277).

Beyond that, the ZOA tract engages in selective quotation by cutting the most incriminating parts of witness testimony it cites. It ignores the many perpetrators who have admitted “liquidating prisoners,” “eliminating every Arab,” and witnessing a fellow fighter machine-gun a surrendering family. It cites witnesses who find no evidence of excesses like rape and mutilation and omits their clear testimony of mass murder. It also appears that the tract simply creates facts to manipulate emotion, as when a dead Yugoslav Muslim fighter is described as a former S.S. member even though the original source makes no such claim (MI 263). A great many examples of this form of self-serving omissions and selective quotations are set forth throughout this monograph.

Ultimately, however, there is good news. Revisionism is self-defeating despite its attempts to rob victims of the dignity of their suffering. Because revisionists need to visit reality from time to time to shore up their case, the absurdity of their arguments and conclusions are forced to the surface despite best efforts to conceal them.

One example is the ZOA's endless focus on the difference between the figure of 254 victims in the massacre – which has been reported in most standard histories – and the lower figure of 110 discerned from closer research. This is a central theme of the ZOA tract. How can we trust the claims of massacre, the ZOA asks, when the writers who claim it repeat such an incorrect figure (ZOA 153)? To repeat that false figure renders one's credibility on Deir Yassin fundamentally flawed (ZOA 153). In an ironic twist, the same tract says that the exaggerated 254 figure was originally arrived at by the attackers themselves. By the ZOA's main standard, the very people they are defending stand convicted of the biggest fabrication in telling the history of Deir Yassin.

Thus, we need not go beyond the ZOA tract itself to perceive its problems. This is valuable because those in denial should not be able to force established history to meet the revisionists' burden of proof. That would mean victims almost literally reliving horrors as they revisited their own and their loved ones' agony. Instead, it is the revisionists who should have the burden of validating their views by independent witnesses, objective evidence, or significant retractions.

In that direction the ZOA fails miserably. They produce not a single independent (i.e., non-Irgun or non-Lehi) eyewitness to Deir Yassin or its aftermath who has concluded that anything other than a massacre happened. And there were hundreds of such witnesses present. Similarly, the ZOA provides no independent witness to corroborate the intrinsically unlikely hypothesis that an unusually heavy battle caused the deaths. Reality further erodes their tract when the ZOA admits that the perpetrators seriously contemplated massacre even before attacking Deir Yassin and that there are irrefutable admissions of atrocities by the perpetrators. These points will be discussed in greater detail.

We shall mention the ZOA tract many times in this monograph as it confirms or fails to provide corroborating evidence regarding particular issues. Also, we cite the ZOA document directly as a source in an effort to illustrate how a critical reader could invalidate the ZOA tract even without additional research. This emphasizes the self-defeating nature of such fraudulent revisionism.

## Our Approach in This Monograph

In the next chapter, we approach the issue exactly as the ZOA tract defines it—a murder mystery. The historical debate comes down to a simple question of criminal responsibility: Were the dead men, women, and children of Deir Yassin primarily the victims of massacre or were they accidentally killed in the hazards of active battle? Following the logic of that formulation, we proceed in an investigative fashion by following an imaginary detective puzzling a mystery involving the discovery of those who have died violently. While traveling with our investigator, we shall visit the scene, take observations from witnesses, and formulate theories and conclusions. This structure allows logic and linearity, and not revisionism, to frame the questions that evaluate the evidence.

We shall see rather quickly that the evidence that a massacre occurred is overwhelming. It is so strong that, even before consulting independent observers, our investigator has no doubt that the victims were primarily killed deliberately and outside the exigencies of combat. The circumstantial evidence, the scene of the incident, the confessions and behaviors of the participants demonstrate a massacre beyond all reasonable doubt. However, our investigator examines all evidence to take the case full length and settle the matter through facts and not preferences.



# The Mystery of the Deaths of Residents of Deir Yassin

## Background

Let us follow an imaginary detective, one who is trained to investigate historical crimes. This investigator is brought to the task 50 years later to perform an “autopsy” of the incident. Like any criminal investigator, he begins from the moment word arrives that the dead have been found. He takes great pains to search for all relevant forensic evidence and evaluate it fairly.

The place and time is Deir Yassin village in the Palestine Mandate, mid-afternoon, Friday, April 9, 1948. Two guerrilla groups called the Lehi and Irgun attacked the village in the morning. They were in control of the town as reports of the dead began to enter public consciousness. History books have called it a massacre. But the detective read a recent ZOA pamphlet saying the dead were unintended casualties resulting from a tough battle to capture the village in a time of increasing warfare.

Our investigator first fills his notebook with general background information: British rule in Palestine was set to end the next month, May 1948. At that time, the official Jewish Agency for Palestine was to declare a Jewish state called Israel on the strength of a November 1947 United Nations resolution recommending the partition of Palestine into one Jewish and one Arab state. Jerusalem was to be internationalized. Arab leaderships in Palestine and elsewhere forcefully opposed the plan.

Our detective knows that Arab-Jewish fighting broke out right after the U.N. resolution. The departing British made no serious efforts to stop the violence. Arab states began to infiltrate armed units detached from the Syrian and Iraqi armies, joined by some Yugoslavs. Around Jerusalem, these forces were led by Palestinian Arab Abdel Khader Husseini, and many Palestinian Arab villagers joined the effort. The Jewish Agency, led by the Labor Zionist movement, opposed them with its own armed force called the Haganah and its elite strike force, the Palmach.

The detective first seeks to identify the forces who took control of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948. They were small Jewish guerrilla forces. One was the Irgun (National Military Organization) and the other was Lehi (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, sometimes called the Stern Group or Stern Gang). The two operated independently from the Jewish Agency, especially around Jerusalem. Politically, they were right-wing Zionists (Jewish nationalists) who felt partition was insufficient. They believed all of Palestine and Transjordan (now Jordan) should be included in Israel. They were thus political and military rivals of the Jewish Agency.

Our investigator next turns to Deir Yassin, a Muslim Arab village of stone houses with villagers whose chief activity was quarrying and cutting stone. It was located a few hundred meters to the west of the Jewish settlement known as Givat Shaul. Population estimates varied from the middle hundreds to over a thousand.

The detective then examines the immediate military situation. By April 1948, Arab forces had cut off Jewish Jerusalem from the coast by ambushing traffic on the main highway. An armed offensive by the Palmach and Haganah began the first week of April to protect Jewish convoys along the highway. A vital chokepoint was Kastel, an Arab town not very far west of Deir Yassin.

The detective looks for consensus about the events of April 9 and finds that the Irgun and Lehi groups, in a united operation, attacked Deir Yassin in the morning. They met resistance. By the mid afternoon, however, they were in control. There were a great many dead villagers. The question facing our imaginary investigator is: Did they die in massacre or combat? Did they die in mass murder or wartime misfortune?

### **Photographs of the Scene**

The most helpful investigative tool, our detective reflects, would be photos of the event or its scene. This would allow less reliance on conflicting testimony of witnesses who may be biased, dishonest, or confused. In this regard, the ZOA tract has promising news: There are indeed photos of Deir Yassin from April 9, 1948 (ZOA 55).

Although photographs of Deir Yassin on the day of the incident exist, they have been kept hidden and are currently held in the Archives of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF), and (as the ZOA tract confirms) they have never been made public. Indeed, and suspiciously, they have been denied to even in-house inspection by academic researchers (ZOA 55-56, MI 275), even though it has been over 50 years since the event. Opening the case notebook, our investigator records his first impressions: “Suspicious. Why are these photos still not available? Is there something to hide? A massacre?”

Strong suspicion that there was a massacre at Deir Yassin is warranted. Common sense provides the reason: If an institution is concerned about some aspect of an event, and that institution then conceals photographic evidence of the event, it is reasonable to suspect that the photos support the concern. Regarding Deir Yassin, the concern for Israel is the allegation of a massacre. The ZOA confirms this, noting that the charge of massacre at Deir Yassin is often used against the State of Israel (ZOA 1).

A closer look only increases suspicion. This secrecy has continued through Israeli government administrations run by the Likud party. The Likud are political descendants of the same guerrilla movements accused of the Deir Yassin massacre (ZOA 4). In fact, one Likud Prime Minister was Menachem Begin, a former Irgun chief who adamantly denied the charge of massacre at Deir Yassin. Yet in all his years as Prime Minister, the photos remained secret. Surely, if they supported his viewpoint, he would have released them.

Even more incriminating material appears in the ZOA tract. At the IDF Archives, the photograph custodians have commented on the cause of death in some pictures. Interestingly, they did not exclude intentional massacre as the cause of death of bodies in the photos (ZOA 56).

### **Witness Testimony**

Our detective realizes that without photographs, witnesses are sorely needed. The investigator needs independent witnesses so he can compare what they say to what the attackers and their advocates say. The investigator assembles testimonies about the victims and the apparent causes of their deaths. He finds statements made by nine people, including Haganah officers, who came upon Deir Yassin just after its conquest. There are also statements by several survivors and Haganah intelligence officer Meir Pa'il, who witnessed the event. Now let us explore our

detective's findings from the statements of the nine who arrived at Deir Yassin immediately after its capture. Findings from statements by survivors and the Haganah officer will be examined in the next chapter. What do the nine independent witnesses of the scene say?

**Account 1: Mordechai Gihon, Haganah.** Mordechai Gihon was a Haganah intelligence officer in Jerusalem, code name Elazar. He provided cover fire in the morning so that the guerrillas attacking Deir Yassin could remove their wounded. He later became a general in Israeli army intelligence and a university professor. He was a British Army veteran as well. The ZOA cites him extensively, always favorably, and at one point narrates events through his eyes. However, all of the following statements were omitted from the ZOA tract. Gihon entered the village on the afternoon of April 9.

Before we got to the village we saw people carrying bodies to the quarry east of Deir Yassin. We entered the village around 3:00 in the afternoon. . . . In the village there were tens of bodies. The dissidents got them out of the roads. I told them not to throw the bodies into cisterns and caves, because that was the first place that would be checked. . . .

At the time I had just been through British Army service and had met Holocaust survivors in the camps. The visit to Deir Yassin was a moral shock for me. Before then I had never seen so many bodies. The dead were lying in the houses and the fields without burial . . .

I didn't count the dead. I estimated that there were four pits full of bodies, and in each pit there were 20 bodies, and several tens more in the quarry. I throw out a number, 150. (M1 274, Lv 343)

It is not clear if Gihon's counting of the dead occurred on the first inspection or later. But in an intelligence report at the time, his summary assessment of the Deir Yassin incident is straightforward: "the murder of falachim [Arab peasants] and innocent citizens" (Lv 343).

**Account 2: Eliahu Arbel, Haganah.** Eliahu Arbel was Operations Officer B of the Haganah's Etzioni Brigade. He was an officer in Israel's armed forces in subsequent wars. He entered the village on Saturday, April 10.

On the following day, after the operation, I inspected the village, in accordance with the order of Colonel Shaltiel. Accompanied by an officer of the attacking unit, I saw the horrors that the fighters had created. I saw bodies of women and children, who were murdered in their houses in cold blood by gun fire, with no signs of battle and not as the result of blowing up the houses. From my experience I know well, that there is no war without killing, and that not only combatants get killed. I have seen a great deal of war, but I never saw a sight like Deir Yassin and therefore I cannot forget what happened there. (YA-5-2-72)

**Account 3: Jacques de Reynier, Red Cross.** De Reynier, a French-Swiss, was Representative of the International Red Cross. He had been with that humanitarian organization in World War II. Before the Deir Yassin incident, he took part in an intervention to save the lives of Jewish fighters trapped by Arab guerrillas. He came to the village on Sunday, April 11.

Finally the [Irgun] Commander tells me . . . for now I can visit some houses and the situation is as follows: a total of more than 200 dead, men, women, and children. About 150 cadavers have not been preserved inside the village in view of the danger represented by the bodies' decomposition. They have been gathered, transported some distance, and placed in a large trough (I have not been able to establish if this is a pit, a grain silo, or a large natural excavation). Impossible to visit because it's under fire. . . . About 20 bodies are located in the no-man's-land between the Arab and Irgun troops. About 50 bodies are in the village. . . .

I . . . enter the house. The first room is dark, everything is in disarray, but no one is there. In the second, I find among the ripped-open furniture, blankets, debris of all sorts, some cold bodies. Here the cleaning-up was done by submachine guns, then by grenade; they finished it off with knives, as anyone could tell. The same thing in the next room. . . .

In the neighboring house and so on . . . it is the same hideous spectacle. . . .

The houses visited by me presented an appearance of the most complete disorder, everything is broken, and bodies litter the floor. . . .

[One body was] a woman who must have been eight months pregnant, hit in the stomach, with powder burns on her dress indicating she'd been shot point-blank. (DeR 74, RC, CLP 278)

De Reynier concluded that the villagers had been "deliberately massacred" (DeR 74).

**Account 4: Dr. Alfred Engel, Magen David Adom (Red Shield of David, Jewish medical organization).** Alfred Engel went to Deir Yassin with de Reynier. He had extensive medical experience in wartime. The ZOA endorses him as a sober witness but omits the last two sentences of his recollection.

We got into the village easily. There were only dissidents [Irgun and Lehi members] there, and they were putting bodies on trucks. . . . In the houses there were dead, in all about a hundred men, women and children. It was terrible. . . . It was clear that they (the attackers) had gone from house to house and shot the people at close range. I was a doctor in the German army for 5 years, in World War I, but I had not seen such a horrifying spectacle. (MI 270)

**Account 5: Two Haganah Photographers.** Haganah broadcaster Harry Levin, later an Israeli consul in the United States, published a recollection from his diary of the period. He related that two unnamed photographers from the Haganah reported entering Deir Yassin with the Red Cross representative. He met them after their visit and refers to them only by initials "I." and "H."

I spoke with two, I. and H., who went [to Deir Yassin] with the Red Cross as Haganah photographers. I. was too shaken to say anything. H. told me he saw a large pile of burned and half-burned bodies in a pit; another pile of children's bodies, about 16 of them. In a room of one house were the bodies of a woman and a child; in a second room the bodies of two villagers and two uniformed Syrians. . . .

Most Jews I have spoken with are horrified. Some still refuse to believe it. (HL 59)

**Account 6: Drs. Avigdori and Druyan, Histadrut Medical Committee.** These doctors visited while the Haganah was taking over the village. The ZOA endorses their information but omits the following account (ZOA 78).

By the invitation of the Jewish Agency, on April 12, 1948, we visited the village before noon. The village was empty. Looted houses. The commanders of the Haganah showed us bodies in different places. A mother and her children that were killed by gunfire, two bodies of women who were killed by shooting.

In the quarry five bodies [killed] by shooting, and two youths of 13 or 14 [killed] by shooting; in the Wadi 25 bodies, one over the other, uncovered, children and women. . . . We did not check each body, all were dressed. Limbs were whole. . . . They were not buried. . . .

Piles of smoking bodies. There were 12 bodies, and 6 burnt children. We asked for more bodies. . . . There are other bodies in the houses. The Haganah commanders did not inspect the houses. (MI 271)

Irgun officer Yehuda Lapidot later said the two had reported 90 bodies (MI 271).

**Account 7: Yehoshua Arieli, Haganah.** Yehoshua Arieli was a commander of the Haganah's paramilitary youth group, the Gadna. He had also been a World War II veteran of the British Army. He would become a distinguished Israeli professor of American history. He supervised the burials of the bodies and describes the scene (in a recollection omitted by the ZOA) and its scope.

Absolutely barbaric. All of the killed, with very few exceptions, were old men, women, and children. The dead we found were all unjust victims and none of them had died with a weapon in their hands. . . .

The 116 figure [of bodies] makes sense. I don't think we could have buried more than 120-40. (CLP 279, SI 96)

Arieli saw "several men" lying dead in a quarry (SI 94).

**Account 8: Yeshurun Schiff, Haganah.** Schiff was adjutant to Haganah Jerusalem chief David Shaltiel. He was in Deir Yassin on April 9 and present to review the burial scene on April 12. His impressions are provided below (again, omitted by the ZOA).

[The attackers chose] to kill anybody they found alive as though every living thing in the village was the enemy and they could only think 'kill them all.' . . . It was a lovely spring day, the almond trees were in bloom, the flowers were out and everywhere there was the stench of the dead, the thick smell of blood, and the terrible odor of the corpses burning in the quarry. (CLP 280)

**Account 9: Yair Tsaban, Gadna Youth Organization.** Yair Tsaban, later an Israeli peace activist, was one of several youths in the burial team at Deir Yassin on April 12. He describes some things he observed.

When we buried the bodies, I saw no evidence of killing by knives. . . .

What we saw were [dead] women, young children, and old men. What shocked us was at least two or three cases of old men dressed in women's clothes. I remember entering the living-room of a certain house. In the far corner was a small woman with her back towards the door, sitting dead. When we reached the body we saw an old man with a beard. My conclusion was that what happened in the village so terrorized these old men that they knew being old men would not save them. They hoped that if they were seen as old women that would save them. (SI 93, 95)

## Ascertaining Facts

Our investigator notes that the ZOA tract does not produce even one independent witness who reports a conclusion different from massacre. The witnesses, meanwhile, are highly credible. Still, the first thing the detective must do is separate the facts from the emotions and conclusions. Doing so, our historical sleuth finds that there is actually quite a bit of agreement on basic issues. The investigator opens his notebook and begins to address objective questions of Deir Yassin.

**How Many Actual Dead Were There?** Our investigator reasons a fair estimate is about 110. The ZOA endorses a figure between 107 and 120 (ZOA 91). Except for de Reynier, the eyewitnesses



provide a range from 70 to 150. (De Reynier's figure of over 200 appears to be based not on direct count or observation but indirect information from the guerrillas.) The ZOA's low-end estimate of 107 is based upon villager recollections. No source claimed to be totally precise, so 110 is a fair approximate number (BZ 57 et seq.). (This figure does not include the four guerrillas killed on the scene who were removed.) Historian Uri Milstein also suggests the 110 figure (MI 274).

**Who Were the Dead?** Almost all, if not all, were Deir Yassin villagers. The 107 figure is based entirely on villager casualties (BZ 6, 57). Repeated, and uncontradicted, emphasis from the testimonies our detective examined is on the large number of women, children, and old men among the dead. The ZOA-endorsed Arab study lists victims as women, children, and elderly (BZ 57-60).

There are no direct independent source reports of Arab soldiers among the dead (Levin's account is second-hand), except for a few dead soldiers claimed in the ZOA tract (ZOA 32-33). In any event, it is clear from the witnesses and the breakdown of villager dead that almost all were Deir Yassin villagers, the bulk being old men, women, and children.

**Where Were the Dead?** Perhaps the clearest thing that can be said is that they were not found in one place. It is not clear where all of them died, as many bodies appear to have been moved quickly. The reports place large numbers of bodies inside several houses. (Many were burned afterwards.) Some also appear to have been in one of the quarries or in the Wadi, the valley south of the village.

**Whose Firepower or Lethal Force Killed Them?** There is little debate that most of the dead were killed by the Lehi and Irgun. Those who contend a massacre occurred attribute all or most deaths to the guerrillas. The ZOA, although describing general crossfire and the use of firepower by the Haganah, does not allege that Arab firepower was responsible for most deaths (ZOA 31-45, 114). The ZOA also does not accuse the Arab forces of executing the civilians of the town. The only issue is whether the lethal force was the product of the chaotic violence of close, intense combat or the deliberate killing of persons who were not in a threatening position when they were killed.

While he is on the subject of objective data, our investigator pursues other areas of agreement regarding casualty statistics. He discovers some range of agreement exists here as well.

**How Many Villagers and Village Defenders Were Wounded or Captured?** For wounded, our detective finds a range of 12 to about 50; for prisoners, a range of 50 to 150. Captured and wounded were mostly removed from the scene by the time Gihon and other witnesses arrived. The ZOA seems to accept a figure of 12 wounded based on an Arab study. A contemporary Red Cross report says 50 wounded were turned over to the British after the capture of the village (RC). As to prisoners, the ZOA is vague and even contradictory, stating 40 plus "a small number" (ZOA 47). On the ZOA Website ([www.zoa.org](http://www.zoa.org)), however, a version of the ZOA tract published there as of September 1, 1998, reported over 100 prisoners. Another reference in the printed version says several dozen (ZOA 42).

**What Were the Attackers' Casualties?** The ZOA reports four dead and "several dozen" wounded attackers on the scene (ZOA 65). Generally, sources place a figure of wounded at about 36. One more appears to have died later (Lv 344).

## **Massacre Contention Grows Stronger**

As our historical detective ponders the objective figures, his earlier suspicion of massacre (originating with the missing photos and prodded by the powerful witness testimonies) grows to near certainty. He continues to add to his notebook:

**How Does the Number of Dead Argue a Massacre?** One hundred ten dead, predominantly civilians, in a single village battle is a huge red flag that there was deliberate killing. Ground combat in a peasant village, even with modern weapons, does not usually cause that high a number of civilian deaths. Common sense says that civilians do not want to be near the battle, and neither side—usually—wants to kill them or have them in the way. Civilians hide, they surrender alive, or they run away. Some illustrations follow.

In the bloodiest battle of the U.S. Civil War, over 100,000 soldiers with massed artillery fighting in and around the town of Gettysburg cost only one noncombatant civilian death. A casualty toll of 180 civilians in one day in one town during the Civil War caused national shock, and that massacre was the deliberate killing of most males in Lawrence, Kansas, by Quantrill's raiders (Hs).

In Vietnam, a civilian death figure of about 20 in a rural village battle was considered “abnormally high,” requiring special investigation by a command-level officer (SH 131). Deir Yassin's death toll of 110 was thus as much as 5 times the number of civilian deaths considered disturbingly excessive in bloodier village combat (helicopter gunships, artillery barrages, search and destroy, etc.) where much greater firepower was typically brought to bear against flimsier dwellings.

Our detective knows that the death rate inflicted at Deir Yassin is also atypical and wholly inconsistent with normal combat-induced casualties. For example, a deliberate massacre of a Jewish convoy over a period of hours by Arab fighters at Mt. Scopus, Jerusalem, in retaliation for Deir Yassin had fewer deaths than Deir Yassin, about 75, a figure that included many noncivilian fighters (CLP 291). Nonetheless, that incident generated world headlines for its exceptional scope (NYT 4-14-48). Some months before, an Arab massacre of Jewish refinery workers in Haifa (in retaliation for an Irgun bombing of Arab refinery workers) had less than half the death toll of Deir Yassin (FI 95). The day after Deir Yassin was captured, more powerful Arab artillery pounded Jewish neighborhoods in West Jerusalem, hitting a Talmud school. The total dead from a barrage of 40 shells: 3 (NYT 4-11-48).

In the 1948 war, all Israeli civilian casualties (about 2,000) inflicted by Arab forces averaged five civilians killed per day (approximately 400 days) (NL 450). At Deir Yassin therefore, the inflicted death rate exceeded by as much as 20 times all forms of anti-civilian violence by the Arab side, including airstrikes, artillery bombardments of urban areas, all hazards of combat, and all deliberate atrocities. (Total Arab civilian casualty figures for the 1948 war are uncertain because of the dislocation of the Arab population.) Clearly, Deir Yassin was an exceptionally lethal event by any military standards. Deliberate excessive slaughter of the civilians is thus powerfully indicated. (It is not surprising that the ZOA does not attempt to provide evidence that the casualties inflicted at Deir Yassin were typical of village ground combat.)

Famous deliberate massacres by armed militias—where obviously the civilian death toll would be higher than just the accidents of battle—often involve figures less than or comparable to Deir Yassin. For example, Racak, Kosovo, 40 (January 1999) (NYT 3-18-99); Mountain Meadows, Utah, 120 or less (September 1857) (JBr); Wounded Knee, South Dakota, 140 (December 1890) (JG). The observation by Deir Yassin eyewitness and military physician Alfred Engel, cited above, supports the notion that civilians do not normally die in such large numbers in regular ground combat. Deir Yassin was more horrible than anything he had seen in the entirety of World War I. In sum, the 110 or so deaths are an additional major indication that deliberate slaughter occurred.

**How Does the Small Number of Wounded Demonstrate a Massacre?** At Deir Yassin, the dead outnumbered the wounded. As one professional historian has explained, the careful deliberateness of the killing in the massacre at Lawrence, Kansas, by Quantrill's raiders in the U.S. Civil War was evidenced by the fact that the dead civilians outnumbered the wounded, which is the reverse of normal combat casualties (Hs). The standard ratio in ground combat is three

wounded for one dead (TF 126). The statistics on the attackers at Deir Yassin also indicate a massacre because the attackers, who were shot at deliberately, suffered more wounded than dead. This is the normal result of combat even for fighters: There are usually larger numbers of wounded than dead.

Common sense reigns again. Even in deliberate killings, it is often hard to kill someone who does not want to be killed. Shooting and explosions are generally inaccurate and do not make a direct path for vital organs even when they manage to hit a person. The person may be partly protected by obstacles or other persons, and when the battle stops, the wounded are usually helped or at least left alone. But when one has the opportunity and will to kill deliberately without resistance or restraint as in a massacre, the wounded become fewer and fewer until only a few or none are left.

In massacres like Lidice in World War II Czechoslovakia, no surviving wounded were reported among the casualties; it was entirely systematic (JB). In others, a few survive (e.g., by being mixed among the dead) as at My Lai (ABC). At the massacre of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, the Sioux Indian dead also outnumbered the wounded with a ratio of 140 dead to 50 wounded. The massacre there ran out of steam before all could become among the dead (JG).

The high ratio of 110 dead to 12 wounded at Deir Yassin is provided by the ZOA. The number of wounded may have been as high as 50, but in either case the dead outnumber them (RC). A systematic slaughter is powerfully indicated by this remarkable statistic alone. We would otherwise have to believe a group of ill-trained and poorly equipped fighters repeatedly scored a miraculously high rate of lethal wounds on persons they say they did not intend to hit.

**How Does the Lack of Captives Fail to Challenge the Charge of Massacre?** Even at the famous Lidice massacre of Czechs, captives were taken (JB). At the battle of the Alamo, prisoners were also taken despite the call for “no prisoners” (LT). People were taken alive after Wounded Knee. There were different reasons in each case. Some persons were not targeted for massacre (e.g., women and children) or the massacre was undertaken for only a certain length of time.

## The Death-by-Combat Explanation

Although our investigator has become virtually convinced of a massacre based on the casualty figures, the testimony of witnesses, and the concealment of the photos, he still must satisfy any lingering doubt. Strange things do happen, so it is important to get the story from the accused.

Our historical sleuth turns to the ZOA tract and learns of a firefight during the village takeover. According to the ZOA, the attackers reported meeting stiff, accurate resistance from armed soldiers inside and outside the houses. Women and men dressed as women fought and used deceptive tactics of false surrender; women ran about giving assistance to village fighters; parts of some houses were blown up or blown open as they were stormed and captured; guerrillas had to advance and enter houses while firing wildly for fear of resistance (ZOA 35-46). There was also some mortar fire against one house by the Haganah, and some hand grenade use, but the ZOA alleges that by then most of the carnage had already occurred (ZOA 44).

Absorbing the new information, our detective draws a further conclusion: A massacre can no longer be seriously doubted. Even assuming the ZOA description of the combat is accurate (which is highly questionable, as shall be shown later), it still leads to a conclusion of massacre. The notebook comes out again.

**Why Is the Combat Explanation Inadequate to Explain the Dead?** There is no set of combat incidents that could explain the extreme carnage. As already discussed, 110 dead, largely if not exclusively civilian noncombatants, is profoundly unusual for village ground fighting. Yet the only explanation provided for this freakish outcome is a normal, unexceptional battle. That does not fit.

There is nothing unusual about the battle reported by the ZOA. Defending soldiers sniping effectively from houses is a normal part of every war. Deception tactics like men disguised as Arab women to fight or escape, fake surrenders, etc., are as old as war itself. Women do fight. There were armed women in the Irgun, for example (MI 265). Houses are stormed in all resisting villages in all wars, but storming houses is one thing and executing the inhabitants is an entirely different thing.

Most important is the fact that the greatest destructive acts reported—blowing up houses, or parts of them—is also nothing unusual. *The New York Times'* correspondent of the period recalls that villages being raided and houses in them being blown up was standard for the period (DS 3-4). According to Aryeh Yitzhaki, an official historian of the Haganah, civilians were often in houses when blown up in ordinary operations by regular Jewish forces (FI 94). Also, a letter from the Haganah commander to the guerrillas before the action at Deir Yassin advises against blowing up the houses, as if that practice was already an established, standard battle tactic (ZOA 7).

Furthermore (in the ZOA tract or anywhere else), there are no reported airstrikes, heavy artillery fire, chemical weapons, suicide charges, or other powerful interventions that might explain an egregiously high civilian death toll. It is as if we are expected to believe that the untrained Irgun and Lehi guerrilla fighters spontaneously invented a new and lethal village ground-combat method never before conceived in warfare, and they did so while under fire. The death-in-combat explanation fails by trying to explain an extraordinary civilian death toll by describing a very ordinary battle. But more important, as discussed next, the heavy-battle explanation is not supported by the evidence.

**How is the Account of Combat Deaths in Heavy Fighting Contradicted By Evidence?** One reported eyewitness has said that aerial photos of Deir Yassin, if taken, would have shown no significant difference before and after the fighting (McG 39). The reports of house demolitions at Deir Yassin (accounts that appear in most conventional reconstructions of the incident) are not

supported by independent evidence of the scene. The ZOA cites no independent observer who recalls houses being destroyed or concluding that such destruction had taken place.

Aftermath eyewitness Eliayhu Arbel, a veteran of several Middle East conflicts, who is cited above, insists that houses being blown up were not the cause of the deaths. None of our detective's independent eyewitnesses report demolished houses, partly demolished houses or structural signs of heavy combat. De Reynier's description of a disordered house of damaged furnishings makes no mention of stone rubble or crushed bodies. He describes the causes of death as knives, bullets, and hand grenades, not large bombs or structural collapse.

In fact, the most detailed examination of the bodies (by the Histadrut doctors) repeatedly says the deaths of women and children occurred by bullets. There are intact limbs, suggesting no strong explosions. Dr. Engel specifically says the deaths in the houses were primarily by gunfire at close range. The two Histadrut doctors and Dr. Engel are all endorsed by the ZOA. An additional point of note is that most of our detective's eyewitnesses were experienced observers when they made their observations. And none of the independent eyewitnesses report any Arab or other soldiers among the dead, except for a second-hand report of two soldiers. This further strongly argues that there was little or no professional military resistance from inside the village.

The claim of heavy resistance is also contradicted by evidence. The ZOA does not report even a single hand grenade thrown by the village fighters. There is also no mortar fire, land mines, or extensive hand-to-hand combat. Although there are reports of a soldier body here and there in the ZOA tract, our detective finds a lack of significant numbers of reported professional-soldier bodies. Nor is there a record of any specific number of captured guns to indicate the presence of enemy fighters. (A secret Haganah postbattle assessment categorically concluded that there had been no foreign Arabs in the village [Lv 343].)

The decisive question presents itself: How is it that there came to be so many dead among those presumably not targeted (women and children) but so few, if any, of those supposedly targeted (soldiers)? If scores of civilians were hit by indirect fire at Deir Yassin while soldiers were the actual targets, should we not expect to find many more soldiers or even young male fighters among the dead?

Further, we learn that only 5 out of 130 attackers died. This ratio (1 in 26) is slightly lower than the normal ratio of dead to total Jewish fighters in the 1948 war (1 in 25; 4,000 out of 100,000). Using the more precise figure of total nonreserve Israeli soldiers in front-line combat – 25,000 – the casualty rate at Deir Yassin of 1 in 26 falls well below the average 1 in 6 casualty rate for combat units (NL 450, Fl 198-199). Considering that the Deir Yassin attackers had little experience or training in regular combat, one would expect instead that they would suffer *higher* than average casualties in their first combat. Thus, by the most generous objective calculation, the attackers at best met average village resistance; by the more accurate combat-troop ratio, they met feeble resistance, not tough house-to-house fighting. Either way, the ZOA claim of an unusually heavy fight is contradicted. Irgun commander Mordechai Raanan himself recalls that the Haganah commander spoke to him with a tone of ridicule about their performance, hardly the way even a rival would act if green troops on the same side successfully overcame tough enemy resistance (ZOA 45).

The explanation of heavy combat and house-to-house fighting is not only inadequate to explain the deaths, it is also contradicted by the evidence to this point. Deliberate killing of most of the victims is the explanation consistent with the evidence to this point.

Our historical detective has found conclusive indirect evidence of massacre. Now he needs to track down the accused to examine their demeanor after the terrible carnage. This would provide evidence of their intentions regarding civilians. Did they act in candid moments as if the deaths

were welcome or unwelcome? Doing so, our detective finds new evidence supporting the conclusion that a massacre occurred.

### **The Demeanor of the Accused**

How is the claim of unintentional killing refuted by the behavior of the guerrillas? Our detective found no one to dispute that there were over a hundred corpses, including large numbers of women and children, in Deir Yassin's aftermath. The ZOA argues that the guerrillas did not intend to massacre them or even harm them substantially. Yet not a single expression of horror from the attackers about those results emerges in the ZOA tract. In fact, the broader record repeatedly indicates reactions that show the slaughter was quite intentional.

Our detective searches for at least one guerrilla who stepped away from self-justification to say how horribly the massive carnage affected him. He looks for someone like one of his independent witnesses, many war-hardened professionals, some endorsed by the ZOA, and most engaged also in warfare against Arabs, who used phrases like "horror" and "moral shock" to describe the scene. He finds the reaction of the guerrillas, however, different. The guerrillas reveal no regrets or guilt but rather indifference and even pride about the carnage that included women and children.

From the beginning, their behavior reflects a consistent theme of profound satisfaction with the grisly slaughter. One of their first observed actions after the fighting was to sit down among the corpses . . . and have lunch. "I was shaken," Mordechai Gihon remembered, "by the sight of some of the [guerrillas] eating with gusto next to the bodies" (MI 268).

A few days later, when the burial party arrived, one of the buriers broke down in tears at the sight. A guerrilla jeered, "Why are you crying, boy?" (MI 272). When the guerrillas were asked to assist in the burial, Yeshurun Schiff says they scoffed and cracked, "We're fighters, not pallbearers" (Kr 147).

On the night of the attack, as the ZOA tract confirms, the leader of the Irgun consciously exaggerated the death toll to 254 in a public statement that has become the source of the most commonly reported figure by all sides. Such willingness to make a tragedy appear worse indicates the result was desired and that the fight was not gruesome enough for them.

De Reynier, the Red Cross representative, gave the most dramatic recollections of the behavior of the attackers amidst the carnage. He described them as appearing "half-mad" (CLP 278). In a recollection not challenged by the ZOA, he finds a wounded child left untended two days after the village came into the hands of the attackers (DeR 73; ZOA 65). In his contemporary memo to the Red Cross in Geneva, he recalls a leader of the guerrillas telling him that when the "cleaning up" is finished, there would not be a single Arab left alive in Deir Yassin (RC). In his memoirs de Reynier recalls an Irgun commander saying that the villagers who did not surrender "got the fate they deserved" (DeR 72).

De Reynier is attacked in the ZOA tract. It is imputed that he is on some mission to "expose Jewish savagery" to the world and that he was hostile to "the Jewish side." The attacks on de Reynier are in such desperate and demonstrable bad faith that it raises questions of slander. For example, the ZOA implies he fabricated an incident that occurred when he arrived at Deir Yassin, and then they cite Dr. Engel's testimony that reports the incident differently. What they fail to tell is that it is quite clear from de Reynier's account that these are two different stories (DeR 70-73; ZOA 61, 66). In a dishonest appeal to partisan emotions and fears of bias, the ZOA accuses de Reynier of wanting to expose the world to "Jewish savagery." However, contemporary reports indicate de Reynier consulted the Jewish Agency staff prior to making statements; and he insisted that Arab authorities mention the risks taken by Jewish medical personnel to help his mission (ZOA 63; RC).

A member of the Jewish paramilitary youth organization commented that the attackers appeared proud of what they had done as they carried the bodies about (MI 271). Shimon Monita, a Haganah informant in Lehi, found an old crippled man hiding in one of the houses on April 10; another guerrilla casually told Monita to shoot the man (MI 267). A final image de Reynier took with him is telling. It is of one guerrilla holding up a large dagger, wet with blood, and waving it about like a trophy (RC). Natan Yellin-Friedman, Lehi supreme commander, encapsulated the postbattle attitude to the carnage by Lehi fighters. Rebuking them at a conference on the subject of Deir Yassin some time later he said, "Who asks you to come and boast about it?" (Lv 345).

The lack of sorrow or revulsion among the guerrillas at Deir Yassin in the face of a rare war horror, and the apparent pride of the killers, even to a ghoulish degree, argue definitively that the carnage was not an unintended misfortune but the grisly aftermath of a deliberate massacre.

Our historical investigator is now fully convinced of the culpability of the Irgun and Lehi guerrillas in a massacre at Deir Yassin. The concealment of the photos, the large number of casualties, the disproportionately low number of wounded, the grisly conclusions of experienced eyewitnesses to the carnage, the death-by-combat excuse, and the lack of regret shown by the killers provide, separately and together, an indisputable case of massacre.

Our detective must now assemble the case. Having assembled the overpowering circumstantial evidence, he turns to direct evidence of guilt. It does not take long. Knowing that culprits often can be caught boasting of their deeds in private, the sleuth's goal now is to find admissions of massacre. Although there has been no criminal prosecution about Deir Yassin to force testimony, admissions of intentional killing still readily surface.

### **Admissions by the Attackers**

Have the attackers of Deir Yassin admitted to intentional killing and planning a mass murder? Yes, and often. In a public statement, Irgun commander Mordechai Raanan recalled that the villagers of Deir Yassin stopped surrendering after they saw one of his men machinegun surrendering prisoners. "A young fighter [from our side] holding a Bren machine gun in his hands took up a position," Raanan remembered. "Having seen what happened to the inhabitants of the other houses, [the residents of the house] came out to us with their hands up. There were nine people there, including a woman and a boy. The chap holding the Bren suddenly squeezed the trigger and held it. A round of shots hit the group of Arabs. While he was shooting he yelled 'This is for Yiftach!'" (YA 4-4-72). Yiftach was the nickname of an Irgun officer who had been shot earlier. It bears repeating here that the ZOA claims there is no evidence of prisoner mistreatment.

The ZOA cannot conceal the enormous record of confession, although it ignores and omits most of it. Still, it quotes Israeli author Uri Avneri's claim that he learned from Irgunists that the massacre began when a local commander lost his head when the Irgun suffered casualties (ZOA 70). The ZOA also concedes that journalist Dan Kurzman wrote in his book on the 1948 war that some attackers admitted that they "cold-bloodedly shot every Arab they found – man, woman, or child" (ZOA 145; Kr 148).

In a similar revelation, Raanan implied to journalist Ned Temko that "excesses" were performed by his forces at Deir Yassin (NT 368). Raanan describes one such killing in the passage just quoted. But the ZOA denies to its readers even the mention of these Raanan admissions.

The existing confessions and revelations are extensive in scope. Private recollections of the incident were collected in the Jabotinsky Archives, the institution named after the Irgun founder. Much of this was discovered and published by Israeli journalist Yisrael Segal in 1983 (SI 262). Irgun member Yehoshua Gorodenchek declared that, as the attackers considered retreat, his unit "had prisoners, and before the retreat we decided to liquidate them. We also liquidated the wounded."

In one place, Gorodenchek learned, “about eighty Arab prisoners were killed after some of them had opened fire. . . . [Male] Arabs who dressed up as Arab women were found, and so they started to shoot the [surrendering] women also” (SI 93).

Detailed reports can be found of atrocities and atrocity plans from the perpetrators. Yehuda Marinburg of the Lehi told the Jabotinsky Archives of the execution of one group of male prisoners after capture (PI 52). Uri Milstein, whose work is the basis for the ZOA tract, tells of the execution of two prisoners taken alive, a fact he drew from a key Lehi officer's own recollections (MI 263). Another account is of the cold-blooded execution in Givat Shaul in front of numerous witnesses of a man from Deir Yassin found disguised as a woman (MI 267). Ben-Zion Cohen, Irgun commander for the operation, informed the Jabotinsky Archives that, at some point at Deir Yassin, “We eliminated every Arab that came our way” (Pr 216). The ZOA does not report any of these accounts but instead insists that there is no evidence of prisoner mistreatment at Deir Yassin.

The same commander also related the preplanning of the operation. There, a debate occurred and “The majority was for liquidation of all the men in the village and any other force that opposed us, whether it be old people, women, or children” (SI 90). The evidence of a massacre mentality is so strong that the ZOA, despite its pattern of concealment, cannot avoid discussion of the murder-mindedness. From an attacker source, it tells of a Lehi proposal to massacre the inhabitants of Deir Yassin (ZOA 28-30).

The admissions of deliberate atrocity from participants are numerous and broad. There are also repeated admissions of cold-blooded contemplation of mass murder in the village. No fair-minded person can reasonably doubt that the carnage of Deir Yassin was simply the result of anything other than a massacre.

### **Motives For Massacre**

Our historical investigation now has more than enough evidence to demonstrate a massacre at Deir Yassin. There is circumstantial evidence and there are repeated confessions. Now the detective asks the obvious next question: Why?

Murder usually has one or more motives. Perusing the record, the detective finds several reasons, many straight from the killers' own words. From the outset it should be noted that the guerrillas were young people, teenagers even, most on their first military encounter (ZOA 28; NT 368). The Irgun district commander was only 25 (Kr 140). They encountered deadly resistance. They were armed and in a violent situation. The analysis of motive begins with the most obvious emotional factors and proceeds to the more systematic ones.

**Fear.** The guerrillas encountered fire that killed four of them and left many wounded. They advanced into an unknown situation without training. The most likely reaction was fear. Ben-Zion Cohen stated that one reason his group “eliminated every Arab” who came their way was “fear of the battle starting up behind us” (Pr 216). Fear can also be an excuse for willful acts. Fear as a motive loses emphasis as other motives are clearly discovered.

**Revenge.** Inflicting a retaliatory punishment was a central motive. “Their feelings of revenge were unrestrained,” assessed the Haganah intelligence chief of the time (PI 50). Ben-Zion Cohen independently confirmed this in his Archives testimony. “In view of Deir Yassin's resistance, [we] felt a desire for revenge” (Pr 216). The attacking groups had suffered 4 dead and 36 wounded in the action. This was their first time in pitched combat and this seemed enormous.

The desire for revenge was also for older grievances. The Irgun operations officer, Joshua Goldshmidt, was the son of a Jewish fighter from the 1929 Arab-Jewish violence in which Deir Yassin had participated. Goldshmidt's father had sworn him never to forget Deir Yassin's violent



hostility of the earlier period. It was Goldshmidt who apparently suggested Deir Yassin as a target (Lv 340).

Attacks and atrocities by Arabs in the growing warfare between Jews and Arabs played a part. The Irgun's Yehuda Lapidot specifically noted that, in planning its attack on Deir Yassin, the group was inspired by anger over the atrocities (including mutilation of bodies and take-no-prisoners fighting) committed by Arab irregulars at Atarot and Gush Etzion (Nebi Daniel convoy attack of March 30) (Sl 90). Ben-Zion Cohen corroborated this in his testimony when he said that the desire for revenge that influenced those who eliminated every Arab came "especially after the enemy [had] hit us hard in Gush Etzion and Atarot" (Pr 216).

A less explicit basis for revenge may have been the organizational humiliation engendered by the village resistance. Before the attack on Deir Yassin, the attackers had planned to make a major show of their organizational strength. "If we, the IZL and Lehi are finally going to do a joint operation, the Arabs should know it" (ZOA 30). Instead of the great showing, however, overcoming final resistance in Deir Yassin required help from the Palmach fighters, who were military and political rivals. "They achieved in one hour what we could not accomplish in several hours," observed one guerrilla commenting on the superior performance of a much smaller unit (ZOA 46). A Palmach member who rated the guerrillas' fighting performance as poor reported an angry exchange in Deir Yassin over the relative fighting obligations of the guerrillas and the Palmach (Ml 266).

**Militarism: Violence, Terror, and Prisoner Abuse.** Most fighters in most actions in most wars feel fear and a desire for revenge. That is not enough to explain the large scope of the massacre. An additional factor was the militaristic cult of violence among the attackers. A common chant among the Betarim, a nationalist group once led by Irgun chief Begin, promised that as Judea was destroyed by blood and fire so it shall be restored (Bl overleaf). The emblem of the Irgun organization was a map of Palestine and Transjordan with a bayoneted rifle superimposed above the words "Only Thus" (NT 364). After the Deir Yassin operation, Irgun chief Begin issued a statement exulting, "God, God, thou hast chosen us for conquest" (Sl 88).

In planning the attack on Deir Yassin, the guerrillas seriously contemplated massacre of the villagers in order to display the fearsomeness of the two guerrilla groups (ZOA 30). About the time of the attack *The New York Times* correspondent in Jerusalem interviewed an Irgun spokesman in Tel Aviv who told him that terror, bombs, and assassination were the only weapons they had to fight the Arabs (DS 4-5).

Violence against civilians and prisoners was an operational tactic in this regard. British Mandatory headquarters at the King David Hotel were bombed by the Irgun, and almost a hundred civilians were killed. The Irgun threw bombs into civilian bus stops, public squares, and workplaces. On one occasion, they kidnapped two British soldiers and hanged them publicly. The ZOA passes over this as "retaliatory hanging" (ZOA 79). In a ghoulish twist, they set up a booby trap for those who retrieved the bodies. On another occasion, captured British soldiers were publicly flogged (CLP 116). Well before Deir Yassin, the attackers had an established mode of operation that included acts of demonstrative violence in which civilian casualties were sought and prisoners were abused and killed, sometimes publicly.

**Communal Warfare.** The fighting between Palestinian Arabs and Jews was often especially cruel, a form of deeply fierce ethnic warfare. The mentality grew paranoid and racist such that no one of the "enemy," no matter how innocent, was deemed immune, even children. Every action had some degree of excess associated with it. Israeli historian Uri Milstein, the main source for the ZOA tract, observed that

Even before the establishment of the State, each battle ended with a massacre. In the [1948] war . . . most of the action happened between Jews and Palestinians. The education in the Yishuv at that time had it that the Arabs would do anything to kill us and therefore we had to massacre them. [Many were] convinced that the most cherished wish of say, a nine-year old Arab child, was to exterminate us. (GE)

Harry Levin reflected on the atrocities of Deir Yassin and related the existence of “cultured, kindly people . . . who condone it, [and] say the Arabs started it, and this is the only kind of reply they understand” (HL 59). Yehuda Lapidot of the Irgun said that a main motive for the attack on Deir Yassin was lifting morale after Arab victories and atrocities (SI 90). With this kind of mentality every Arab man, woman, or child was a potential “legitimate” victim.

**Ethnic Ideology.** More than popular wartime prejudice, the attacking groups in particular had cultivated an ideological ethos of hostility to an Arab presence. The Irgun's founder, Vladimir Jabotinsky, said that Islam, the primary religion of Arab society, “must be broomed out of Eretz Israel.” The founder of Lehi, Avraham Stern, declared that “Arabs are not a nation but a mole that grew in the wilderness of the eternal desert. They are nothing but murderers” (Pr 212). Logically, what one is permitted to do to murderers is kill them in self-defense. Journalist Dan Kurzman describes the thoughts of Lehi member Menashe Eichler, whom he interviewed about his experience at Deir Yassin. The latter considered the Arabs to be “thieves” since they were enemies of Zionism. It was permissible to kill them in the act of theft, defined to mean the opposition of Arabs to (in Eichler's religiously-oriented nationalism) a divinely ordained Jewish state (Kr 143).

Inflicting high civilian casualties by massacre thus served the ideological motive of stampeding panicked Arabs into submission or flight. The effect of a high casualty figure in causing mass panic was apparent to Irgun district chief Mordechai Raanan when he exaggerated the already horrendous death toll at Deir Yassin to 254. “I told the reporters that 254 were killed so that a big figure would be published, and so that the Arabs would panic not only in Jerusalem but across the country, and this goal was accomplished” (MI 269).

# Reconstructing the Event

This chapter is the story of the massacre from the available record of the events. It deals foremost with the issue of mass murder; other alleged crimes are treated briefly and peripherally and only where they are relevant to the main picture. Much of the story relies on the recollections of a witness to round out Arab testimonies and attacker admissions. That witness is Meir Pa'il. He retired from the Israeli armed forces as a colonel in the early 1970s. He has spoken often of his experience at Deir Yassin (PAI).

Pa'il (then Pilevsky) was an intelligence agent in 1948 who monitored the Irgun and Lehi for the Haganah. He infiltrated the attackers on the day of the Deir Yassin raid. His presence at the scene as an eyewitness is invaluable because he saw much of the event on April 9<sup>th</sup> and saw it from the attacker side (PAI).

The following account is more detailed and critical in content than most other accounts. It is information from up-to-date research and includes a breakdown of the massacre in stages, a resolution of significant discrepancies such as the death toll, and a rejection of the common view that demolition of houses occurred in the course of the operation.

## The Beginning

On April 5, 1948, the Palmach began its Operation Nachshon to force open the road to besieged Jewish Jerusalem. On April 6, a convoy of supplies made it through tough resistance from Arab fighters along the road. Meanwhile, Arab leader Abdel Khader Husseini came to the area to take personal command after the Haganah captured the strategically situated roadside town of Kastel earlier in the week (CLP 261).

The Irgun and Lehi guerrillas had not been part of this fighting. They were not cooperating with Haganah in Jerusalem because they opposed the internationalization of the city. On his own initiative, Yeshurun Schiff of the Haganah invited the Irgun and Lehi guerrillas to join the battle of Kastel. They declined (CLP 255-256), but they wanted to perform some action of their own. By April 7, they had closed in on the choice of a town they wished to attack: Deir Yassin (Kr 141).

## The Selection of a Target

Deir Yassin was a curious choice for a target for several reasons. Months before, the elders of Deir Yassin agreed not to allow the village to become a base for attacks against the neighboring Jewish areas of West Jerusalem. The agreement was supervised by the Haganah (Lv 130; ZOA 19). In turn, Deir Yassin would not be attacked. The village was not situated on a main road; it was located on the other side of a hill and was over a kilometer away (AIP, BZ 6). Documents from the time indicate that some villagers were sources for Haganah military intelligence (ZOA 20).

There has been much debate and recrimination since the 1948 incident about why Deir Yassin was selected and who suggested it. One thing, however, is clear. No one, in planning the attack, considered it to be a center of active hostility in the growing conflict. Nowhere in the ZOA's entire

discussion of the selection of Deir Yassin, for example, is there information from any source that the guerrillas felt the village needed to be taken to quell ongoing attacks on Jewish targets emanating from there, nor is such consideration reported in any of the guerrillas' planning discussions (ZOA 5-15).

Arab villages had a great deal of autonomy because of strong personal and family loyalties and because of lack of modern transportation and communication facilities. Additionally, territory-wide political organization of Palestine's Arabs had often been officially repressed by the British. As the British departed, the breakdown of central authority enhanced the already powerful local leadership (BZ 49-52). Deir Yassin had been a hostile village to Jews and to the British in the 1929 Palestine violence and the Arab revolt of the late 1930s. By the late 1940s, however, the village had developed a good working relationship with the nearby Jewish settlement, Givat Shaul (Kr 138).

Deir Yassin made its own decisions in the 1948 conflict. Having chosen mutual nonaggression with their Jewish neighbors, the village elders stuck to the deal. The Lehi, in a publication a few weeks before the attack, described the village as one that remained steadfast in honoring its nonaggression agreement (Lv 340-341).

Of course the villagers did not trust their neutrality to fate or the good will of either side. They purchased smuggled weapons and set up a system of guard watches to patrol the village perimeter (BZ 50). On one occasion, Iraqi detachments fighting on the Arab side attempted to set up a base around the village. The village leadership insisted on their departure; the confrontation grew violent, and a young man from Deir Yassin was killed (Lv 340). Treading carefully, they kept up contact with both the Haganah in Jerusalem and the Arab paramilitary base in neighboring Ein Kerem (Ml 257).

Fighting in the area grew intense as March ended, and the Kastel battle and Operation Nachshon swung into gear. Pressure increased on Deir Yassin. On March 30, a large number of Syrian and Iraqis were seen entering the village (Lv 340). They departed soon after, according to the same report (the departure unmentioned by ZOA). In an independent account, a villager recalls an elder inviting the leader of a foreign Arab force to a meal about that time and politely but firmly convincing him to abandon the idea of staying in Deir Yassin (Kr 139).

Soon after fighting began at Kastel, violence increased around the West Jerusalem Jewish districts. Some of these neighborhoods were hit by sniper fire coming from the west, a general area that includes Deir Yassin (Ml 257). As fighting spread from Kastel to Motza, some Arab professional troops came from the south and cut through Deir Yassin, assembling there on the way to Motza (ZOA 22).

Despite open warfare looming closer and closer, Deir Yassin remained an oasis of stability. The shooting in the area and movements of armed formations did not affect the basic quiet of the village. The elders refused a request from one Arab guerrilla leader, Erekat, to allow troops to move into Deir Yassin (Ml 257). Dov Joseph, the Jerusalem area Military Governor for the Jewish Agency and later Israel, recalled the town as "a quiet village, which had denied entry to the volunteer Arab units from across the frontier and which had not been involved in any attacks on Jewish areas" (Js 71). Irgun leader Raanan reconnoitered the village and, although he maintained years later that it served as an Arab militia logistical position of sorts, nevertheless admitted at the time that the town did look "quiet" (Ml 256, 260).

Popular Arab militia leader Abdul Khader Husseini was reported missing on April 7 at Kastel. But only a handful of individuals left Deir Yassin to join the huge stream of Arab villagers that stormed Kastel and took it back from the Haganah on April 8 (CLP 263, BZ 49). (This did not violate the agreement between Givat Shaul and Deir Yassin because Jews from Givat Shaul could also fight elsewhere without violating the agreement.)

The village elders' policy to prevent attacks on Jewish West Jerusalem from Deir Yassin was so well-maintained that the Haganah commander in nearby Givat Shaul, Yona Ben-Sasson, stated unequivocally that in the 1948 conflict there had not been a single incident between Deir Yassin and the Jewish community before the town was captured (MI 257). Ben-Sasson is mentioned favorably as a source by the ZOA, although this particular statement is omitted in the tract. Mordechai Gihon of Haganah intelligence inspected Deir Yassin after it was captured and reviewed movements of armed men he observed before the attack to determine if this was bad faith on the part of the villagers. The ZOA cites Gihon extensively and always favorably but omits the following. In a secret memorandum after the incident, Gihon concluded that the villagers had been "faithful allies of the western [Jerusalem] sector" who had "kept faith" even during a Jewish offensive to take a nearby ridge (Lv 343).

The main reason for the selection of Deir Yassin by the guerrillas had nothing to do with Deir Yassin being an actual or potential military threat. In private testimony, Irgun officer Yehuda Lapidot revealed that "the reason was mainly economic . . . to capture booty" for bases of the guerrilla groups (SI 90). The siege of Jerusalem had created severe shortages. Lapidot also mentioned a desire to improve morale by taking a village, especially in light of recent hits taken by Jewish forces (Lv 340). A Haganah commander recalled that the guerrillas also told him the raid was "punitive" in character (MI 258). Some dissent was heard within the guerrillas' ranks. David Siton of the Lehi organization protested that hitting a friendly Arab village would endanger western Jerusalem (MI 257).

In the guerrillas' discussions, another reason entered; namely revenge. Irgun operation commander Joshua Goldschmidt had been sworn by his father, who grew up in Givat Shaul, never to forget Deir Yassin's hostility in the violence of the previous decades.

When the suggestion of an attack by the guerrillas was brought to the Haganah, District Commander David Shaltiel tried to dissuade them from it and suggested the town of Kolonia instead (MI 259). Finally, he gave in and issued a cover letter that did not exactly approve the attack but stated that an eventual Jewish takeover of Deir Yassin was a long-term goal, in order to set up an airfield. It cautioned against blowing up houses and causing the population to flee because Shaltiel feared that foreign troops would use blown-up houses as a base. Shaltiel also stressed the need to hold the town after taking it for fear it could be taken over by hostile forces (ZOA 7).

The Irgun's Mordechai Raanan claimed that the town had been a protection point for a supply route from Ein Kerem to Arab troops at Kastel. A separate Lehi reconnaissance was made. Its excursion is said by a Lehi member to have reached the conclusion that Raanan's claim was false and that the village was not a threat (MI 256). Attackers would also say that the Deir Yassin raid was requested by the Haganah to assist a Jewish attack on Kastel and to support the movement of a road convoy (MI 260). The Haganah sources do not support this, and concerns about what was happening in Kastel or on the road do not appear in attacker recollections of the actual battle (ZOA 31-45).

Meir Pa'il of the "antidissident" intelligence unit learned of the attack after meeting a Lehi member on April 7 or 8. The Lehi member was unaware of Pa'il's espionage duties. The Lehi member told Pa'il of the raid and invited him to join it. Pa'il did not like what he heard. He protested to David Shaltiel that permitting the guerrillas to attack Deir Yassin was in violation of the agreement with the village, but Shaltiel said he did not want to risk a fight among Jewish forces at that time (PAI). The Haganah's spy agency chief in Jerusalem, Yitzhak Levi, also opposed the plans and suggested to Shaltiel that they at least advise Deir Yassin that the truce was off. Shaltiel refused, saying he would not alert Arabs to a possible Jewish action (Lv 341).

The guerrillas held meetings to plan the operation. They adopted a password: Achdut Lochemet. It meant "Fighting [in] Unity" and signified the fact that this was the Irgun and Lehi's first joint operation. Efforts were made to gather weaponry, much of which was illegally and poorly made in underground factories. The commanders also knew their fighters had not been trained for regular warfare (MI 258, 261).

A natural question soon asserted itself. What is to be done about captives from the village? Since this was the guerrillas' first regular military operation, it was a novel question. According to the Irgun's Yehuda Lapidot, a proposal came from the Lehi side to slaughter any inhabitants of the village who did not flee (ZOA 28-30; MI 258). Ben-Zion Cohen of the Irgun reported that the majority of his group favored killing all the men and any others who resisted (SI 90). Revenge for a late March Arab militia ambush of Jewish fighters and subsequent mutilation of the dead bodies was put forth. It was also urged that a fearsome showing had to be made in a combined Lehi-Irgun operation. Sending a loud message of terror to the Arabs appealed to the members (MI 258).

A debate ensued and Irgun commander-in-chief Menachem Begin in Tel Aviv was apparently consulted. He is said to have ordered the Irgun to honor the Geneva Convention's rules for honorable treatment of prisoners and to have suggested that the raid begin with a loudspeaker announcement telling the villagers to flee to Ein Kerem (MI 258). How effectively this warning was conveyed to the members before the battle is unclear. Leaders of both groups and Meir Pa'il have said instructions were indeed given, but Raanan of the Irgun said that Lehi Jerusalem district chief Joshua Zettler admitted to him that he thought it unwise to give prebattle instructions that called for minimizing casualties and respecting captives (Kr 139, McG 37). Further, as the guerrillas were getting ready on the night before the attack, fighters were observed by a Jerusalem family candidly and excitedly discussing their hopes to do things in Deir Yassin that would send a message so frightening that the Arabs throughout the country would panic and flee (Sh 36).

### **An Early Coverup?**

Just after midnight on April 9, the raiders began to assemble. The total number of participants appears to have been around 130 (ZOA 16). Infiltrated among the Lehi group was Meir Pa'il and a photographer. Pa'il had decided to spy on the guerrillas to get an idea of their military performance (PAI).

The groups proceeded in two main prongs. The Lehi came from Givat Shaul and traveled down the main road into eastern Deir Yassin, accompanied by a small vehicle equipped with a loudspeaker. A Haganah squad under Mordechai Gihon was present in Givat Shaul (MI 260; Lv 343). In the same early hours, the Palmach began an assault to retake Kastel after its fall to Arabs the previous day.

David Shaltiel made an odd entry in his operations log at about 2:40 a.m. He recorded that he sent a cable to Operation Nachshon's Palmach commander Shimon Avidan that the Arabs in Deir Yassin had set up a mortar to shell a convoy on the highway (MI 259). This information is quite inconsistent with the Deir Yassin incident and is almost certainly false.

There is no report or suggestion anywhere else by anyone else (including attackers and villagers) of a mortar or even mortar shells being used by the Arabs, all very valuable weapons. Nor is there any account of a mortar being discovered, concealed, sought, observed, used, or in any other way involved with the action at Deir Yassin. Nor is there any published reference to such a message being received by Avidan. The anomalous notation is thus not likely to be true.

An explanation may be simple error: a misstatement from another village because the impending attack on Deir Yassin was on Shaltiel's mind. (The timing of the incident coincides with the attack on Kastel.) Or it may represent an attempt by Shaltiel to concoct a justification to the

leftist Palmach for his toleration of the controversial Deir Yassin raid by the hated “right wing.” In any event, it stands as an oddity inconsistent with the facts and much more consistent with a mistake or a deception. (The Deir Yassin massacre became a very controversial affair afterwards, and Shaltiel and the Haganah command proved capable of issuing false statements regarding their role in the raid [ZOA 72-73].) Allowing the politically unpopular “dissidents” to betray a peace pact during a vital offensive made the Deir Yassin action controversial even before the more infamous massacre that followed.

In those early hours, the residents of Deir Yassin had their guards on watch as they did every night. There had already been some movement in the area as fighters and peasants who had gone to Kastel headed eastward during the night towards Jerusalem, where Abdul Khader Husseini's funeral was scheduled for the morning (Kr 138). About 3:00 a.m., the Irgun began to move into position from Jerusalem's southwest suburbs. The Lehi prepared to move directly down the path from Givat Shaul. The village guards met some advancing guerrillas, apparently Irgunists, and fired warning shots. About 4:45 a.m., the battle began (Lv 342).

### Comedy of Terrors

One of the Middle East's most enduring tragedies, the massacre at Deir Yassin, began as a black comedy. Two sets of ill-trained fighters suddenly met each other when neither was ready. The start of the attack did not go as planned because a villager shouted an Arabic word or name that was similar to the attacker's password. Thinking he heard his password, an advancing fighter shouted a response, thus exposing the attackers (MI 262). Then, the warning loudspeaker's transport fell into a ditch and the crew began broadcasting from the ditch, its ultimate effects uncertain (PAI; ZOA 31). The Irgun also failed to keep the high ground in front of the village, which would have allowed direct suppression of village fire (Lv 342).

Meanwhile, the village guards fled in confusion and panic as fire came from all around (Lv 342). Alerted by the attack in the east, the town's population began to flee toward Ein Kerem in the southwest. The Lehi units made some progress into the lower eastern part (McG 36; PAI), but progress was hampered as the frightened townspeople began to reorganize and resist. A village teacher, Hayat Balabseh, started a first-aid area and began to retrieve weapons from dead villagers (BZ 53, 54). The Irgun's failure to hold the rise allowed some village men to return from Ein Kerem and take up positions (Lv 342).

The Irgun began experiencing casualties (Lv 342). Mordechai Gihon swung into action with the Haganah unit in Givat Shaul. Uninformed of the full extent of Haganah approval of the action, he obtained limited authorization to protect the guerrillas' retreat from the rise and to retrieve the wounded. He set up a machine gun on the Sharafa ridge (now Mt. Herzl), fired at fleeing residents, and also hit some of the guerrillas in the confusion. For a while, Haganah firing blocked the return of the rallying Deir Yassin villagers and any assistance they might obtain from Ein Kerem (Lv 343).

The Lehi members' more successful advance into the village also became stymied as some of the rallied townsmen assembled in the mukhtar's (village head) house, a multi-storied residence at the highest part of the village. From this vantage, the defenders commanded much of the town (PAI).

The terrible black comedy continued. Many of the guerrillas' homemade weapons simply did not work. Lack of training was also evident. And many of the attackers did not know how to use their weapons. Some threw hand grenades without pulling the pins. In addition to the possibility that Irgun men got hit by friendly fire from the Haganah, one Lehi unit commander was accidentally shot by his own men (MI 263). More significant, central command control was lost quickly. Units went off on their own and failed to obey orders. Most proved incapable or unwilling to help fellows who were injured (MI 262; Lv 342).

The Irgun decided to retreat from its positions south of the town. The equally ill-trained villagers did not press their advantages and launch a counterattack. One of the men of the town recalled shooting in the hopes the attackers would run away. "We expected the fighting to last two or three hours, after which they would retreat" (GN). But they did not pull out. The Lehi suggested the Irgun join them among the houses and buildings in the east of the village. During this period of advance, confusion, and frustration, which constituted much of the morning, the "Deir Yassin massacre" took shape.

### **The Massacre in Hot Blood**

After the initial advance, the village counter-fire from the Muktar's house caused many attackers to hide. Meir Pa'il and others remained pinned in an empty house (PAI). Some who were more organized and less exposed had begun early to move among the houses to take prisoners. Still, "the conquest was carried out cruelly," as historian Uri Milstein summarized, involving the killing of whole families (MI 274).

Early on, any orders inhibiting the massacre appear to have lost their force under the lack of central control and the fear and rage engendered by the resistance. Eyewitnesses reported several gruesome stabbings of unresisting villagers that occurred in the morning. Two men are said to have been thoroughly slashed with a very large knife. A pregnant woman was shot and stabbed (CLP 275).

Although Pa'il says that the attackers he saw had no knives (PAI; McG 43), there are many reports of knife-killings (BZ 56, McG 51, CLP 275, DeR 74). It is possible that units he did not observe had knives, or that knives and other implements were retrieved from captured houses. Pa'il's movement was hindered in the morning, and he could not see everything (PAI). Several fighters among the ill-armed guerrillas planned to acquire weapons from casualties, either Jewish or Arab. Further, with ammunition low and a part of the force unable to operate their weapons (because of poorly trained fighters or poorly manufactured weapons), it is quite likely the attackers resorted to other weapons. Weaponry was so scarce, in fact, that the units' medics were crudely armed with clubs (MI 261).

The bloody-minded prebattle plans seem reflected in the takeover of one house and the killing of those who were inside. The murders echoed planning-stage proposals to kill the men first and any others who put up opposition, where "opposition" could simply mean a cry of protest or horror. Village resident Fahimi Zeidan was about 12 years old the day of the raid. She recalls the attackers blowing open the door of her house where she, her family, and several relatives hid in a storeroom. "They . . . entered and started searching the place; they got to the storeroom, and took us out one-by-one."

They started with one man. "They shot the son-in-law, and when one of his daughters screamed, they shot her, too. They then called my brother Mahmoud and shot him in our presence, and when my mother screamed and bent over my brother (she was carrying my little sister Khadra who was still being breast fed) they shot my mother too." The children began crying and screaming. They were told that "if we did not stop, they would shoot us all" (BZ 55). The children did not stop crying. So the attackers "lined us up, shot at us, and left." She was wounded but not killed. "I looked around to see who was still alive: my uncle, his children and his wife were all dead, my sister Soumia who was only four, and my brother Mohamad, were alive" (BZ 55).

She and her injured siblings were taken alive later by other fighters. Their restraint was not much less than those who killed her family. "We walked with some other women from the village, then came across a young man and an older man, with their hands up in the air, under guard." The group with the two surrendered males and hers met. "When they reached us, the soldiers shot them." The mother of the younger man was with Fahimi Zeidan's group of gathered captives.



"She attacked the soldiers and started hitting them," she remembered. So "one of them stabbed her with a knife a few times" (BZ 56).

It was in the early morning, while retreat was being considered, according to confirmation by the Irgun's Gorodenchik, that one Irgun unit executed its Arab prisoners and Arab wounded. He also said that Arab women were compelled to function as human shields to carry wounded guerrillas out of the village; the women were then hit by fire from the villagers (SI 93, MI 266).

**A Trigger Event?** The above account, along with others, suggests a possible trigger event for many of these killings, although this is speculation. Desire for revenge over a particular man's death and the use of disguise tactics by some villagers played a significant part in setting off the attackers on a murderous rampage, shooting everyone in sight. One villager's impression was that the attackers were not going to harm the townspeople until after an Irgun commander was shot (ZOA 111). Many survivors told an undercover Haganah agent that the massacre began after a concealed weapon was found on a man dressed as a woman (MI 267). These accounts may find reconciliation in Irgun leader Raanan's similar story of a group execution prompted by a key commander's mortal wounding.

Irgun vanguard commander Yehuda Segal was shot and mortally wounded on the steps of a house in the morning fighting. When people in the house surrendered, a guerrilla gunned them down with a machine gun, shouting "This is for Yiftach!" (Yiftach was Segal's nickname.) The victims of the revenge execution included at least one woman and child. According to Raanan's account, one of the men was dressed as a woman and had a gun. Raanan concedes that after this mass killing the villagers became terrified (Lv 344). The version from the undercover Haganah agent also indicates that villagers believed that after a man dressed as a woman shot an Irgun commander, the guerrillas began killing everyone they saw (MI 276). Thus, there is evidence from separate sources that the shooting of Irgun officer Yehuda Segal by a person or persons disguised in women's clothing set off a pattern of general slaughter. Whether this was indeed a trigger, or whether there was a single trigger for the hot-blooded massacre, remains speculative.

What is not speculative is that needless slaughter kept happening during the fighting and taking of prisoners. Villager recollections indicate one attacker set up a machine gun and mowed down all who passed (MI 275). Reports from survivors also tell of family members being shot as they attempted to aid fallen relatives (MI 275, GN). Gorodenchek of the Irgun said that surrendering women who did not move fast enough were also killed (SI 93). A woman named Thoraya, at the time a young girl, recalled that her aunts protected her with their bodies as they were stabbed to death in a house. She survived by cowering beneath their stiffening bodies while covered in their blood (McG 51). The deaths were murderous excesses, not accidents of combat. Houses were not blown up. "No house in Deir Yassin was bombed," Pa'il confirms emphatically (McG 39).

**The Rescue of the Guerrillas** Many guerrillas were in trouble—wounded were hard to reach and sniper fire from the townspeople was deadly (Lv 342; PAI). They could move among the houses, killing and capturing, but they proved unable to advance decisively. Some of the attackers ran to get help. What is clear is that by late morning a decisive difference was made when 17 members of a Palmach unit with official authorization presented itself.

This was Company D of the Palmach's Harel 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade commanded by Mordechai Weg, better known by his nickname Yaacov or Yaki. Studying the situation, he brought a two-inch mortar and 17 "Palmachniks" (Lv 344, PAI). Pa'il discovered the unit's presence when he heard the mortar firing. It was now about 11:00 a.m. Three shots were directed at the mukhtar's house and all significant resistance was stopped. The Palmach troops rapidly went through the village and suppressed hostile fire (Lv 344).

The real victory had been won not by the guerrillas but by a much smaller number of rival Palmachniks. Kalman Rosenblatt of the Palmach unit later expressed his dismissal of the military performance of the guerrillas. "The [guerrillas] did not fight" (MI 266). The Palmach did not suffer a single injury in subduing the village. "They operated quickly and efficiently," the Lehi's David Gottlieb said, unfavorably comparing his own group's performance (MI 266). Raanan recalled Shaltiel exhibiting "a certain ridicule" about his group's fighting performance (ZOA 45).

Pa'il summarizes the earlier battle succinctly. "The fighting was not that heavy. If they had been good soldiers, they could have conquered the whole village in about an hour" (McG 42). The Irgun and Lehi immediately lost four men and one who would die later. The 5 guerrilla dead out of 130 and the lack of injury to the small Palmach unit members also attests that the resistance had not been professional or particularly tough. Most of the wounded were said by the guerrillas to be "lightly wounded" (NYT 4-10-48).

**No Outside Help for Villagers** There were few or no foreign soldiers involved in fighting in the village (Lv 343). Certainly there were none who had any significant effect. The only independent report of outside soldiers is an unusual and second-hand account reporting two dead Syrians (HL 59). If true, they may have been visitors or persons who managed to come from Ein Kerem after Deir Yassin was attacked. It is also conceivable that uniforms were later put on civilian bodies by the attackers, a technique used to bolster claims of a tough fight. Villager recollections are a chorus of frustration over the inaction of Arab forces in the area (Kr 144; GN). "We had no aid or support from any party," recalled Abu Mahmud (GN).

Some of the guerrillas claim that a Transjordanian deserter and a Yugoslav were found in the village (MI 263). There are scattered reports of other soldiers (MI 263). The ZOA omits a subsequent admission in the same source that the alleged deserter and Yugoslav were executed after capture. More concrete is the report from Palmach personnel of a mysterious Arab man from outside the Jerusalem area, though there is no explicit claim of a military affiliation. A Palmach man executed him after capture, apparently causing protest from other members (MI 276).

Though there may have been military deserters or guests in the village, or a few fighters who managed to slip in during the attack, no one has shown they were a sizeable group or part of any systematic presence or defense. An internal Haganah assessment concluded categorically that no foreign Arabs were present and Weg's report also says nothing in regard to encountering foreign troops (Lv 343). Nor is the presence of any outside fighters reported by any other Palmach men present or any other independent observer. The ZOA produces no independent witness to corroborate any claims of a presence of foreign troops.

### **The Massacre in Warm Blood**

Pa'il assessed the overall capabilities of the Lehi and Irgun at Deir Yassin in the following manner: "They didn't know how to fight, but as murderers they were pretty good" (McG 40). His observations were based on what he witnessed. "I started hearing shooting in the village," he recalls. "The fighting was over, yet there was the sound of firing of all kinds from different houses." Were they suppressing new pockets of resistance in the homes, doing a "clean-up" operation? This was different, it was "sporadic firing, not like you would hear when they clear a house" (PAI).

The Palmach unit had already left by this time and Pa'il may have had something to do with that. Late in the morning, perhaps close to noon, Pa'il revealed himself to Palmach Commander Weg after the village was subdued. As a key intelligence man, Pa'il had some authority (PAI). He urged Weg to take his unit and leave. "Yaki," he addressed the Palmach commander, "you know we have a saying in Yiddish, 'varf sich avek' – get away from here! Don't get mixed up with the Irgun and Stern Gang" (PI 50). Pa'il profoundly regretted his action afterwards. He would feel that

had Weg and his people remained, they would have been able to prevent what the new sounds of shooting represented (McG 40). After the Palmach left, Pa'il relates, "the Stern Gang and Irgun began what I'd call an uncontrolled massacre performance" (PI 50).

A village boy named Mohammed Jaber was one of the few to survive and describe as an eyewitness the "massacre performance." About noon, the attackers broke into his family's home. They "[drove] everybody outside, put them against the wall, and [shot] them." This group was his entire family. One woman victim, he remembered, "was carrying a three-month-old baby" (CLP 276).

The enraged killings of the morning exploded into the entire village. The town had resisted, some had failed to leave or surrender, and as the Irgun's Ben-Zion Cohen later described the mentality of his men, "We wanted revenge" (Pr 216). To Pa'il, the violence appeared spontaneous, not a result of a direct order. He considered this observation confirmed when postaction recriminations were leaked by an informant in Lehi (McG 43).

The demeanor of the guerrillas stunned Pa'il as well. They appeared "mad with a desire to kill." He followed after them with his photographer. The eyes of the guerrillas made a memorable impression. "People were going around there, as I wrote in my [subsequent] report, with their eyes rolled about in their sockets" (PAI). "Their eyes were glazed," is how he explained his meaning years later to Eric Silver. The Irgun and Lehi appeared "mentally poisoned" as if "in ecstasy" (SI 94).

The attackers of Deir Yassin, by the accounts, had degenerated into unrestrained murderers. Most Arabs unfortunate enough still to be at large in the town were being shot dead. Some were gunned down as they tried to run away. Others found in the houses, women and children primarily, were crowded into the corners of rooms and executed (MI 274, PAI). The attackers also threw hand grenades at people huddled inside the houses (SI 94).

Pa'il's own emotions were a mix of stunned outrage and fear. "I saw this horror, and I was shocked and angry, because I had never seen such a thing, murdering people after a place had been conquered." As he and his assistant went about he "didn't say anything. I did not know their commanders, and I didn't want to expose myself, because people were going around there . . . full of lust for murder." Pa'il felt himself in "a psychological trap" (McG 40). "I didn't know what to do" (PAI).

Pa'il described the postcapture event as "a massacre in warm blood." The term seems to describe a situation where, although there was no combat pressure, a spontaneous action arose immediately after the stress of combat. It appeared to Pa'il to be a sort of cold-blooded, mechanistic killing but driven by an unplanned, hot-blooded stimulus.

Pa'il and his photographer took pictures as they went through the houses where the guerrillas had been. "It was terrible," he related. "I could see people dead in the corners – an old man, a wife, and two children, here and there a male" (McG 40). The victims were the slowest and most vulnerable – people least likely to resist or escape, but those who were taken alive while they tried to escape were also at risk. "They also shot people running from houses, and prisoners. Mostly women and children." The young men had mostly been driven off. "Most of the Arab males had run away. It is an odd thing, but when there is danger such as this, the [more] agile ones run away first" (PAI).

Young Mohammed Jaber who had seen his family rounded up and killed recalled his mother screaming for a long time before she died (McG 51). Pa'il's memory of the event is the same. "You could hear the cries from within the houses," he said. The screams came from "Arab women, Arab elders, Arab kids" (SI 94). Pa'il called the guerrillas "pogromists," using a term for violent police

terrorist gangs in Tsarist Russia. "But this time it was not just a pogrom to loot; it was a massacre" (McG 40). Looting and robbery soon followed, however.

One woman was taken alive about this time, along with her brother. Zeinab Akkel recalled that "my husband had given me \$400. I offered it . . . and said, 'Please leave my brother alone, he is so young.'" The guerrilla took the money. "Then he just knocked my brother over," she remembered, "and shot him in the head with five bullets" (Dn 4-11-98).

The frenzy now extended to the prisoners who had already been taken alive. "The Irgun and the Stern Gang," Pa'il has recalled, "put them in the school building." Then "they surrounded the building claiming they would bomb this schoolhouse on their heads" (McG 43-44). There are many reports of various types of physical and psychological abuse of prisoners throughout the day. Pa'il saw no explosives but recalled that the guerrillas were dissuaded from further violence when a group of civilian Jews from Givat Shaul entered Deir Yassin and shouted at the guerrillas to stop, angrily calling them "You bastards, you murderers" (McG 39).

The surviving captive villagers who were rounded up over the day (up to 150) were loaded onto trucks (RC). Young Fahimi Zeidan was part of the transport. "They . . . put us in trucks and drove us around the Jewish quarters, all the while cursing us" (BZ 56). Thousands saw this triumphal display of terrified massacre survivors (Lv 344, MI 267).

Harry Levin recorded in his diary on April 9 that "at 2 o'clock this afternoon I saw three trucks driving slowly up and down King George Avenue bearing men, women, and children, their hands above their heads, guarded by Jews armed with sten-guns and rifles." In the front truck, he saw "a young boy, a look of anguished horror bitten into his face, his arms frozen upright." The people watching with him "looked revolted" (HL 57).

One Jewish Haganah soldier, Gavriel Stern, had a similar reaction. "I watched from my position on Neviim Street, when they took the survivors of the massacre on a revolting victory parade" (MI 267). The decision to parade the prisoners was taken, according to the Haganah's informant in the Lehi, in order to boost civilian morale in the besieged city (MI 267). Among the terrorized prisoners, Levin saw an old man he believed to be the father of the young man killed in Deir Yassin weeks earlier when the town had honored their agreement and forced Arab militiamen to leave (HL 57). Most prisoners were eventually released in East Jerusalem. Some prisoners appear also to have been taken to a Lehi base in a warehouse. One Deir Yassin woman taken there had her baby murdered in front of her and when she fainted, she was also shot according to a Haganah intelligence report from the time (MI 267). This account given in Milstein is omitted in the ZOA tract.

## The Massacre in Cold Blood

Part of the parading of prisoners was the beginning of a cold-blooded execution in one of the quarries while the warm-blooded slaughter continued in the town itself. Pa'il saw a truckload of prisoners containing captured males leave the town around noon and come back less than an hour later (PAI). The Lehi's Yehuda Marinburg testified about this in the Jabotinsky Archives. "Our appearance [in Jerusalem] encouraged the people very much and they received us with applause" (P1 52). Then, after that parade, "we executed the prisoners" (P1 52).

Pa'il remembers seeing those male prisoners executed in a quarry. His photographer took pictures. Pa'il has estimated about 25 victims. "They put them up against the wall" and shot them (McG 37). Marinburg's admission suggests his unit shot to death eight prisoners (P1 52). The ZOA confirmed that plans for a quarry execution took place. Yona Ben-Sasson, the Haganah commander in Givat Shaul, said he encountered the guerrillas preparing a prisoner execution in the quarry but was able to talk them out of it (ZOA 58). It is not clear when this happened or if he was watching all the quarries at all times. In any event, Yehoshua Arieli, head of the burial crew, later did observe "several men" lying dead in a quarry (SI 94).

The quarry firing squad was apparently the final large-group killing at Deir Yassin, and the most cold-blooded. It was done in an organized fashion, away from the combat area and combat circumstances and with deliberation. Another individual killing is claimed by an Arab militia leader who says that when the main prisoner transport arrived near the Arab part of the city, an adolescent boy was pulled away as he was being released and shot to death in front of his mother (Jr).

## Afterwards

Pa'il left Deir Yassin in the mid-afternoon as the final prisoner trucks departed (PAI). When he wrote a report of the incident that evening for the Haganah, he started by quoting Chaim Nachman Bialik's poem about a Russian pogrom: "Arise and go to the city . . . and with your eyes you will see . . . on the trees and on the stones and on the plaster the congealed blood and battered brains of the slain" (SI 93). His report – along with two rolls of developed film – went to Haganah Commander Shaltiel and then on to headquarters in Tel Aviv. Pa'il never saw the photos. He instructed his photographer only to develop the negatives, for fear the pictures might circulate (McG 40). His report and photographs remain classified.

By about 3 p.m. on April 9, Shaltiel had sent Yeshurun Schiff and Mordechai Gihon to Deir Yassin. Both expressed shock and horror by what they saw in and around the dozens of houses. About 110 Deir Yassin residents had been killed, almost all in outbursts of murderous violence.

Most were killed by close range gunfire, some by stabbing, a few in combat, and some while fleeing. Most of the victims of the massacre, as the burial chief later lamented, were old men, women, and children, who died with no weapon in their hands. There was no combat chaos or circumstances necessitating their deaths, despite the early fighting. They were intentionally murdered.

It was an act of violence that was proposed and discussed in advance. The guerrillas' lack of restraint after meeting resistance caused many to follow through on plans to murder regardless of instructions to inhibit them. Their leaders proved unwilling or unable to stop them. Afterwards, they proved quite willing to benefit from the fear effect and embellish the bloody outcome. That evening, Irgun chief Raanan met with the international press in a tea-and-cookies party in Givat Shaul and told them that 254 Arabs had been killed (NYT, 4-10-48, 4-13-48).

The massacre and the 254 figure soon entered the history books and the verbal warfare of the Middle East (ZOA 109-110). The massacre was a real event. The figure was exaggerated; but because it came from the source with the best access, it has become the conventional figure. In the 1980s, authors like Eric Silver began to make efforts to correct the figure, documenting both the more correct number killed and additional evidence confirming the murderous nature of the atrocity. Palestinian Arab researchers of the same period published similar findings in a report on the village. The ZOA agrees with that detailed research and lower number but omits that same report's voluminous testimony of mass murder (ZOA 90-91; BZ 50-59).

## Challenges to Pa'il's Credibility

Taking a final look at the now discredited ZOA tract, the investigator sees that the ZOA challenges Pa'il's credibility as an eyewitness, alleging that he might not even have been there on the day of the raid. The investigator easily dismisses the objections to Pa'il's credibility, which he sees as weak and minor. (See the general discussion at ZOA 46-59.) Statements made over many years are alleged to be wrong or contradictory. For example, Pa'il also reported the 254 death figure. But Pa'il relied on the Irgun for the final figure, as did most historians. He did not count the dead himself and never said he did. Pa'il also claimed that the photos he produced showed a massacre in progress but the Israeli Defense Forces archives allegedly said that they only show bodies, not an execution (ZOA 56). This discrepancy could be resolved by releasing and tracing the photographs. In any event, Pa'il never saw the developed pictures. On one of several occasions describing the incident, Pa'il said the attackers entered houses and killed people found "sleeping" (ZOA 51). This is alleged to be a problem to his credibility. But the attack began in the early morning and the context is unclear.

The ZOA claims that Pa'il's report of an execution of prisoners in a quarry is "denied" by the Haganah commander in Givat Shaul, Yona Ben-Sasson (ZOA 58). However, Ben-Sasson's account merely says that he stopped a group of guerrillas from performing an execution in the quarry. He does not say that he monitored the quarries throughout the day, nor that he stopped every group.

Other alleged challenges to Pa'il's credibility are also strained and questionable. For example, his credibility is challenged because he said that the village had no strategic value and was not situated on any important route (ZOA 50); but Deir Yassin was not on the main highway and did not overlook it. Pa'il is also chided for not identifying the photographer with him, saying he is fearful (ZOA 53). Our investigator reasons that an eyewitness to a mass murder who provided evidence might have reason to be fearful.

Testimonies about the Deir Yassin incident from several Haganah officials (Shaltiel, Meret, Eldad, and Schiff) fail to mention Pa'il (ZOA 52). This insinuation that he was not there is argued to be a significant challenge to his credibility. But Pa'il was a spy among Jewish organizations. It is not hard to imagine that his activity would be kept secret; he himself did not reveal publicly for over 20 years (PAI). Since we do not know what issues the testimonies cover, his absence in ill-defined testimony about secret matters carries little weight.

Finally, we come to allegations of bias, a tactic of revisionists. Pa'il is alleged to have been "out of work" just before the Deir Yassin incident and in search of a budget to continue an operations unit to monitor the Irgun and Lehi (ZOA 48). Apparently, we are to conclude that in order to win favor for his own spy unit in 1948, he would fabricate a massacre by fellow Jews at a critical moment in the formation of the state. Our detective wonders in this scenario how Pa'il would expect to gain stature as an intelligence officer by concocting false reports embarrassing to his side of the conflict and challengeable by numerous independent Jewish witnesses from his own faction. And why would he persist decades later to present information that damages the state he fought to found and in whose army he served for years as a high-level officer?

We are further led to ask how Pa'il could then coordinate a incident instantaneously among Arab villagers, Haganah High Command, the British Criminal Investigation Department, the Magen David Adom, the Red Cross, and numerous Jewish observers, none of whom fail to challenge him on the main picture over several decades. We also need to ask how he did all this when the ZOA offers that he was not even in Deir Yassin (ZOA 55-56). This kind of conspiracy thinking, ironically, parallels Holocaust revisionism.

One point also needs to be stressed. It is almost inevitable that atrocities of a political nature will be reported by political or ethnic "opponents." Any criminal act is most likely to be reported by people who do not like the criminal and do not belong to his group. To illustrate, imagine insisting—as Holocaust revisionists do—that the only valid Holocaust evidence must come directly from non-Allied, non-anti-Nazi, and non-Jewish sources. That would put an enormous and needless strain on demonstrating the events. In its tract, the ZOA engages in those kinds of demands. In a brutal irony, the ZOA tract is an eerie echo of Holocaust revisionism in that the ZOA is implicitly challenging atrocity information because it came from a Jewish Communist.

### **Why Pa'il's Credibility is Unrefuted**

Pa'il has enormous credentials for his personal recollections of Deir Yassin. First, no witness has placed him any place but the action. No independent witness whom he claimed to have encountered at Deir Yassin has said he did not see Pa'il there. Yisrael Galili, head of the Haganah in the 1948 war, gave a written endorsement of his credibility about the incident (PAI). Even the ZOA does not challenge that Pa'il produced photos of the incident (ZOA 56). That is very good corroboration of his claim that he was there. Pa'il's report on the massacre remains classified, which indicates it is a significant document in the eyes of the government of Israel (PAI).

Pa'il's recollections of the incident are essentially that it was a minor, incompetently fought battle that degenerated into a general massacre after the attackers suffered casualties. This matches the circumstantial evidence, the villagers' testimonies, and admissions by the guerrillas. His recollections on the killings also match those of the surviving villagers (except on the use of certain methods of killing).

Pa'il's account of the main developments is sound, generally consistent with other evidence, and well attested. Our investigator has pieced together what happened that fateful time at Deir Yassin by using direct eyewitness sources like Meir Pa'il, the villagers of Deir Yassin, and others. It is a tale of a raid on a nonhostile target that goes awry and is transformed by personal history, emotion, attitude, incompetence, and ideology into a mass murder that would permanently scar the face of the Middle East.

### **Other Atrocities**

There were certainly other excesses committed at Deir Yassin. In this monograph, we have studied only the mass murder. Some accusations against the killers (e.g., rape, mutilation) are more controversial and elusive than others (e.g., general looting, prisoner exhibition). Focusing on other discrepancies in details of the event in an effort to confuse the issue is standard revisionism and a regular feature of the ZOA tract. We can find similar and more clear examples of this in Holocaust revisionism: Conventional debates over whether the Nazis made soap from human beings or scholarly controversy over which facilities were used as gas chambers are used maliciously to call into question the entire genocide program. In any widely witnessed traumatic event, confusion and rumor alone can cause different recollections. For example, half the survivors of the Titanic thought the ship broke up before sinking; the other half did not (Ps 235). Additionally, there can be motives to conceal and fabricate among both victim and aggressor and their political champions. Nonetheless, the overwhelming consistency of the evidence of Deir Yassin not only shows that a massacre took place but gives us a fair idea of its inception, progression, and scope.





## Conclusion

The massacre of Deir Yassin is neither lie nor exaggeration, despite the claims of the Zionist Organization of America. The only significant exaggeration is the estimated death toll of the mass murder, which was created by the perpetrators themselves for the admitted purpose of inciting mass terror. Nor can the massacre be said to be “in serious dispute” or “controversial.” There is no room to invoke “balance” here; there can be no balance between clear truth and clear falsehood. Those who demand such balance are acting with a hidden agenda or out of fundamental ignorance.

As this monograph has shown, the casualty numbers alone tell an honest and informed commentator that the dead villagers of Deir Yassin – largely women, children, and old men – were primarily killed deliberately and outside the necessities and incidents of combat. The explanations given by the perpetrators' excusers – blown-up houses, very tough resistance – do not justify such an extraordinarily high figure nor are they supported by the evidence. In addition to this are the admissions by the perpetrators themselves of deliberate murder along with the testimony of numerous independent witnesses who corroborated a scene of exceptional horror. Finally, there are the photos concealed for over half a century, suggesting something to hide far more terrible than ordinary war.

The massacre of Deir Yassin is also not “Arab revisionism.” Many of the primary sources of information on the massacre – witnesses to the scene and event – were non-Arabs. Several were Jewish soldiers and humanitarians; some were the attackers themselves. The conventionally cited number of casualties, likely exaggerated, was also not concocted by Arabs. The ZOA notes that the exaggeration was actually corrected by Arabs (ZOA 91). Labeling the Deir Yassin massacre “Arab revisionism” is simply an appeal to those who are concerned because Arabs have gained sympathy from the massacre. Saying it did not happen (or cannot be said to have happened) is a sad method to keep blame from the Jews and sympathy from the Arabs. “Loyalty is involved,” as George Orwell observed, “so pity ceases to function” (Or).

In a 1945 essay that also included one of the earliest warnings about Holocaust denial, Orwell described this partisan mentality regarding truth in the past. “Those who rewrite history do probably believe with part of their minds that they are actually thrusting facts into the past. . . . They feel that their own version was what happened in the sight of God, and that one is justified in rearranging the records accordingly. . . . One has no way of verifying the facts, one is not even fully certain that they have happened, and one is always presented with totally different interpretations from different sources. . . . Since nothing is ever quite proved or disproved, the most unmistakable fact can be impudently denied” (Or).

Describing the Deir Yassin massacre as false, exaggerated, or in dispute, is to indulge in the same impudence as Holocaust Revisionism. The same applies to alleging a false origin of the reports of massacre. Ironically for partisans of Israel, by implicitly challenging the moral and factual honesty of so many Jewish witnesses of the event and its results, one slanders patriotic Israelis who risked their lives to build the state.

In that regard, it is interesting that the ZOA also relies on mutually contradictory pamphlets from the 1960s and 1970s by the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Of course, government statements about controversial events have no value whatsoever as direct evidence of the event (ZOA 110-112). The same point applies more strongly to the ZOA's use of an Israeli veteran's benefit hearing for wounded raiders of Deir Yassin. Years after the massacre and on legal appeal after initial rejection, an interested government ruled that the raid had involved fighting against hostile forces. Even if the decision could amount to credible direct evidence, the judgment nevertheless did not deny a massacre (ZOA 1-2).

Since the time of these propaganda pamphlets, Yitzhak Levi, former Haganah intelligence chief in Jerusalem, wrote a book called *Nine Measures*, showing that the military record does indeed reveal a terrible massacre at Deir Yassin. This serious work was published by the Israel Defense Army Press (Lv). Meanwhile, Meir Pa'il, the chief eyewitness of the Deir Yassin massacre is today the author of the official history of Jewish military organizations in pre-Israel Palestine disseminated by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). If the government of Israel had serious credibility questions about Pa'il, the massacre, or its witnesses, it has obviously been a passing phenomenon. However, few, if any, of the more established American organizations identifying themselves with the label "Zionist" have distanced themselves from the ZOA's revisionism.

For 50 years no serious controversy surrounded the claim of mass murder at Deir Yassin, and the ZOA has not created one. It is thus only right that those organizations that align themselves with Zionism dissociate themselves from the ZOA tract, "Deir Yassin: History of a Lie."

A broader question asserts itself nonetheless. It is one that may put a silver lining to the cloud of the ZOA tract. That question is how the Deir Yassin massacre ought to be remembered for the betterment of all the peoples of the region. The real area of challenge and debate lies there. Searching for and understanding the evidence, as our detective did, can lead to better performance, not worse. But insofar as the ZOA may have helped call attention to that issue, its diatribe against reality may yet serve some good. Certainly it has taught us that wishing something doesn't make it so.

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