

MEMOIRS, 1948

PART I

FAUZI AL-QAWUQJI

[EDITOR'S NOTE: A professional army officer, Fauzi al-Qawuqji was born in Tripoli, Lebanon and served in a reconnaissance unit on the Palestine front in the Ottoman Army during World War I. He first rose to prominence in the Arab world as a result of his participation in the Druse rebellion against the French in Syria in 1925-26. After becoming an instructor in the Saudi Arabian army and later in the Iraqi Military College, he attained an international status by leading an Arab volunteer force into Palestine from Iraq during the 1936 rebellion against the British, subsequently leading the Palestine guerrilla forces themselves during the same year. In 1941 he fought on the side of Rashid Ali al-Kilani in Iraq, was severely wounded in an air-raid and was evacuated for treatment to Germany where he spent the remaining years of the war.

In 1947, following the UN resolution for the partition of Palestine, Qawuqji was appointed commander of the Liberation Army (*Jaysh al-Inqadh*) formed by the Arab League out of volunteers from the surrounding Arab countries to come to the aid of the Palestinian Arabs. This army, which numbered almost 4,000 men, including about 1,500 Palestinians, was divided into eight battalions under the central control of an Arab League Committee in Damascus, and entered Palestine gradually over a period of four months starting in January 1948. Qawuqji himself entered Palestine in early March 1948, establishing headquarters at the village of Jaba' in Central Palestine.

The *Journal of Palestine Studies* has been able to obtain Qawuqji's papers and diary on the period and, in view of their historical interest, will publish excerpts from these in two parts. The first part, printed below, covers the period up to the beginning of May 1948 and opens in January just after the mobilization of the bulk of the Liberation Army.]

A number of complications arose before our forces could cross the River Jordan. Before the First Yarmuk Battalion, which was the vanguard of our forces advancing towards central Palestine, moved from Damascus, I impressed

on the Syrian authorities, and in particular the President of the Republic, the late Shukri Quwatli, the necessity of contacting Amman and informing it of our movements to facilitate their passage and to ensure that in the future we could receive supplies and provisions through Jordan.

At Deraa, on the Syrian-Jordanian frontier, on the night of January 22, 1948, I was surprised to find that the Jordanian guard knew nothing about us. I therefore decided that the only thing to do was to telephone the Governor of Irbid and ask for an explanation. When I did so, he was furious and asked me: "How dare you cross without informing me in advance and giving us sufficient time to study the situation, especially as you know that we have a treaty with the British which imposes certain obligations on us in cases like this?"

I replied that, as far as I knew, Damascus had contacted Amman, and there must be some complication that I was not aware of. I requested him to contact the authorities in Amman.

The reply soon came to the effect that the Jordanian government knew nothing and absolutely refused to let us cross. I then asked the Governor to come to Deraa himself to discuss the situation.

The whole of the conversation took place in the hearing of Major-General Ismail Safwat, the Commander-in-Chief of the Arab League's Army for the Liberation of Palestine, and of Colonel Mahmoud al-Hindi, a member of the Military Committee; we were jointly responsible for supervising the entry of the Battalion into Palestine.

We then telephoned the Presidential Palace in Damascus where Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, the Inspector-General of the Liberation Army, was with President Quwatli, waiting for news from the frontier.

When I explained the situation to the President, all he said was: "Taha Pasha will speak to you. In any case be ready to cross."

I was then amazed to hear the voice of al-Hashimi urging me to cross the frontier by force. Such an idea was the last thing to come into my mind. I naturally refused to do so, for a number of reasons. When the Governor of Irbid arrived in Deraa he said:

"The only hope is for you to go to Amman yourself and meet His Majesty King Abdullah."

I at once excused myself, and proposed that Major-General Ismail Safwat should go instead. So he went to Amman and saw the King and prominent members of the government, and obtained their approval on certain conditions, and it was decided at what point we should cross the Jordan. I gave orders to the Commander of the Battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Safa, to avoid doing anything while crossing Jordanian territory that might arouse the suspicion of Amman.

The fact that the battalion passed through Jordan according to plan

without causing any disturbance reassured the authorities in Amman, and we were even allowed to cross the Jordan by the Allenby Bridge — the biggest and most important of the bridges — which was guarded by a Jordanian-British force directly attached to General Glubb Pasha. When the First Yarmuk Battalion had reached their appointed positions, in Central Palestine, I entered Palestine on March 6, 1948 with the remaining units of the Liberation Army via Amman, not stealthily by night, and not piecemeal, but in broad daylight and actually across the Allenby Bridge.

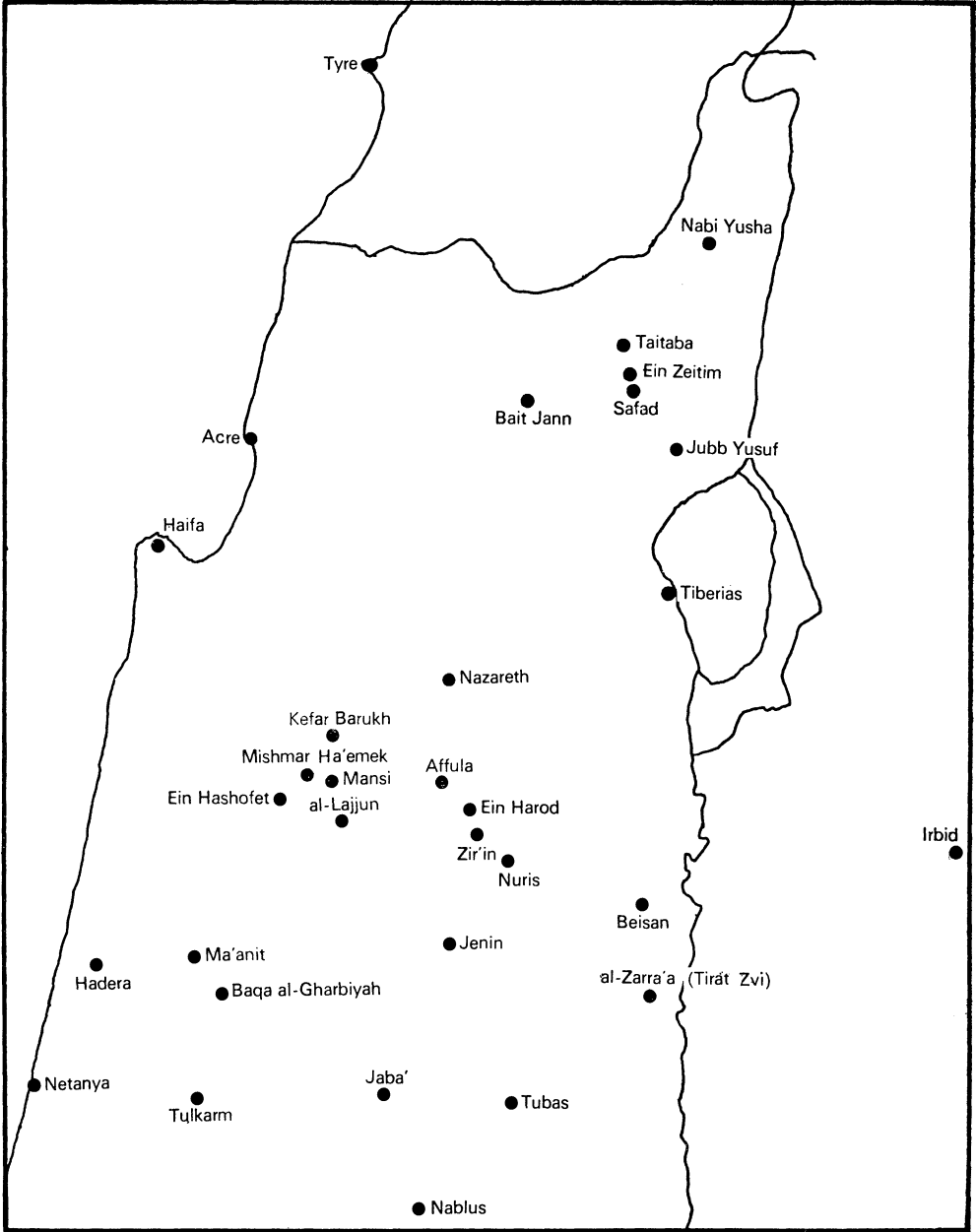
A few days after my arrival at my headquarters in the village of Jaba', in the presence of several Palestinian delegations, I was visited by a British military mission headed by an officer with the rank of Colonel, with Captain Mahmoud al-Rifa'i acting as interpreter. After congratulating me on my safe arrival, the officer said that he had to inform me, on behalf of the British Command in Palestine, that as from that day I was to be held responsible for security in the whole country.

Greatly surprised, I answered that I was responsible for security only in the area allotted to me by the Arab High Command in Damascus — the Nablus, Jenin-Tulkarm triangle, and the area of Galilee and Lajjun, and that I was responsible to Damascus only, not to any one else. I added that the other areas were not officially under my command. There is an official record of this conversation in the correspondence between Headquarters and the High Command in Damascus, copies of which are available at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut.

In 1947 and at the beginning of 1948 the attention of Arab politicians was focused on Britain, in the hope of discovering what lay behind its moves in the area. So when King Abdullah decided to join the Arab ranks openly and agreed to assume the supreme command of the Arab armies that were being prepared to advance into Palestine, this reassured the Arab politicians and convinced them that this had been done with the consent of London, which would therefore give its blessing to whatever steps they took in the future. They thus swallowed a dose of the same medicine that Britain had given them in the First World War, at the time of the revolt of the late King Hussein.

It is true that, before May 15, 1948, Britain did not seriously oppose the entry into Palestine either of the force under my command or of the other forces under the control of the Arab League, despite the token protests it made, as a matter of form, to the late President Quwatli in Damascus, to the late Prime Minister Riad al-Sulh in Beirut, and to me personally, and despite its demand that the entry of these forces should be postponed until after the British withdrawal from Palestine on May 15, 1948. It is also true that Britain did not oppose the entry into Palestine of the Arab regular armies after May 15, 1948 and, indeed, probably secretly encouraged them to come in. But what is even more true is that Britain was a principal party to the vast conspiracy whose aim

CENTRAL PALESTINE AND GALILEE, 1948



was the establishment of Israel in accordance with a carefully prepared plan, and that one of the links in this conspiracy consisted of involving the Arab armies.

It is not true (as has sometimes been claimed) that Britain abandoned its pro-Arab attitude under American pressure in May 1948. On the contrary, it had from the start supported the Jews and had made every effort to ensure their victory. Thus the false smiles it handed out in the Arab capitals at one time and another were meaningless; their sole object was deception and camouflage. In the light of what I discovered after I entered Palestine, the task of the British army in Palestine before May 15, 1948 was as follows:

1. To protect the Jews in their battles against the Arabs.
2. To help the Jews in their offensive actions from time to time.
3. To supply the Jews with as much arms and ammunition as possible as rapidly as possible.

I can prove this with irrefutable evidence derived from documents and figures.

The following are documents from the official records of the Liberation Army, copies of which are available at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut. They establish the role played by the British army against the Arabs and to the advantage of the Jews in the fighting that took place before May 15 between the Liberation Army, which I commanded, and whose numbers, even in its most prosperous days, never exceeded from three to four thousand combatants, and the Jewish forces of the Haganah, the Palmach, the Stern Gang and the Irgun, whose numbers at that time exceeded twenty thousand men ready to take part immediately in any military operation out of sixty thousand highly trained recruits.

Jewish historians admit that the best of their units were the ones trained and armed by the British army at the beginning of the Second World War. This war provided them with an opportunity to obtain battle experience and to produce a cadre of competent officers.

Documents Proving the Intervention of the British Army against the Arabs before May 15, 1948

46W

3/2 [1948]

2045

To Fauzi

At 2 p.m. Jews of Ein Zeitim attacked two Arab vehicles near their settlement. al-Atasi, who was reconnoitring Taitaba, helped the vehicles with a squad which engaged the Jews for an hour and withdrew when the British army intervened. We sustained no losses.

ADIB¹

¹ This was Lieutenant-Colonel Adib al-Shishakli, commander of the Second Yarmuk Battalion of the Liberation Army.

49W 4/2 1950
To Fauzi

An Idlib company ambush waylaid a Jewish convoy. The Jews came to the aid of the convoy with large forces. The British army intervened against us, using armoured cars, and pursued us for a short distance; mortars were also used. We were forced to withdraw. We do not know what losses were sustained by the Jews and the British. Our losses were five missing. Details follow.

ADIB

52W 4/2 2100
To Fauzi

We have been informed that those missing after today's battle were taken prisoner by the British.

ADIB

60W 7/2 1720 71600
To Fauzi

The Idlib Company blockaded Jubb Yusuf this morning. The British army intervened with heavy mortar guns and started pursuing our troops when they withdrew. We have sustained no losses. Results unknown.

ADIB

59W 7/2 1945 71900
To Fauzi

The Northern Company clashed with the British when they were supplying Ein Zeitim which is under siege. Our detachments withdrew without losses. Believe six Jews killed and wounded.

ADIB

69W 12/2 1510 121430
To Fauzi

A Headquarters Detachment ambush waylaid a Jewish convoy south of Jubb Yusuf. It was attacked by a British detachment three hours after the incident. Believed to be a large-scale encircling movement. We shall withdraw towards Bait Jann.

ADIB

71W 13/2 1400 131330
To Fauzi

After two hours of fighting the British detachment withdrew towards Safad. We started withdrawing towards Bait Jann at night.

ADIB

109W 26/2 2320 261920
To Fauzi

An Idlib Company ambush waylaid a Jewish convoy south of Jubb Yusuf. Jewish losses unknown. The British intervened and our detachments withdrew safely.

ADIB

109S 28/2
To Fauzi

Jews of the Macanit settlement north-west of Baqa al-Gharbiya attacked Arabs in the Wadi Ara. We sent a company to defend them. It engaged the enemy at 5.30 a.m. today. We should have penetrated the settlement but for the intervention of the British army. The company withdrew to Mis to the east of the valley at 1200 hours. Situation report: three of our men wounded; twenty-five Jewish casualties; Palestinian villagers, one casualty.

MADLUL²

165W 18/3
To Fauzi

The battle of Nuris ended at noon today with the intervention of the British army. Results of the battle: one of our men wounded and fifteen Jews killed; we have their bodies. We captured one French machine gun, one Tommy gun, three rifles and a number of shells. Our forces occupying the orchards to the west of Ein Harod and the hills above it.

SAFA³

67S 19/3
To Fauzi

Following repeated losses inflicted by the garrisons of Nuris and Zir'in which control the Beisan-Affula-Haifa road, the Jews have been trying since the seventeenth of this month to eliminate these villages. They have made repeated attacks on them, ending at noon today. Our forces blew up three bridges to prevent the arrival of Jewish reinforcements. Seventeen Jewish dead left in the field, wounded estimated at more than fifty. Will inform you of exact number of wounded when confirmed. We handed over the bodies of the dead to the British police in Jenin. The British army intervened and threw smoke bombs at us. Our losses one wounded only.

SAFA

² Captain Madlul Abbas, commander of the Hattin Battalion of the Liberation Army.

³ Lieutenant-Colonel Safa, commander of the First Yarmuk Battalion of the Liberation Army.

187W

27/3

2325

2100

To Fauzi

Our men took up positions around the Nabi Yusha guard-post, with the intention of occupying it, because of rumours that the British had evacuated it. The Palestinians clashed with a Jewish convoy. The British army intervened and fired on the Palestinians with machine guns. The Palestinians withdrew.

ATAZI⁴

127S

6/4

To High Command

Very heavy blow to morale. Jews panicking. Arabs delighted. Haganah still removing dead and wounded under protection of British tanks.

FAUZI

63S

3/5

To High Command

Reliable reports received from Jerusalem that the results of our artillery bombardment on Saturday and Sunday were very good. Yesterday Haganah positions, ammunition stores and electricity and water centres were hit. The British are siding with the Jews. They forced the garrison of the Iraqi Consulate to leave it, and the Jews occupied it and hoisted their flag over it. They forced the Arabs to accept a 48-hour truce in the interest of the Jews. We shall continue bombardment and joint pressure operations inside and outside.

FAUZI

69S

4/5

To High Command

The British warned that they would attack our guns with planes if we bombarded Jerusalem a third time. British armoured cars guarding Nabi Yaqub and Kalandia settlements all day. A British mechanized brigade from the Latroun district has been stationed in Ramallah.

FAUZI

Surely this hardly suggests a pro-Arab attitude? But in spite of this clearly pro-Jewish attitude on the part of Britain, some Arab politicians believed the plea that, under the terms of the Mandate, the British army could not stand idly by while the Jews were being attacked by the Liberation Army. This is why in Damascus, the principal base of Arab activity at the time, there was no change in the atmosphere of confidence that prevailed in its attitude to British policy, in spite of my repeated warnings.

⁴ Lieutenant Fathi al-Atasi, an officer of the Liberation Army.

After our victory in the battle of al-Zarra'a, which will be discussed later, and our success in cutting communications between the Jewish settlements in the area for which we were responsible, where the British tried unsuccessfully to rescue the Jews from our power, the Jews, especially the Oriental ones, became convinced that the Liberation Army was strong and that it had sufficient military resources to destroy their settlements and eliminate their inhabitants.

For this reason the leaders of some of the settlements near to us decided to try to contact us with a view to surrendering, so as to obtain our protection. They therefore sent a messenger to the headquarters of the commander of the Hattin Battalion, Captain Madlul Abbas, who was responsible for the Tulkarm district, to propose this.

Captain Madlul came with the Director of Intelligence, Lieutenant Salim al-Asil, to discuss the matter with me. I agreed, and told them to make preparations for the meeting that I intended to attend in person, along with the Arab delegation, so that I might myself hear what the Jewish delegation had to say.

At the meeting, which was held in the village of Nur Shams, the members of the Jewish delegation, who were Oriental Jews, complained bitterly of the way the Western Jews treated them, and expressed the desire that we should protect them.

I accepted their proposal on three conditions:

1. That they should immediately hand over to us all their arms and ammunition.
2. That they should undertake to cut off all contacts with the Haganah, the Palmach and the other terrorist organizations.
3. That they should prevent all Jewish elements unknown to them from entering their settlements.

The delegation agreed to these terms and departed to inform their comrades, after which they were to return to us. In the meantime Lieutenant Salim al-Asil sent a detailed report to the High Command in Damascus, which had known that the meeting was to be held, and had given it its blessing.

But no members of the delegation returned, because the Jewish Agency in Tel Aviv got wind of the meeting and took disciplinary measures against those who attended it, and prevented them from returning to us by threatening them with the consequences.

Before discussing the battle of Mishmar Ha'emek, I must describe what happened in the battle of al-Zarra'a (Tirat Zvi in Hebrew) and how it ended.

After the First Yarmuk Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Safa, had entered Palestine and occupied the positions allotted to it, the general situation in the country was extremely critical. Nearly all the Palestinian fighting formations were engaged with the Jews, and, in particular, were suffering from a shortage of ammunition. While I was still in Damascus I saw

that the situation required that the Yarmuk Battalion should immediately undertake vigorous operations to raise the morale of the Arabs and shake that of the Jews. I therefore ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Safa to carry out the necessary reconnaissance to find a settlement for us to attack with the object of inflicting as much damage as possible.

The weather in Palestine in the second week of February 1948 was rainy and stormy. Lieutenant-Colonel Safa had completed his plans for an attack on the settlement of al-Zarra'a, and was waiting for the weather to improve. In the night of February 16-17 the improvement he had been waiting for took place, and he made a surprise attack on the settlement at 23.45 hours, engaging the outposts, whose personnel soon retreated into the settlement under pressure from the attacking force which, although it consisted of only one company, succeeded in routing the enemy troops and following them into the settlement, whereupon the enemy fired SOS flares for reinforcements. When reinforcements arrived, they clashed with a company of the First Yarmuk Battalion which had been detailed to intercept them. In spite of this, because of their numbers, some enemy units did succeed in getting into the settlement, where a bloody conflict was raging in the streets and houses. Fighting continued till morning, when a British force came to the assistance of the Jews, and Lieutenant-Colonel Safa ordered his troops to withdraw, because the occupation of the settlement was not an end in itself. Our losses throughout the night were thirty-seven killed, and a greater number wounded.

According to the British Colonel Nelson, who supervised the removal of the bodies to Beisan in his transport, enemy losses were 112 killed; he did not know the number of wounded, but estimated them as higher than the numbers killed.

This engagement greatly disquieted the Jews because, although our forces had been greatly hindered by the nature of the terrain immediately around the settlement, where the recently ploughed soil, made slushy by the heavy rains, had impeded their attack and slowed down their retreat, they nevertheless put up a magnificent show and only left the field when the British intervened, and their losses were less than those of the enemy.

The engagement caused much satisfaction and greatly improved morale among our Palestinian comrades in arms, and started a Jewish exodus towards the coast away from the areas near the firing line.

This engagement took place at a time when the morale of the Jewish population of Palestine was at rock bottom, and was threatening to split their ranks. It was one of the largest and most violent engagements to take place before the entry of the regular Arab armies. In the course of the fighting there was constant advance and retreat, attack and counter-attack, several positions were captured, lost, and recaptured by both sides. It was also remarkable in that the British army took part in the fighting when it became certain that the

battle was going in our favour, and that United Nations security forces intervened to impose a cease-fire.

The Liberation Army had struck a very serious blow at this important settlement, and the Haganah forces had suffered grave losses in arms, equipment and men. This added to the panic that spread among the Jews at the end of March and the beginning of April 1948. Their morale had already been shaken by the Arabs' success in cutting the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem road, and isolating the Holy City from the principal Jewish centres, with the result that the Jewish population of Jerusalem, numbering one hundred thousand, were threatening the Jewish Agency in Tel Aviv with surrender. Another factor was the Arabs' success in cutting the communications between the Jewish settlements; this had been achieved by the Liberation Army and the Palestinian fighting units. To conceal this situation the Zionist propaganda media were obliged, during and after the battle of Mishmar Ha'emek, to put out fabricated reports, through certain world news agencies which were under their control, to the effect that the Haganah had encircled and annihilated Qawuqji's bands.

Doubtless thousands of people in the Arab countries still remember the alarm and distress they felt when they read these reports in the press or heard them over the radio.

There follows the text of the report submitted to the Command by our intelligence chief, Captain Salim al-Asil, on March 19, 1948, a copy of which is available at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut. This report shows how grave was the situation in which the Jews found themselves when the battle of Mishmar Ha'emek broke out, and explains why Zionist propaganda was obliged to resort to falsification and misrepresentation.

"Certain Oriental Jewish landowners in Affula and Hadera are trying to make contact with the Command of the Liberation Army with a view to making peace with the Arabs, on condition that the safety of the Jews in these areas is guaranteed. Most of them are farmers and industrialists who are resident in Palestine or who came from Arab countries for commercial reasons and without political motives. They actually contacted Captain Madlul, the commander of the Hattin Battalion, in the village of Nur Shams, and offered to surrender in return for guarantees of safety for themselves and their families, but the Haganah prevented them from doing so and dispersed them."

The settlement of Mishmar Ha'emek is situated on the Jenin-Haifa road, at the opening of a valley surrounded to the east, west and south by wooded hills, while to the north stretches the plain of Marj ibn 'Amer, which is full of Jewish settlements linked to it by a metalled road.

Because of its important strategic position, the Jews had fortified the settlement with reinforced concrete towers and heavy machine gun emplacements, and had dug underground shelters inside it. They had also surrounded it with a ring of trenches protected by barbed wire entanglements. It was the

most impregnable Jewish settlement in the whole of Palestine and was notorious for its constant attacks on Arab vehicles on their way to Haifa or Jenin.

My object in attacking it was to teach it a lesson, and to draw the Haganah forces into an engagement in open country, well away from the towers and fortifications of the settlement, in order to make a trial of their abilities under specific conditions.

After three weeks of reconnaissance I chose Saturday, April 4, 1948 as the date for the attack, as it happened to be a Jewish feast, in addition to being the day of rest. The attack was scheduled to begin at 5 p.m. to prevent intervention by the British army, which normally did not move from its positions after nightfall. Also, at this hour the settlement would be entirely unapprehensive of attack.

The force I prepared for the attack consisted of one battalion and two reserve companies, supported by the one artillery battery we had at our disposal, which consisted of four 75 French field guns and two old American 105 guns — and not, as the Zionists claimed, seven 75's and three 88's.

This modest and remarkable battery became very famous on the battlefields of Palestine, and foreign correspondents wrote so many stories about it that it became almost legendary. Its commander was Lieutenant Afif al-Bizri, who, after the coups d'état in Syria, was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant-General. In the whole of my military life the only officer I have known who was his match in artillery matters was a Turkish officer, Captain Rida, who commanded an artillery battery in the Third Cavalry Division in the Ottoman Army during the First World War. Lieutenant Afif al-Bizri achieved an outstanding record in the battles in Palestine in 1948.

The task of the other detachments, which constituted the majority of the force prepared for the battle, was to cut the roads leading to the settlements and force such reinforcements as might arrive to give battle, whatever direction they came from, to deal with such emergencies as I anticipated might arise, and to exploit such opportunities as might be offered us.

To divert the attention of the Haganah command from our movements and our objective, I decided that a detachment of the First Yarmuk Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Safa, one of our cleverest and most courageous officers, should make a diversionary attack on a settlement called Zera'im, near Zir'in, north-east of Jenin. In the night of April 3-4, Lieutenant-Colonel Safa succeeded in destroying some important installations in the settlement, and threatening the Beisan-Affula road and the Beisan-Tiberias-Safad road with closure.

While considerable Haganah forces were on their way to reinforce this area, I was moving the force detailed for the attack on Mishmar Ha'emek and concentrating it in the nearby hills and low ground, according to plan.

This force had twenty-four hours for rest and preparation in the positions allotted to them. I spent the whole day on a hill 500 metres from the settlement watching through my binoculars everything that was going on in and around it, without finding any indication that anything unusual was afoot. I was therefore convinced that the Jews knew nothing of the movements and concentration of our forces. At 5 p.m., the time appointed for the attack, a game of football was still being played in the settlement, in spite of the drizzle that was falling; the balconies of the buildings were crowded with sitting and standing spectators, and I could hear them shouting and singing, absolutely at their ease and unsuspecting.

The first shells hit the balconies, to be followed by a rain of shells which fell in and around the playing fields. At the same time the three armoured cars were advancing along the main road towards the towers that stood at the entrance of the settlement and the soldiers of the company were advancing rapidly towards the barbed wire.

The surprise was complete. Terrified Jews were running about in confusion all over the settlement, and at the start there was only light and confused firing from the towers. When our men succeeded in reaching the barbed wire, our artillery stopped its bombardment, which had continued intermittently for an hour. The armoured cars advanced as far as the towers at the entrance, which fell silent. This surprised me, and also put me on my guard as I feared that it might be a ruse.

Darkness had begun to fall, and the drizzle had turned into a heavy downpour which made it difficult to see. I was afraid that our troops might suffer heavy casualties in the night, because they lacked discipline and experience in night fighting in rain and mud. I also feared that the company's ranks might break in disorder. In view also of their small numbers as compared with the Jewish forces in the settlement, I decided that it was better to concentrate the company on the hills directly overlooking and controlling the settlement until the night was over and we could see in the morning how the Haganah command in Tel Aviv was reacting. At that time our losses were one wounded only.

All that General Macmillan, the Commander-in-Chief of the British forces, did that night, after receiving the first information about the battle, was to block the roads leading to the positions occupied by his troops. The later stages of the battle were to disclose, first, the deceitful role he played on the pretext of humanitarian considerations and, secondly, his open partiality when he threw into the battle the tanks that were stationed in the settlement to protect it, and later supported the Jews in their counter-attacks.

The next day, with the settlement besieged and intermittent artillery fire at important targets continuing, a senior British officer came to the headquarters of the Battalion commander, Mahdi Saleh, asking, on behalf of the

138S

7/4

High Command

This afternoon the Mukhtar of the Mishmar Ha'emek settlement arrived with the elected committee, under the protection of a British Colonel, proposing to surrender the settlement. I sent them my conditions — that they should hand over the settlement with all its arms, and sever all relations with the Haganah. I undertook to spare their lives and protect their property and to take the settlement under our protection.

FAUZI

On April 6, 1948 alarming reports started reaching the Tulkarm front to the effect that Jewish forces were concentrating against it. This was the first reaction on the part of the Haganah High Command. I saw the picture clearly, and expected that the Jews would attack on this front to force me to reduce the blockade of Mishmar Ha'emek by withdrawing some of the forces fighting in this field.

I cabled to the Commander of the Front, Captain Madlul Abbas, to warn him to make preparations to confront the situation I anticipated with all available forces, and not to expect me to send either men or ammunition to reinforce him.

The Jerusalem area, which was not under my field command, had suffered a severe setback by the death on April 7, 1948 of its commander, 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini. In this critical situation I was visited by Dr. Amin Ruwayha with a delegation from Jerusalem who told me of the deteriorating situation there, and asked me to send reinforcements urgently. Dr. Ruwayha sent the following cable to Damascus:

146S

8/4

To Commander-in-Chief and Inspector-General

I returned today from the Qastal front. The death of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husseini has caused confusion in the whole area. The commanders of companies and detachments who are his followers, and some of them his relations, request the High Command to immediately entrust Qawuqji with the protection of Qastal to allay fears in Jerusalem. Request you accede to their wishes at once, if only temporarily, to save the front from collapse.

AMIN RUWAYHA

I knew that to reinforce Jerusalem meant weakening my position at Mishmar Ha'emek by withdrawing some of the forces that were fighting there. I could see only two possible solutions — either to wait until the end of the battle I was fighting and until specific instructions came from Damascus, and thereby delay the arrival of reinforcements, or to accede to the request immediately, against the express orders I had been given absolutely forbidding me to intervene in any area for which I was not responsible.

Faced with the High Command's delay in replying, the increasing insistence of Dr. Ruwayha and the members of his delegation, and new reports of things getting even worse in Jerusalem, I made up my mind what to do, taking advantage of the negotiations that were in progress between us and the representative committee of the settlement. I did so in spite of reports of immense efforts being made in the Marj ibn Amer settlements and in Haifa to mount a Haganah attack to break the blockade of the settlement and push us back.

Thus on April 8 I took the risk of sending reinforcements to Jerusalem under the command of the late Staff Captain Mamun al-Bitar, an extremely courageous and competent officer. Before the artillery battery set out for Jerusalem on April 8, it took its leave of the settlement with a round of concentrated firing which led to explosions in the ammunition stores and destroyed a number of installations and buildings.

The following is the text of my cable on the incident.

143S

8/4

High Command

The Jerusalem area is urgently calling on me for reinforcements in view of the desperate situation in Qastal. I have decided to send the artillery battery, three armoured cars and a company under the command of Captain Bitar to reinforce it in co-operation with Fadel's company and the leaders of the Palestinian fighters there. I have sent a unit for reconnaissance; reinforcements will be there tonight or tomorrow.

FAUZI

On April 8, the Jewish negotiating delegation, accompanied by the British officer, again came to Battalion headquarters to discuss terms for the surrender of the settlement. The officer opened the talks by suggesting to Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh, in a threatening tone, that he should lift the blockade of the settlement. Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi replied firmly that this was up to the High Command, that he would carry out such orders as he received, and that he was indifferent to threats.

The head of the delegation then intervened in an attempt to quieten things down and to justify their delay in replying to our conditions, as follows:

"We have contacted the Jewish Agency in Tel Aviv — it is they who are responsible for our delay in replying. Eventually they allowed us to take whatever decision we regard as being in our interests and at our own responsibility. Our decision is now under study by the notables and leaders of the settlement. What we want to ask you is that you will continue to allow us to remove the dead and wounded."

When Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi told me details of what had happened at this meeting, I gave him permission to accede to their request, so that they

should not think that we had changed our minds about continuing the negotiations, although I was convinced that they were deceiving us to gain time to complete the mobilization, reports of which were reaching me all the time. However, I did make it a condition that the operation should end in twenty-four hours, during which they would make their final decision. They agreed to this and departed.

I also wanted to gain time until the force sent to reinforce Jerusalem completed its task and returned, and I started to prepare for the major battle which I foresaw would be fought at Mishmar Ha'emek rather than anywhere else.

Staff Captain Mamun al-Bitar sent me a dispatch dated 10.40 hours on April 10 in which he said:

“Their radio is not replying. Our force occupied the village of Qastal after heavy bombardment. Our artillery levelled the Mota settlement yesterday evening and our infantry advanced to its boundaries. We started shelling again at 5 a.m. and destroyed a number of armoured cars and vehicles loaded with ammunition which exploded in the air. The Palestinian irregulars have not taken advantage of this bombardment to advance and attack the settlement. Do you order me to continue shelling the settlements as ordered even though there is no one to take advantage of it? Awaiting your orders.”

I then realized that there was no longer any point in this force remaining in the Jerusalem area for the present. They had performed their duty admirably, and it would do much more good if they joined us in the battle, especially as I urgently needed the artillery battery. So I sent Captain Bitar the following order:

“Shell Nabi Ya'qub this evening and conclude the operation by shelling the western part of Jerusalem. Make every effort to return tonight. Our forces engaged around Mishmar Ha'emek.”

As had been anticipated, on the morning of April 9 the Haganah counter-attacked with a force of more than six thousand men, equipped with a large number of mortar guns and heavy machine guns — more than any regular unit would have. Some of these forces came from the settlement itself, and others from the Haifa road and the Marj settlements.

I started retreating before them, drawing them eastward towards Khirbat al-Ghubaiyat, in order to force them into battle in the open, well away from the fortifications of the settlement and the shells of the British tanks stationed in the settlement which helped the attack.

Fierce fighting continued throughout the day, during which we relinquished not less than two kilometres of ground, the enemy reaching the village of Ghubaiyat and occupying it, though we later succeeded in driving them out. I started attacking again, and there was house-to-house fighting in the village throughout the night.

On the morning of April 10 the fighting developed into a pitched battle, and our men succeeded in clearing Ghubaiyat of enemy forces and driving them back. In the afternoon the 105 artillery unit, consisting of two guns, started shelling the Jewish positions, and the shelling was followed by an all-out infantry attack.

The Haganah forces were surprised by the violence of the attack and started to withdraw. They were well trained, resisted strongly and had ample arms, especially Bren guns and heavy mortar guns. Their morale remained good until 4 p.m., when it started to deteriorate, and at sunset the retreat turned into a rout. Intoxicated with victory our men advanced rapidly, treading on the bodies of the dead and the arms that lay scattered over the field of battle, until they reached the hills overlooking the settlement, which we had evacuated the day before.

At 7.30 p.m. orders were given to stop in these hills and build fortifications. Enemy losses had been more than 200 killed and wounded, some of which they were unable to take with them from the field of battle. In addition four large enemy freight trucks were destroyed, two of them being burnt.

As soon as reinforcements for the Haganah forces arrived, they made their second counter-attack at 3 p.m. on April 11; this was more violent than the first. We once again started to retreat, and stopped at the village of al-Mansi. On the same day, too, Captain Bitar's force arrived back from Jerusalem, in a state of extreme fatigue.

On the morning of April 12 we again attacked, and the fighting developed into something like a massacre. The Haganah forces retreated, and we recovered what we had lost. During the rest of the day we observed large concentrations near Kefar Barukh arriving from Affula and the settlements on the Haifa-Nazareth and Haifa-Jenin road. Other Jewish forces also arrived from south-west of Mishmar Ha'emek.

The third Jewish counter-attack began at 5 a.m. on April 13, with forces estimated at six battalions supported by numbers of armoured cars and heavy mortar artillery. The attack came from two directions — from Mishmar Ha'emek towards Ghubaiyat and from Jaara-Ein Hashofet towards Lajjun.

The object of this attack was to pin down our forces before Mishmar Ha'emek and to reach the crossroads at Lajjun in an outflanking operation intended to destroy them.

For the first time I saw a Jewish reconnaissance plane circling over the battlefield. I had received reports of a Jewish plane being shot down by the Second Yarmuk Battalion in the Galilee area while it was bombing the Battalion's positions, where some of our men were wounded.

Our units in Ghubaiyat withdrew, and our units West of Kfarin also retreated towards Mansi to avoid the outflanking operation.

I sent three companies of the reserves which I had started to withdraw from the battalions in neighbouring positions to confront the attack to stop the advance and to recover the lost positions. In preparation for a counter-attack I had decided to make in the afternoon of April 13-14, Captain Bitar went off to reconnoitre the situation. Everything in and around Ghubaiyat seemed quiet, and, thinking that all the enemy had left it, he gave orders to advance and occupy it, and for the artillery to be moved up to positions near Ghubaiyat. In the meantime the "Qadisiya" company and the Jordanian detachment were surprised by heavy firing which even hit the 105 artillery section, wounding a number of its men.

Captain Mamun was hit while struggling to withdraw the artillery section to get it out of danger, and died of his wounds in Nablus hospital on the same day.

Thanks to the rare courage it displayed, the Circassian company, assisted by the armoured cars, succeeded in ensuring the withdrawal of the artillery unit, after engaging the enemy at close quarters and forcing him to retreat with heavy losses. Some members of the detachment were killed and wounded.

During the night of April 13, I succeeded in reorganizing our ranks to be ready for the morning, while throughout the night reinforcements were coming in for the Jewish positions.

In the morning of April 14, after preliminary artillery shelling, we counter-attacked and dislodged the enemy from all the heights, recovered Ghubaiyat and reached the woods near Mishmar Ha'emek, after containing some of the Haganah forces in the settlement.

The only reason why we did not go on fighting was our fear that our little remaining ammunition would run out. In this attack the commander of the Haganah forces was killed; there were big demonstrations when he was buried in Tel Aviv later.

Our losses in all stages of the battle of Mishmar Ha'emek were twenty-four wounded and six killed, including Captain Mamun al-Bitar. Enemy losses in this last stage of the battle were three armoured cars burnt, and two destroyed, and three freight trucks destroyed. He left forty-five dead on the field, and two four-inch mortar guns and quantities of mortar-shells and ammunition.

We later received reports from a British source that enemy losses that day were 230 killed, including the commander of the Haganah forces, and 210 wounded.

After this continuous fighting our ammunition was almost exhausted, and we had received no replacements from the High Command. During the battle I cabled to Damascus asking for ammunition to be sent immediately. There follow the texts of several cables on this subject:

162S 13/4 9.40

All kinds of ammunition almost exhausted. Please send immediately 81 mortar shells, 105,75 artillery shells, and English, French and armour-piercing ammunition. Awaiting immediate dispatch.

FAUZI

163S 14/4

Omitted to request ammunition for French rifles and sub-machine guns and English rifles for Adib. He cabled today that he has none at all and has had to stop operations. Please send him ammunition immediately.

FAUZI

164S 14/4 7.05

Only 54 rounds of armoured car gun ammunition left. 81 mortar ammunition all used. Urgently awaiting ammunition.

FAUZI

The reply we had been awaiting so anxiously was disappointing. There follows the text of the cable from the Inspector-General of the Liberation Army, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, ordering us to end the battle so as to avoid further expenditure of ammunition. The cable was accompanied by a detailed letter.

239W 14/4 14.20
To Commander, Northern Front

The battle of Mishmar Ha'emek has become a battle of attrition. Situation as regards ammunition, particularly French, bad. It appears that your armaments are not sufficient to repel the enemy and hold out. Do you not think it better to end fighting and withdraw forces? We hope the League will help us with arms.

AL-HASHIMI

The following is the text of the letter:

HIGH COMMAND OF PALESTINE FORCES

No: 114/H

File: H/14

Date: 14/4/48

From the High Command to the Commander of the Northern Front:

1. In reply to your letter No. 451 dated 12/4/1948; We have sent you the list of duties as set out in the attached schedule with Second-Lieutenant Ibrahim.

2. We have informed you by cable that the situation as regards ammunition, especially French ammunition, is bad, and that we cannot meet your request for French ammunition because there is very little in stores.

3. There is no ammunition for 105 guns in the Syrian Army stores and very little in Lebanon.

4. We have not been able to send more than three Belgian machine guns because the limited number we have received have been used to equip the forces recently organized as the "Central Front." If we obtain more we shall send them.

5. It appears to us that the battle of Mishmar has got to the stage of a battle of attrition, and it is clear, from the course of the continuous fighting that has been taking place for several days, that your means are not sufficient for you to storm the settlement and hold it. Would it not be better to end the fighting to prevent further expenditure of ammunition? It is clear that the Jews have large quantities of all kinds of ammunition and that they can expend it regardless of the cost.

6. We have observed that your above-mentioned letter was not marked "Secret," and call the attention of the Chief-of-Staff to this omission.

for Commander-in-Chief of Palestine Forces.

AL-HASHIMI

In view of the fact that, in spite of my urgent insistence, we were to be supplied with no further ammunition, and that our situation was extremely critical, my patience came to an end and I sent the following cable to Damascus:

4S

16/4

High Command

We are fighting in this area with the very pick of the Haganah forces who are trying to establish their superiority on the field of battle so as to influence the course of the truce negotiations in the political field. Some battles are optional and can be avoided, others must be fought. If you have no ammunition and cannot ensure supplies, how do you expect us to defend and hold out in battle? The League decided to make war and is obliged to provide the means for fighting it.

FAUZI

286

24/4

To Commander, Northern Area Forces

Kindly communicate this cable to Ajnadin Battalion Commander. Why have you not yet contacted us? Awaiting your reports.

AL-HASHIMI

In the last ten days of April 1948 the situation in Jaffa in particular was growing worse daily. Like the Jerusalem area it did not come under my command, but was directly linked to the High Command in Damascus. I began to receive disturbing reports that the situation in the city was going

from bad to worse, and that enemy forces had surrounded it and cut communications with it. The situation in Jerusalem, too, was just as grave, and the situation in Beisan, Safad, Tiberias and Haifa was very bad indeed.

Faced with this grave situation everywhere I thought it my duty to have a personal discussion with the High Command in Damascus on the information at my disposal, my impressions, and the measures that should be taken to cope with the situation. The High Command at first delayed giving me permission to go to Damascus on the grounds that the situation was not propitious for me to leave the front. However, when I insisted that a meeting was essential, approval arrived on April 23.

There follow the texts of the last two cables exchanged on this subject:

36S

22/4

High Command

Essential I come to meet you. Shall be in Damascus Sunday morning for 48 hours. Safa replacing me. Acknowledge receipt.

FAUZI

W23/4

To Commander Northern Area Forces

J36 Approved

AL-HASHIMI

On arriving in Damascus I first visited the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General al-Hashimi, and gave him a situation report on the Liberation Army forces under my command. I strongly criticized the method of choosing officers and men, and the grave lack of military competence evinced by many of them in battle — some of the men could not even load a rifle properly. I also said that among the officers there were some elements so corrupt that I did not know how the Inspectorate-General could have agreed to their being attached to units of the Liberation Army. I told him frankly that, but for a group of loyal and energetic officers who had dedicated their lives to the great Arab cause, and but for the enthusiasm, courage and disciplined conduct of some of the companies, we should not have been able to stand up to the enemy for a single day.

I then told him of the scandalous lack of arms, ammunition, rations, clothing, health services and means of communication, and of the delays in giving the men their pay to send to their families. As an example I told him how the Circassian Company had not been paid for three months. How, I asked, can a soldier fight when he is worrying about his family who have been left without means of support?

I added that what I was saying was nothing new to him; I had been writing and cabling unsuccessfully to him for ages, asking him to rectify the situation.

“You ask me,” I said, “to reinforce the threatened areas, although you know very well:

“1. That these areas you call on me to reinforce are, by your own orders, outside the area allocated to me.

“2. That the Liberation Army forces under my command, as regards numbers and equipment, are barely sufficient for the area allocated to me.

“3. That you ask me to provide reinforcements for any area where the danger becomes acute, without giving me my essential requirements in arms and ammunition, and sometimes without replacing the ammunition I expend in battle or providing replacements for the killed and wounded.

“I manage to make up for part of this lack of arms, ammunition and rations with what I capture from the enemy. But some of the enemy’s arms are different from ours, so that the ammunition is also different. How am I expected to cope with this?

“In spite of all this you load me with new responsibilities every day. You tell me to build fortifications, but where is the cement and the steel? And how can a soldier storm a hostile settlement when he has not even a small pair of scissors to cut the barbed wire that surrounds it? If this situation continues it can only mean failure and defeat.”

The telephone then rang, and, answering it, the Inspector-General said: “Major-General Safwat wants to speak to you.”

I was surprised to learn that the Commander-in-Chief of the Liberation Army had known nothing about my coming to Damascus; in fact he had only heard of my arrival from some one who saw me entering the High Command. He was anxious to meet me at once.

Before I had finished speaking the Inspector-General replied in the following one short sentence:

“The Arab regular armies will soon be entering Palestine and it will all be over. We have decided to attach the Central Area to your command. Just wait, and you will be satisfied. The United Nations is going to intervene and settle the problem.”

When I reached the Commander-in-Chief’s office I found him pacing up and down the room as he waited for me. The first words he said to me were: “How are things in Jaffa and Jerusalem?”

I started by giving him my impressions of the whole situation, especially in Jerusalem and Jaffa. I could see from his face how greatly he was affected. Then, with a sigh, he said:

“What are we to do, when these are all the resources we have? I know and appreciate your situation. Be patient for a little until the regular Arab armies come in. Then the whole situation will be turned upside down. For the time being we have decided to add the Central Area to your command. That is the solution we have reached for the problems of that area.”

Major-General Ismail Safwat had always been enthusiastic for early intervention by the regular Arab armies, and had hoped that this would lead to great things. There can be no doubt that he was honest and sincere, and had a sound knowledge of military affairs. But the fact that he was always in Damascus, close to the Inspector-General and to the Arab politicians, resulted in his tending to underestimate the strength of the enemy and its present and future potential, and to depend on Arab diplomatic activity to find a solution that would end the problem.

The fact is that the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus and, consequently, the Liberation Army forces and all Palestinian fighting formations, were not really controlled by him, but by the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, who enjoyed the absolute confidence of President Shukri Quwatli and the Secretary-General of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha.

Obviously the hopes that General Safwat had pinned on the Arab regular armies were growing weaker daily. When he became aware of the destructive manoeuvres that were going on in the Arab political field, and realized how dark the future looked, he submitted his resignation to the High Command on May 5, 1948, before any of the regular armies reached Palestine. What he said in his letter of resignation is of the greatest importance, because it provides several of the principal reasons for the devastating failure of the Arabs in Palestine. A copy of this letter will be printed with my full memoirs, and another copy is available at the Institute for Palestine Studies in Beirut.

At this juncture I left him, and as I did so, heard his anxious voice saying:

“I beg you, Fauzi, to break the blockade of Jaffa. Do all you can to help Jerusalem.”

My meeting with Major-General Ismail Safwat was frank and emotional. When I had given him details of the worsening situation, suggested means of dealing with it, and told him what I expected would happen, I realized that the man was suffering from a severe psychological crisis because he felt that there was nothing he could do. What most disturbed him was the fear that Jaffa and Jerusalem might fall into the hands of the enemy.

Things were developing rapidly in Jaffa, and I received the following important cable from Lieutenant-Colonel Mohammed Safa, who replaced me during my absence in Damascus:

3S

25/4

To Fauzi

A joint telephone message from the Jaffa garrison, the Commander of the Ramleh garrison and Hasan Salama has been delivered by Suleiman Tuqan. The gist of it is that the British army has withdrawn from Jaffa. The

Jews are attacking with heavy artillery and armoured cars. The city will fall if reinforcements do not arrive within hours.

SAFA

I pictured the gloomy fate that threatened the city and ordered Lieutenant-Colonel Safa to take the following immediate measure:

2W
Safa

25/4

Jaffa in desperate straits. Ras al-Ain must be reinforced with the Ya'bad company, two Circassian units, a 75 artillery unit and four armoured cars, to make a show of strength against Mulabbas, to attract attention of the enemy and relieve pressure on Jaffa.

FAUZI

This measure was the first step in the course of action that had to be taken quickly to weaken the potential of the enemy before Jaffa by forcing him to withdraw some of his forces that were attacking it and move them to a new field, and it was likely to prove successful, as the target I had chosen was particularly important in view of its strategic position. It would also distract the enemy high command by directing its attention to another point. While I was studying the second step, I received the following cables from headquarters in Jaba':

6S
To Fauzi

26/4

Have received the following cable from the Military Committee: Immediately send reinforcements of guns and armoured cars to strike at the Jews blockading Jaffa. Acknowledge receipt.

SAFA

7S
To Fauzi

26/4

Military Committee demanding reinforcements for Jaffa. What are your instructions? Must inform you that we have no ammunition and that any reinforcements sent to Jaffa may never return.

SAFA

What Lieutenant-Colonel Safa told me in his cable was precisely what I had in mind as I considered what could be done to reinforce Jaffa — the problem of the lack of ammunition and the certain dangers that would face a force on its way to Jaffa — dangers so great that they might result in its being completely annihilated before it reached its destination. Between our positions and Jaffa was a chain of fortified Jewish settlements situated close to each other, which had absolute control of the road.

Jaffa was urgently requesting reinforcements. And the High Command was also telling me to reinforce Jaffa. Then there was the new responsibility for the Central Area which stretched as far as the south of Jerusalem and included the Bab al-Wad pass. And I had in front of me another important cable from headquarters informing me that the Jews had launched a heavy attack against the city of Acre. This is the text of the cable:

8S

26/4

To Fauzi

The Jews are making an all-out attack on the city of Acre. Fighting is still going on. The city will fall into enemy hands if reinforcements do not arrive. Our forces unable to cope with the situation. Please send reinforcements immediately. I hold you responsible before God and before history.

ADIB

How on earth was I going to help Adib too? He was far away in Acre, and between us was a barrier of hostile settlements and fortifications. How could I reach him quickly? The only way to meet his request was to send reinforcements by a squadron of planes. But unfortunately the only means of communication the Military Committee had provided me with the day I entered Palestine was a squadron of mules. The only freight trucks I had at my disposal had all been captured from the enemy during the fighting — and even they could not fly. So I decided that the best thing I could do was to refer the cable to the High Command in Damascus in the hope that they would arrange things through South Lebanon.

In spite of the grim situation I was in, I cabled to Lieutenant-Colonel Safa to form a convoy, under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh, to make its way to Jaffa ahead of the Ajnadin Battalion, and get it into the city. I supported the battalion with a company which I withdrew from the Hattin Battalion in the Tulkarm area.

I appreciated the immense difficulties involved in this operation, and admitted that it was a hazardous undertaking. But my confidence in the competence and courage of Lieutenant-Colonel Saleh made me choose him for the task, just as I would have chosen him for any other similar task. In addition to his courage and endurance he had a quick understanding of all sorts of situations, took the right decisions and carried out orders to the letter, but behaved admirably in unforeseen circumstances. The following is the text of the cable sent to Safa:

4W

26/4

To Safa

The whole of the Central Area is now under my command. Instruct the Ajnadin Battalion to send its two companies and the Ras al-Ain company to

reinforce Jaffa under command of Ajnadin. A convoy of support forces including the Ya'bad company, a Circassian company, two desert guns and three armoured cars under the command of Mahdi to help Ajnadin is on its way to Jaffa. Mahdi replaced by commander of the Lebanese detachment. Mahdi contacting commander of Ajnadin Battalion to arrange moves. Hasan Salama will assist this operation with his forces. Task of our forces restricted to making their way to the Ajnadin Battalion and Ras al-Ain company. Convoy will return to Nablus bases and remain as reserve. The Hamawis will take over the position of the Ras al-Ain company.

AL-QAWUQJI

I received a cable from Lieutenant-Colonel Safa saying that the convoy would move from Ramallah in accordance with orders.

10S 27/4

To Fauzi

Mahdi with force leaving Ramallah towards Ramleh 10 p.m. today.

SAFA

While the reinforcements were preparing to depart, the following cable from the Inspector-General, Lieutenant-General Taha al-Hashimi, arrived at headquarters:

7W 27/4

Very urgent and important

Our contact with Jaffa cut since yesterday. Contact Jaffa at whatever cost. Assure us that reinforcements are on the move and will fight to the last man.

AL-HASHIMI

This was then followed by a second cable:

No. 9W 27/4

Important and urgent

Reaffirm urgency for taking immediate measures to reinforce Jaffa and get Battalion there according to our last cable. Situation too grave for delay. Send reinforcements to protect Jaffa whatever the cost.

AL-HASHIMI

The convoy set out for Jaffa during the night, and clashed with Israeli ambushes and patrols which could not stand up to it, until it reached the settlement of Mikve Yisrael which controlled the Jaffa road. Here there was fierce fighting, after which the convoy continued to advance, keeping to both sides of the road, until it reached Jaffa at 9 a.m. on April 28, followed by the Ajnadin Battalion with the detachment. Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi informed me that he had succeeded and started to return: I had been in constant contact with him as he advanced.

I asked him to tell me his position and distance from Tel Aviv. He replied that he was seven and a half kilometres from it.

I ordered him to advance seven kilometres and shell important installations. He quickly and efficiently trained his guns on Tel Aviv, and fired sixty shells, which were all he had. It was a terrifying surprise for the enemy. This was the first and last time Arab artillery succeeded in shelling this most important enemy position.

There follows the text of the first cable dispatched after the convoy entered Jaffa:

44S 28/4
High Command

Ajnadin Battalion entered Jaffa at 9 a.m. this morning under protection of the convoy and artillery. Our artillery successfully fired sixty shells at Tel Aviv.

FAUZI

After I had sent this cable I received the following very important and urgent cable:

No. 16W 28/4
Very important and urgent
To Commander, Eastern and Central Front

The whole Michel Battalion must be sent to reinforce the Jaffa garrison. Send it all possible mortar guns; we will replace them from here. Help the Jaffa garrison by artillery fire from suitable positions. Do all you can to relieve pressure on it. Absolutely essential to hold and defend it. No news from Jerusalem. Contact the garrison and inform us of the situation.

AL-HASHIMI

I read this cable several times. What did the Inspector mean by the word "whole," when the Michel Battalion, that is the Ajnadin Battalion, was already in Jaffa? And the mortar guns that he promised to send us to replace those we were to send to Jaffa — why had he kept them in his stores so long, with the fighting in Palestine at its climax? And why did he ask us to inform him of the situation in Jerusalem, when its garrison was in direct contact with him?

I also thought that this concern for Jaffa might have been displayed somewhat earlier, and that, before the situation became so desperate, he might have fortified the town and made other necessary arrangements, and ensured that it had all the men and equipment it needed, all this being his particular job.

So I sent off the following detailed cable in which I asked about the Ajnadin Battalion, as being linked to him personally:

45S

28/4

To High Command

The convoy broke the siege by force at the Mikve-Yisra'el settlement. Sergeant Khalid of the Circassian company was killed in the fighting. The Ajnadin Battalion suffered some losses. The settlement was destroyed. Fires caused by artillery bombardment seen in Tel Aviv. No sign of the third company of the Ajnadin Battalion. Did it consist of only two companies? A company of the Hattin Battalion entered with the Battalion. We shall complete the formation of a strong battalion equipped with an artillery battery and five armoured cars under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi by tomorrow noon, then start operations to put pressure on settlements near Jaffa and shell Tel Aviv.

FAUZI

The next day I received the following cable from the Inspector-General:

23W

29/4

To Commander Northern and Central Front

Inform us if true Tel Aviv and Bat Yam bombed by planes. Send all information.

AL-HASHIMI

Apparently certain international news agencies thought the shelling of Tel Aviv by our artillery was an air raid, and dispatched cables to that effect. Or perhaps it was advance justification for the aerial bombardment of Jaffa that took place later. I replied with the following cable:

49S

29/4

High Command

Jaffa bombed yesterday at 1930 by unidentified planes believed to be British. Bat Yam fortress damaged.

FAUZI

The same day I received the following cable from the Commander-in-Chief, Major-General Ismail Safwat:

25W

29/4

Fauzi

We propose appointing Michel Isa commander of the Jaffa Garrison. If you have no objection appoint him and withdraw Adel after he has handed over everything and employ him on any duty you think fit.

SAFWAT

I replied with the following cable:

48S 29/4

High Command

Adel surrendered Jaffa day before yesterday. Shall withdraw him and give command of garrison to Michel Isa.

FAUZI

I then received the following strange cable from Major-General Safwat:

28W 29/4

To Fauzi

The Jaffa garrison is still asking for reinforcements and aid and for detailed maps. Keep in constant touch with it and do all that is necessary to help and hold the city. The situation will soon change in our favour. Therefore no objection to your using most of your force to prevent fall of Jaffa. Inform us of situation in Jaffa and then Jerusalem. In a few days regular forces will be mobilized and start moving. Therefore no objection at all to your using some of your forces to hold and defend Jerusalem and Jaffa, especially Jerusalem, and in general doing all that your situation permits to relieve the pressure on the Jerusalem garrison and to hold the city at all costs, even if it means evacuating positions of secondary importance.

Careful study of this cable shows how acute was the psychological crisis from which Major-General Safwat was suffering — something we had never known to happen to him in the whole of his military life. The news arriving was very bad, and the city of Jaffa was at its last gasp. In fact he resigned a few days later.

At noon on May 2, less than three days after the Ajnadin Battalion had entered Jaffa, I received the following cable from the new commander of the garrison, Captain Michel Isa, informing me that the former commander, Lieutenant-Colonel Adel Najm al-Din, had withdrawn by sea to Lebanon with his men. The following is the text of the cable:

[No number]W 2/5 1245

To Commander Northern and Central Front

Adel has left the city by sea with all the Iraqis and Yugoslavs and the city will be depopulated after today's exodus. Scarcely supplies in the city to support remaining garrison. British postal services stopped today. Orders given for both sides to cease fire until middle of this month. Should the Jews disobey the order the British will fire on them. Ajnadin infected by panic flight. Await immediate instructions.

MICHEL ISA

As the sad news began to come in with those who had managed to leave

the city in flight from the spectre of hunger and death, and had reached our lines, I sent the following cable to the High Command:

65S 3/5

High Command

Situation in Jaffa distressing. Adel and his men have withdrawn and the situation is confused. Ajnadin infected by panic flight. Only a few men left with Michel Isa. Jaffa almost empty. Arms in stores and streets. Ammunition being thrown into sea. Group must be sent by sea to collect arms and take them by sea to Beirut and Damascus. There were armed clashes between Ajnadin and the Iraqis with Adel in an unsuccessful attempt to prevent them fleeing. New arms being sold wholesale and retail in all areas.

FAUZI

I followed it with another cable:

66S 3/5

High Command

More than forty wounded in Jaffa without first aid or food. Can only be rescued by sea. Help them.

FAUZI

The reply came in the following cable:

58W 5/5 1624

Commander, Northern and Central Front

We have informed Azzam Pasha of British attitude. Are trying to send marine transport to remove wounded through Lebanese government. Request you make every effort to maintain control over troops until things finally settled.

AL-HASHIMI

I next received a cable from Lieutenant-Colonel Mahdi Saleh to the effect that Captain Michel Isa had succeeded in reaching our lines with what was left of the Ajnadin Battalion. The following is the text of the cable:

No. 18W 6/5

To Fauzi

Captain Michel Isa arrived at 0530 today from Jaffa via Ramleh with fifty armed men and some ammunition. We have received supplies of petrol. Inform us if you need anything.

MAJOR MAHDI SALEH

The last act of the tragedy came in the following cable from the Inspector-General:

85W

11/5

1165

To Commander, Northern and Central Front

What has happened to Jaffa and the radio station there? Inform us.

AL-HASHIMI

To which I immediately replied in the following cable:

91S

11/5

High Command

Don't you know what has happened in Jaffa? Adel Najm al-Din is with you. Only remnants of Ajnadin have reached us, as I have informed you. Michel Isa has handed over three freight trucks full of arms and ammunition to Hasan Salama.

FAUZI

In this way the curtain was rung down on that heroic Arab city. The main causes of this disaster were the neglect, ambition, shortsightedness and bad training of the senior officials who were dealing with the Palestine problem.