

THE CONVOY

At 2:05 pm on March 2, 1948 the operator at the Hadassah exchange in Jerusalem heard an Arab voice warn that the hospital would be blown up within 90 minutes. The explosion did not happen but it was a clear giveaway of Arab intentions. Two days, later, Hadassah President Rose Halprin and Denise Tourover called on the State Department and the British embassy in Washington to secure Scopus, then followed up with strong protests to UN Secretary-General Trygve Lie and the International Red Cross. Shortly afterward, commander of Palestine Arab forces Abdul Kader Hussein spoke, on the record, to news correspondents: "Since Jews have been attacking us and blowing up our houses containing women and children from bases in Hadassah Hospital and Hebrew University, I have given orders to occupy or even demolish them." Showing he meant business, he placed a cannon on the roof of the Rockefeller Museum of Archaeology opposite Mount Scopus and began using armor-piercing ammunition and electrically-detonated mines against Scopus traffic. Surgeon Edward Joseph told Yassky that he could no longer take the responsibility of transferring cases to Scopus. Yassky replied sharply: "The time has not yet come to evacuate Mount Scopus... There is no security anywhere."

But reality won out. Yassky carried on negotiations quietly for the use of the Anglican Mission Hospice a few blocks away from the Hasolel Street clinic that Hadassah ran in downtown Jerusalem. On March 15, ten beds were set up for maternity cases and the site became known as Hadassah "A." A century earlier, Jews in Jerusalem were running away from the mission hospitals; now they were running back into them.

By mid-March, the Hadassah Emergency Committee resolved that supplies would no longer be concentrated on Scopus but would be dispersed in the center of town. A meeting (held at the home of Myriam Granott, later Chairman of the Hadassah Council in Israel) considered the possibility, never implemented, of returning to the old Rothschild building where Hadassah's vocational school was then located. Magnes noted that the Red Cross had offered to put Scopus under its flag on condition that Hadassah and the University agreed to demilitarize the area. To Hadassah, the Red Cross banner was the white flag of surrender and its leaders persistently refused the proposal.

Yassky asked Bertha Schoolman to take a confidential note to Jewish Agency Treasurer Eliezer Kaplan in Tel Aviv. Unless the Agency did something at once to secure the road to Scopus, the memo said, the hospital would have to cease operations. But Hadassah was determined to remain as long as possible.

In Jewish Jerusalem the supply situation was so bad that Jews were reduced to scrounging in the fields for a weed called *khubeizeh* to supplement their diets, which now consisted of a few slices of bread, an occasional egg, a handful of noodles, some jam and an orange. On Scopus and in the Hasolel clinic, reported Davis, "Our surgeons have been on the job night and day since the end of November, and not one of them has had a weekend off since then." Magnes informed British Chief Secretary Sir Henry Gurney, "I

am afraid our devoted doctors, nurses and patients are being subjected to a strain too great to bear.”

Yassky prepared an evacuation plan for Scopus. At a joint Hadassah-Hebrew University meeting, he told Golda Meir that unless a minimum of three convoys could safely pass daily, the hospital would close. The only alternative was to accept the Red Cross offer. Meir agreed to raise the subject of Scopus at a Zionist Executive meeting in Tel Aviv. Meanwhile, the Zionist General Council, popularly called the Actions Committee, was in session to debate the proclamation of the Jewish State and to authorize the formation of a cabinet and legislature for the new state's functioning. For that historic session, Hadassah had flown in a delegation from New York: President Rose Halprin, Judith Epstein, Tamar de Sola Pool and Rebecca Schulman. Rose asked Yassky to join them in Tel Aviv, but he was too anxious about Scopus's fate to leave. On April 10, he replied:

The situation in Jerusalem is very serious and that of Scopus much more so. I do not exaggerate when I say that 100,000 Jews of Jerusalem depend on Hadassah's functioning somehow, somewhere. I am very pessimistic about Scopus...It is our duty to prepare emergency arrangements in the city. We will do our best to hang on.

To Bertha Schoolman, who was to leave for the United States on April 12, he reported, “One convoy is an absurd situation. I am afraid we will not be able to continue to operate the Hospital very much longer...I hope that we will meet again in not a too distant future.”

The hope was not to be. Three days later, Dr. Haim Yassky was dead, shot through the liver in an Arab ambush on the road that he and Hadassah's leaders had tried valiantly to make safe.

Five days earlier, on April 8. In the northern outskirts of Jerusalem, the Irgun attacked the Arab village of Deir Yassin, a base for Arab irregulars. As many as 250 Arabs, mostly civilians, were slain. The convoy ambush was not retaliation for the Deir Yassin attack since the Arabs had planned the ambush beforehand, but the Irgun's massacre was cited to justify the Arab attack. The Arab leadership had three goals in attacking the Mount Scopus convoy: to strike a decisive blow that would force the Jews to abandon Scopus and make Jewish Jerusalem more vulnerable, to destroy the will of the Jews to resist an Arab invasion of the city proper and to deprive the Jews of their largest medical facility. And there was a fourth factor. On April 8, in hand-to-hand fighting for control of Qastel Hill, which dominated the Tel Aviv-Jerusalem highway, the Arab hero and ace military commander Abdul Kader Hussein was killed by Meir Carmiel, a mobilized Hadassah worker. Shortly thereafter, Carmiel himself died in action.

Conditions for an ambush were ideal in the Sheikh Jarrah Quarter. Over a stretch of a few hundred yards between Nashashibi Bend and Antonius House, there were stone walls on either side of the narrow road. The convoy would be traveling slowly uphill at

that point; ahead at Antonius House there was a ninety-degree bend. Caught in that stretch of road, the vehicles would be tin ducks in a shooting gallery. Intervention could come only from the Haganah escort and from a small unit of Scots' highland Light Infantry stationed in Antonius House. But the British would not shoot unless they received orders to do so, a possibility that was remote.

On April 11, the British military commander in Jerusalem assured questioners that the road was safe but, because of the Deir Yassin attack, the area was tense. Even as he spoke, the Arabs were consulting expert British officer friends on the logistics of the operation. Subsequent events indicate that the Arabs had an understanding whereby they would not be disturbed in their mission so long as they did not shoot at British soldiers. The Arabs could not – and would not – lose this one.

On April 12, Deputy Medical Director Eli Davis returned to town from Scopus. Wryly he commented, "It was not comfortable on the way down." Customarily Yassky and he took turns up on the hill, but on the evening of the 12th, Yassky had a social engagement and did not go up that morning. Gynecologist Yehuda Bromberg was with him that evening. "I was struck by the great depression which had overcome Dr. Yassky," Bromberg wrote three days later. "It was clear that his depression arose from his deep concern over the fate of our hospital. The dangers confronting the hospital because of the difficulties of transport were clear to him. As was the fear of the destruction of the hospital to which he dedicated his life."

On Tuesday, April 13, the largest Scopus convoy yet assembled was to take personnel, patients, visitors, workers and supplies up to the hospital and University. At 8:00 am people began converging on the clinic in Hasolel Street where a University bus and a Hadassah bus, both lightly armored, waited. Three blocks away, outside Hadassah "A," two armored ambulances were parked. Haim and Fanny Yassky entered one of the ambulances, a converted Dodge truck, which only the day before had been painted a glaring white with a big red Star of David on the body.

Back at the clinic the buses quickly filled. Hadassah Social Director Esther Passman Epstein, her arms brimming over with magazines and sweets for the patients, was so determined to get to her wards that she left behind her beloved son, David, who had been injured while carrying out a school experiment. At the clinic, Esther met noted cancer specialist Leonid Doljansky who urged Esther to sit beside him. Three weeks previously she had become his "mascot" when she moved next to him on a bus and a bullet pierced her hat. Had he, the much taller of the two, been sitting in her place he would have died. But this day Esther was not permitted to board the bus and the ill-fated doctor rode without his lucky mascot. Swearing under her breath, Esther ran three blocks to find a seat on one of the ambulances; but she would live to tell about it.

Dr. Moshe Ben-David, administrator of the planned medical school, got a late start from home, hailed a cab, finally caught one of the buses, sealing his own fate. Shelev Truck Company manager Moshe Lazar had a safe seat in the six-ton Brockway

truck of veteran driver Benjamin Adin, but in a move that cost him his life, Lazar changed at the last moment to one of the buses.

By 9:00 am the vehicles were on their way. Three trucks filled with supplies for the hospital and for fortifications joined the two Haganah escort cars, two ambulances and two buses. The exact number of people in the vehicles is not known because precise lists were not kept, but there were well over 100.

At the final checkpoint outside Hadassah's Tipat Halav station, which served as a Haganah outpost, the convoy halted to await the customary order from the Haganah to proceed. British inspector Robert J. Webb, chief of the Mea Shearim police station, said the road was safe. Webb was known as a friend to both Arabs and Jews as was said to be well-rewarded by both. One job Webb did for the Jews outside his official duties was to drive over the road to Scopus before a convoy left. Webb would stop at Nashashibi Bend, look around and sometimes wait there till the convoy passed. On this day, Hillman said, he called Webb as usual and Webb answered that the way was clear. But Webb did not station himself as Nashashibi Bend on April 13 and all efforts made by the Haganah to contact him throughout the rest of the day were fruitless.

Commander of the convoy was Jerusalem-born Lieutenant Asher "Zizi" Rahav, a British army sergeant during World War II. Now in Company Noam of the Jerusalem Haganah, the city's only Jewish unit that wore uniforms and black berets, Rahav's assignment was to escort convoys in the Jerusalem area in an armored Ford truck.

It was 9:30 am, Rahav was in the lead in his escort vehicle with ten men and two young Haganah hitchhikers, "When we proceeded a short way through Arab territory on Nablus Road, near a mosque, I had an odd feeling that something was wrong, because there was no traffic. I thought of turning back but instead I told my men to load their weapons and keep their eyes open."

The car had peepholes through which the gunners could shoot and a winged roof of meshed steel covered by canvas.

"Step on it," Rahav told his civilian driver. At the first turn in the road the Arab grocery shop was shuttered – another bad omen. The cars began to climb. Ahead Zizi saw Nashashibi Bend curving like a snake. Rahav held his breath. Through his peephole, he spied the movement of Arabs wearing green Iraqi uniform with bandoliers. To his left, Rahav noticed that the road was broken. The driver had to swing slightly right. It was 9:45 on Rahav's watch. Suddenly the Ford truck shook violently, throwing the men forward. A mine was electrically detonated five feet in front of them, creating a narrow four-foot-deep ditch. The car's front wheels nosed into the hole and the car settled at a steep angle. The mesh roof and canvas slid back, partly off the vehicle, obscuring the view of the rest of the convoy. "Bullets came through the armor like bees swarming around us," Rahav recalled later. Zizi shot holes in the canvas to see what was happening to the convoy behind. He saw the last vehicles trying to turn around. At Nashashibi Bend, two British armored cars blocked the retreat. Rahav gave

orders to his armorer, Baruch Nussbaum, to fire a few bursts at the British cars to get them to move out of the way. He did not know that in one of those cars, sitting as a spectator, was Lieutenant-General G.H.A. MacMillan, commander of all British forces in Palestine. MacMillan ordered his driver to move away from the convoy.

Two days later, MacMillan would reply to a protest by University Chancellor Magnes in words that unintentionally admitted British lack of assistance to the beleaguered Hadassah staff in the convoy tragedy:

I myself motored through the area, passing under the fire of an automatic weapon in a Jewish armored car at 9:45 on my way to Kalandia (Jerusalem's airport)...I assumed that the situation was clearing up and my inference at the time was that it would have cleared up much quicker, had the Jewish armored car stopped firing.

Five vehicles managed to extricate themselves and return to Jewish quarters. The Haganah escort car in the rear, its tires punctured, inexplicably turned tail and returned to Jerusalem. Driving blindly with only crack to see though, Benjamin Adin reversed, advanced, reversed, backed into the wall of the Nashashibi House and finally turned his six-ton Brockway toward the city. His foot brakes were gone, his tires were flat, the steering wheel worked only partially. On the floor of the cabin was a weeping male passenger who had hopped on at the last moment in an effort to see his wife and newborn son on Scopus. "I never shall see them again," he cried repeatedly. Adin pushed his pedal to the floor and arrived safely at Mandelbaum gate where his passenger fell out of the cab in a deep faint.

The driver of the larger of the two ambulances, Yosef Levy, was wounded in the head. Surgeon Edward Joseph took a quick look, found it was only superficial and urged him to get moving toward Scopus. Reported Joseph, "We thought the driver was going on but instead he wisely turned the car around and returned. It was the first to get back." Dr. Joseph crawled to join the Haganah men who were trying to edge close to the besieged convoy:

We were being attacked by a tremendous amount of shooting. It was impossible to lift one's head. The bullets were whizzing everywhere. I asked the soldier nearest me, "Are these Arabs shooting at us?" He replied, 'No. They are English soldiers.' I knew it had to be true because it was the kind of shooting that only a proper army could do. They were shooting at the Haganah boys. If they had not, we could have reached the convoy.

The surgeon then joined a few men who had been in the Haganah vehicle that retreated and ran to the roof of the Tipat Halav station. Esther Passman Epstein, who had been in Joseph's ambulance, joined the men. With his old pistol, Joseph ran from roof to roof trying to get close enough to get a clear shot. It was a hopeless attempt. As the ambush appeared to be succeeding, Arab volunteers from the region ran to the scene to get in on the kill. Esther could only sob at the end of the day, "It was horrible to see."

Blood was beginning to flow in Zizi Rahav's thinly-armored escort car. Private Shlomo Mizrahi got two bullets in the stomach and fell. Rahav himself caught a steel splinter in the temple; his eye swelled and blood gushed. He kept shooting, aiming with his one good eye. Around noontime one of the hitchhiking Haganah young women, Shoshana Ben-Ari of Kibbutz Yagur, rose from the floor to help a wounded man, was hit in the mouth by a bullet and died shortly after. At 12:15, Zizi dispatched his armorer, Baruch Nussbaum, to Antonius House about 200 yards farther on to get help from the Highland Light Infantry officers who were observing the battle, their heavy weapons silent. Baruch, who had a slight limp from a case of childhood polio, jumped into the deep ditch made by the mine and crawled along the wall. His body was later found in a wadi in Arab territory.

Back in Jerusalem proper at Haganah headquarters, Commander David Shaltiel called twenty-one-year old Baruch Gilboa, who had arrived in Jerusalem early that morning from Tel Aviv. Gilboa was a commander of an armored unit that had escorted over 150 trucks of supplies to the city, following the capture of Qastel Hill on the city's outskirts. Shaltiel ordered him to take some men in his armored car to the Sheikh Jarah Quarters and try to tow out the four vehicles under Arab fire.

It was obvious that Shaltiel's intelligence from the scene of battle was faulty; otherwise he would not have ordered a lone escort car into that trap. Gilboa and his men were fatigued from fourteen hours on the road. His civilian driver, apparently shocked by the battle, saw the ditch made by the mine across the road, decided to try to drive over it. He put on speed as he came up to the left of Zizi Rahav's embattled vehicle and landed with a thud in the ditch, injuring some of the passengers. Had he gone to the right of Rahav, he would have missed the ditch, gone on to Antonius House and the men could then have engaged Arabs who were firing at the convoy from a house across the street. Now the two Haganah cars were stuck at the head of the convoy.

Close behind was Yassky's ambulance, its tires shot out, standing breadthwise across the road where it was protected by the two Haganah cars just ahead. About fifty yards behind were the two buses. They were the most open to attack from both sides of the road.

One attempt to extricate the buses was made by a British friend of the Haganah. Major Jack Churchill, of the Highland Light Infantry, drove an open-fronted armored car to the scene on his own initiative and was about to put a towline on one of the buses when his driver was killed by a bullet in the neck. Churchill pulled in the tow and drove out of the area, but before doing so, banged on one bus and shouted to the occupants to risk getting out and returning with him. He later reported they had refused to do so.

By early afternoon the two buses were sieves. Only one man from each vehicle survived. Shalom Nissan, a university student, jumped when the Arabs began lobbing grenades at his stricken bus. Miraculously, he dodged the rain of fire and ran all the way to Mount Scopus where he was to provide the first on-scene account of events.

In the other bus was a guard, Nathan Sandowsky, who told a ghastly story that has since been verified. Nathan said that the driver was wounded from the initial fire and lost control. The second driver was lightly wounded but froze from fear and could not function. The bus had three lookouts inside. One was Nathan. Another was D. Avraham Freiman, lecturer in Jewish Law, and a third was university employee Zev Mariasin.

From the rear opening I saw that all the time the British army passed in large convoys. They continued on their way. We shouted 'Help! We have wounded women and men!' But they did not stop. Armored cars of the police arrived and stood for a time without extending any help whatever and without even communicating with us. We were sure that at least they would not let the Arabs approach so close as to burn the vehicles.

From inside the buses, Arabs shouting "Minshan Deir Yassin" (For Deir Yassin) could be heard clearly over and over again. Nathan reported that the arrival of Gilboa's armored car caused rejoicing in the bus. "We saw that our people were at last coming. But the Arabs derived courage from the fact that the police and army cars which passed did not raise a finger."

From the early hours on, bullets found their marks. Gas fumes began to seep in as the Arabs made ready to burn the bus. Molotov cocktails were being thrown. Some of the unhurt passengers tried to make a dash to safety. But the Arabs, only a few yards away, picked them off as they jumped out. As four men ran, a girl in the bus cried, "They are being killed." Nathan deliberated:

I sat at the side of the opening of the bus with a scalpel—my only weapon. Fire started from the rear of the bus. There were cries, 'We are burning alive.' I dived. The blade of the scalpel broke. I ran the length of the road zigzag. I passed the ambulance and approached an escort car, waving the broken knife in my hand. I pounded on the door shouting, 'I am one of you.' The door opened. Inside all the men were dead or wounded.

It was now 2:30 pm. Inside Gilboa's armored car, Sandowsky saw Safed-born David Bar-Ner with a grenade in his hand. The pin was out and the grenade primed to explode. Recalls Bar-Ner:

When Sandowsky climbed in we were waiting for the final assault. It was now a tradition in the Haganah not to be caught alive. We had five dead. Gilboa was paralyzed by a head wound. I had three bullets in my arm. I piled up the six grenades left in the car and pulled the pin on one to blow us up if the Arabs tried to take us prisoner. We had plenty of ammunition left but there was no one left to fire it. Then Sandowsky appeared. His face was blackened from the fire in his bus. He grabbed the grenade from my hand and threw it outside where it went off. Then he took one of our two machine-guns and kept shooting short bursts. That kept the Arabs at bay

since they knew we could till shoot back. He saved our lives, for soon after, the British picked us up.

One further feeble and futile attempt to save the convoy was made in the afternoon by the Haganah. Squad Sergeant Haim Kimron took an armored car to Sheikh Jarrah to tow out the vehicles. As Kimron entered the ambush he saw the buses burning. His vehicle stalled in a ditch. Almost immediately, the two occupants were killed and three wounded from the fire overhead. He wrote, "Hysterically, I ordered my driver to get the hell out of the ditch. He reversed and we went around to the right of the road, past the two armored cars and beat it up to Mount Scopus. My tires were shot full of holes."

No one knew yet what was happening in the white ambulance with the big red Magen David. Because its armor was the thickest of all the vehicles, the wagon was the safest place to be in that corridor of hell. Next to driver Zecharya Leitan sat Yassky. Behind him on the benches were Fanny Yassky, six doctors, a nurse and a wounded soldier. The ambulance, behind the two armored cars, was a poor target for the Arabs and so it absorbed the least punishment. Yassky, who sat by the driver because he had a revolver and could more easily use it, concerned himself with appraising the situation by looking through the tiny window in the vehicle.

"Every time he opened the window," Yehuda Bromberg reported later, "a rain of shots was fired at him. At 2:00 pm, Yassky informed us that everyone had been killed in the burning buses."

After the buses turned into pyres, Yassky announced, "Now our time has come. No escape from our fate is left. We must bid one another farewell."

He took leave of his wife, thanking her for the happy life that they had lived. At 2:30, Yassky was wounded in the liver by a bullet that must have ricocheted through the ambulance's engine.

"I'm hit," he said and then after a few minutes of continuous chatter, he whispered to Fanny, "*Shalom*, my beloved." Pediatrician Yehuda Mattot, who sat on a bench behind Yassky, recalls: "Fanny Yassky took off her blouse and with it I bandaged Yassky. Only an immediate blood transfusion and an operation could have saved him." Yassky lost consciousness and was dead five minutes later. There was nothing the six physicians and one nurse in the ambulance could do. Ironically, there was not even a first aid kit in the vehicle.

Fanny remained strong. Someone else began to weep. Fanny asked, "Why do you cry? Soon we shall follow him."

Zecharya the driver suddenly got up, opened the door and jumped out. He was shot dead a few yards away.

Dermatologist Haim Cohen asked gynecologist Bruno Berkovitz to join him in an attempt to run for it. But Dr. Ullmann said firmly, "Cohen, we have survived this together from nine o'clock. You can wait another few hours."

Mattot, who missed certain death by changing at the last minute from a bus to the ambulance, tried his luck a second time. He recalled:

I thought that if I stayed put it would be the end. My wife later thought I did it because I could not stand to be without a cigarette. I jumped into the ditch and I began to crawl. The Arabs spotted me and began shooting. I got one bullet next to my spine. I kept going and got to Antonius House where the British troops welcomed me. Just opposite on the other side of the road were Arabs, apparently the leaders of the whole thing. The British took me in and bandaged me. They were apologetic. They said they were in a small unit and they could not do anything. They had been asking for reinforcement but could not get any. I was not able to convince the British to do anything for the convoy.

Throughout the day, pleas to intercede were directed to the British by the Jewish Agency, the Haganah, Magnes, Davis and others. The British authorities suggested a truce to both sides and waited. The few troops at Antonius House were consistently refused permission to use their heavy machine gun and bazookas; a few bursts from these weapons could have smothered the Arab initiative. Hadassah volunteers monitored the British radio conversations throughout the day. This exchange was noted at a critical point:

Forward British observer: "The buses are burning. Someone has to put out a white flag. Request permission to intercede."

British Headquarters: "Reinforcements are on the way. Keep everything steady."

But reinforcements, only a few minutes away, took seven hours to get to the site.

Lieutenant-General MacMillan returned to the site at 4:30 pm. Incredibly, he admitted to Magnes by letter that he had been uninformed all day about events in Sheikh Jarrah. Wrote MacMillan:

I was surprised...to find heavy firing in progress on the spot and my own car, which had been back to barracks and returned again to meet me, had been pierced by a bullet. On arrival once more on the spot, I found that Brigadier Jones had got the matter in hand and had persuaded the Arabs to stop firing but had not been able to achieve this until after he had been forced to fire heavily upon them and kill fifteen.

At about 400 pm, Brigadier Jones had finally been given permission to open fire with bazookas. Another army post fired off a few mortars. Then under a smokescreen, half-

tacks were sent in to pick up the survivors. A British Intelligence captain who had befriended the Jews arrived under his own steam from military headquarters at the King David Hotel. A wounded Zizi Rahav was already in Antonius House. When the captain asked Zizi what he could do to help, Zizi requested that the captain return to the scene to bring back the weapons and secret operational papers on the body of one of the men. The captain did just that.

The captain would never forget the scene.

It was grotesque. People were standing over the body of Dr. Yassky, screaming and yelling, while a little farther back beside the two burned-out houses the dead were piled in heaps. The corpses were burning and it was at least 20 minutes after the shooting finally stopped that someone thought to douse them with water.

Precisely how many were killed or wounded in the convoy? It is unlikely that anyone will ever know. A marble memorial bearing seventy-six names stands near Nashashibi Bend. A seventy-seventh is listed as "Unknown." Later, the number was set at seventy-eight. The bodies were so badly burned that the remains were buried in a common grave in Jerusalem's Sanhedria Cemetery.

Three days after the attack, Hadassah handed the Red Cross a list of forty-seven "still unaccounted for." In the mid-1970s an inquiry commission reportedly determined that only twenty-five of the bodies were buried in Sanhedria. Later, Yehoshua Levanon, son of victim Zvi Levanon,¹ located an Arab who claimed to have participated in the ambush. The Arab reportedly said that remains of the twenty-two were buried in an Arab cemetery outside the Old City wall, but officials doubt the veracity of the Arab's statement.

Late in 1996, the Israel Defense Ministry announced it was creating a genetic database as a means of identifying the remains of those buried in Sanhedria. Whether the Ministry could inspect the alleged site in the Arab graveyard was questionable given the prevailing political antagonisms.

The night before the massacre, Rose Halprin and Bertha Schoolman had flown home and heard the news on arrival in New York. Judith Epstein and Rebecca Shulman, who remained in Tel Aviv, were having dinner at their hotel when a newspaperman came up to their table: "I have terrible news for you. Yassky was killed today."

On her return to New York Rebecca told the Board in New York, "I doubt whether we will be able to use Scopus again soon. I recommend that we start building somewhere else."

To Ethel Agron and Eli Davis the Board cabled in May: "We dedicate ourselves to the task of maintaining services and rebuilding Hadassah."

The British reinforced Antonius House and warned both Jews and Arabs that they could countenance no further military activity in Sheikh Jarrah. Nevertheless, on April 25, the Haganah under a young Palmach officer named Yitzhak Rabin, occupied Nashashibi House. But the next day he was shelled out by the British. The Israelis would not return for good until nineteen years later when, under Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin, they occupied the entire Arab sector of Jerusalem.

Shelling and sniping made life on Scopus impossible and the road impassable despite the British presence. Fresh food and water were scarce. Davis had to find a way to get the more than 700 people down and contacted Major Jack Churchill:

Major Churchill told me there was a slight chance of getting through to Mount Scopus, because the Arabs saw the British meant business. He agreed to make the trip up to Scopus and invited me along. The Major took a jeep and his driver. I sat while he stood in the jeep twirling his stick. He looked as though he were on parade in London. Nothing happened as we went through Sheikh Jarrah. On Scopus we were embraced. We had shown it was possible to get through.

Davis decided on the spot to risk a major evacuation because of the low morale. Ben-Gurion had told Hadassah and University representatives several days before the disaster that the hill was to be held at all costs. But Ahron Brezinsky, who was acting as medical director of the hospital, told Davis, “You cannot hold a front-line with sick people who do not want to stay. The atmosphere here is that of a refugee camp. With all the strategic importance of this place, we must get out with what we can.”

Davis returned to town to organize the evacuation. A decision was taken to retain a 50-bed hospital on Scopus, demonstrating that the hospital was not being abandoned.

Davis scrounged the impoverished city for fuel for the partial evacuation. So empty was the city that he was reduced to collecting gasoline from private homes, institutions, friends—bottle by bottle. Four convoys made it. Brought into town were 200 patients, 100 student nurses and 300 staff members, as well and 600 tons of equipment and supplies. Not a shot was fired. Left behind were 150 persons, including eight student nurses who ran the kitchen and forty patients. In the university buildings were another 150 men.

Now in charge of Hadassah’s destiny were Davis and Ethel Agron, as chair of the Hadassah Council in Israel. Magnes, broken and sick, shattered by British nonchalance over the convoy (“This happened not out in the desert but in plain sight of Jerusalem,” he wrote indignantly to General MacMillan), left Jerusalem for the United States where he died in October 1948.

On May 6, Haim Halevy, who administered Scopus, reported, “The hospital no longer exists for all practical purposes.” Water and flour were sufficient for two weeks, power was rationed to only four hours daily and “soon there won’t be any refrigeration.”

Compounding the problem were intelligence reports that King Abdullah was about to shell Scopus before making a full-scale assault.

By the beginning of May, Davis and members of the Hadassah Council had managed to set up reasonably good facilities in Jerusalem's Hadassah "A" and two blocks down the street in St. Joseph's Convent, now known as Hadassah "B," but the accommodations were hardly luxurious. St. Joseph's, leased on April 29, had been a school for 600 Arab girls run by French nuns. After shells hit the converted hospital, the top floor was evacuated and patients were moved to the dank basements where there was neither water nor electricity. Shelves that stored potatoes were cleaned and became emergency beds. Nurses knelt on the stone floor to change bandages and physicians sat on the floor to examine patients. Together with "A" and "B," the Straus Health Center and the Hasolel Street Clinic, Hadassah improvised 300 beds, nearly as many as it had on Scopus. Heroic volunteer work temporarily made up the difference. Nurse Madeline Lewin-Epstein, who had come with the AZMU in 1918, turned her large apartment into a twenty-bed hospital. She often braved sniper's bullets and mortars to pick up the wounded in the streets and pull them into her home. Hers was the first military hospital in Jerusalem; many of her patients were wounded underground soldiers who could go nowhere else. British police officials would be sitting in a chair in the dental clinic of her popular husband, Sam Lewin-Epstein, while in the living room, only a few yards away, were the men they were hunting.

At the height of Hadassah's problems, the Old City of Jerusalem fell to the Arabs on May 28. Hadassah had staffed the hospital in the Old City's Jewish Quarter early in the fighting, but the position of the Jews was hopeless against overwhelming numbers of Arabs. They fought until they were too few, too starved, too fatigued to go on. Avraham Laufer, one of the surgeons who was sent into the Jewish Quarter, reported that the top floors of the hospital had been shelled and seventy patients had to share mattresses and wooden benches in a synagogue and in basements. Laufer told of one young soldier who had shrapnel in an eye but refused to wait fifteen minutes for an operation to remove it because the situation at his post was desperate. "An hour later they carried him back. His handsome face was blown away by a shell."

About 1,300 women and children were evacuated to the Jewish side of the city, while the men were taken to a prison camp in the Jordanian desert. Three among the POW's were Hadassah physicians: Egon Rys, Eli Peiser and Laufer. Two weeks later, while Rys was in the prison camp, his wife, Hava, a Hadassah nurse, was killed in the last pre-truce shelling of the city.

The Old City refugees were put up in the abandoned houses of the Katamon quarter, a large neighborhood of Arab villas that had been conquered in bloody fighting by the Haganah. There, Jerusalem's meager food supplies were tightly rationed by volunteers, who themselves were now on starvation diets. Under the supervision of Sara Bavli, head of Hadassah Nutrition, these 1,300 and twenty thousand others were given frugal daily meals in what was known as a "battle of the calories."

One of the Hadassah volunteers who cared for the Old City refugee mothers and children was Betty Levin. She was given charge of a three-room abandoned apartment in which each corner served as “home” for ten refugees—120 in all. Recalls Betty:

They told me that at the end of the fighting in the Old City they fled to a synagogue where they huddled together until the Arab Legion found them. The Legion expelled them with only the nightgowns and slippers they wore. My job was to feed them. In the morning, they got two slices of bread each and, for the children, four teaspoons of jam. One day, a distraught mother threw the bread down and cried, ‘My children are filthy: their heads are full of lice. I need soap.’

But there was no soap. Betty remembered that before the siege began, her absentee landlady had locked ten large blocks of laundry soap in a room. Disregarding the mortars exploding around her, she walked back to her apartment, a kilometer distant, broke into the locked room and took the soap back to Katamon. There she sliced each block into sixteen squares. The lice were subdued and peace was restored to the apartment.

In the turbulence of siege, Friday, May 14, 1948 was no more than just another day of hunger and death in Jerusalem. No street celebrations marked David Ben-Gurion’s proclamation of the State of Israel in the Tel Aviv Museum. Hardly anyone knew about it until the following day, for few in Jerusalem had electricity and news was passed by word of mouth. Only on Sunday, May 16, did *The Palestinian Post* appear with its headline: STATE OF ISRAEL BORN.

The highway to Tel Aviv had been sealed again by the Arab armies. Daily rations were down to starvation levels. The Holy City’s only link with the outside world was a small one-engine plane that landed under fire in the Valley of the Cross. While great military advances were being made in the rest of the country, at the end of May, Jerusalem appeared to be doomed. The last of the British had left Jerusalem on May 14—except for those officers who remained behind to command Abdullah’s Arab Legion. Residents of the city knew these officers were in command because the merciless shelling would stop precisely at 4:00 pm daily, so British officers could enjoy their tea. It was during that hour that most Israelis dared to go outside for their rations. Scopus was no exception to the bombardment. The buildings suffered badly, but casualties were few because the underground tunnel between the nursing school and the hospital served as a perfect shelter.

Born under fire was a new Hadassah service for Israel—orthopedic surgery. One of its pioneers was British-born Myer Makin, who had been a medical officer at Normandy in 1944 during the Allied invasion of Nazi Europe. Soon after demobilization in 1946, he joined Hadassah as a surgeon. Battle casualties were nothing new to him. He recalled:

We worked 24 hours on and 24 hours off. The main trouble was getting to work through the shelling. I would borrow my neighbor’s bicycle and dash

like hell through the streets. The shelling of Jerusalem was much worse than any I had gone through in France. In France we were at the front for three or four days and then were taken for a week's rest. Here it went on constantly. No let up.

In mid-April, after a British peace effort was rejected by the Mufti, the UN Security Council authorized the Consuls-General of the United States, France and Belgium to try to arrange a truce in Jerusalem. At the same time, American Consul-General Thomas Wasson, the most congenial and effective diplomat in the city, worked to secure Mount Scopus from attack. At the end of the month he was killed by Arab fire near his consulate. Hadassah doctors fought twelve hours in vain to save his life.

Immediately after May 15, the British established a consulate in Jerusalem proper and appointed two consuls to handle Arab and Israeli affairs. Consul John Guy Tempest Sheringham applied himself to the Scopus problem and on May 31, a phone conversation with Hebrew University Administrator Dr. Werner Senator, he advised Israel to surrender Scopus. Senator left a record of the talk:

Sheringham: 'The best way to safeguard the University and Hadassah buildings would be to accept King Abdullah's offer to put them under the protection of the Arab Legion.'

Senator: 'The best way it seems to me would be to advise King Abdullah not to shell the University and Hadassah.'

Sheringham: 'Your military situation is not very bright. You have not succeeded in driving the Arabs out of Jerusalem.'

Senator: 'The responsibility for the Legion's acts against the University and Hadassah lay with the British Government.'

In Washington, innumerable pleas were made to every imaginable source to help relieve Scopus. The State Department was helpful in one respect: Secretary of State George Marshall agreed that cables from the National Board could be relayed through the consulate in Jerusalem to Davis and Ethel Agron.

In the end, an agreement was worked out whereby the United Nations would assume control of Scopus, over which it would fly its flag and provide observers to maintain the area as a demilitarized zone. Eighty-four Jewish police would guard installations at Hadassah and the Hebrew University while 40 Arabs would guard Arab property on Scopus. The UN agreed to supply and exchange the Jewish police in regular fortnightly convoys through the Arab Sheikh Jarrah Quarter. Hadassah and the University were evacuated on July 6 and demilitarization was completed on July 7 when the first police, Israeli soldiers in police uniform, went up.

Out of tragedy and fortitude had come triumph. While the price—an entire medical center and university—had been high, Mount Scopus had not fallen into Arab hands and it would serve as a base for Israeli forces to win the entire city in 1967. On balance, Scopus was the pawn that Hadassah had sacrificed to save the queen.

Jewish Jerusalem was rescued at the eleventh hour by a month-long truce that began on June 11. In another twenty four hours not another scrap of food would have been available. Battered and bloody, the city stood—most of it in Israeli hands. Looking back, Davis hardly knew how he had made it. Tetanus antitoxin was near the vanishing point and could no longer be given routinely; two wounded died for lack of the drug. X-ray film was short, morphine low, hypodermic needles, alcohol, adhesive plaster and catgut silk practically gone. “We were forced to keep one eye on stocks and one eye on the patient,” Davis reported. He pleaded for help from the Red Cross but aid first came dramatically from New York due to the frantic efforts of the National Board.

Hadassah’s Margaret Doniger set up blood plasma collection centers on America’s east and west coasts. But more immediate first aid came from an airlift of 15,675 pounds of medicines and supplies, organized under the direction of Purchasing Committee Chairman Miriam Handler. These supplies were only a drop compared to the more than two million pounds of supplies sent by Hadassah that year, but they arrived at a critical time.

On the plane was Lola Kramarsky who was to become the first European-born leader elected Hadassah president (1960). Lola and her husband Siegfried Kramarsky, both committed Zionists and close friends of the Weizmanns, arrived in the United States in 1940 as refugees from Hitler’s Europe. Lola had been active in the Youth Aliyah movement and was present when Henrietta Szold greeted the first group of Youth Aliyah children to reach Palestine. With Lola on the plane was Jeanette Leibel Lourie, Hadassah’s meticulous executive director.

It was now the beginning of July 1948, and the one-month truce was about to end. The chartered craft landed in Amsterdam where the supplies had to be reloaded on a C-54 cargo plane. At that time, Israel had no airfield that could take a larger craft. After long and harrowing hours in flight, during which the pilot of the plane had to radio several times for landing instructions, Lola, Jeanette and the supplies bumped down at Ein Shemer, south of Haifa. Appropriately the date was July 4. Forty Israeli soldiers rushed to the craft and began unloading. The scene was one of great relief and hilarity. Arthur Lourie, a South African-born diplomat, ran out in underwear to greet his wife; he had been bathing when he heard the plane land. Next day, the convoy of trucks arrived in Jerusalem, only four days before the resumption of war.

The next phase of the fighting lasted only ten days but it was sufficient for the Army of Israel, resupplied during the 30-day truce, to take the initiative. Jerusalem was no longer in danger although it was again being continuously shelled. Twenty-four hours before the war was renewed on July 9, Davis had completed a fully equipped underground operating theater in St. Joseph’s Convent—the first of its kind in the

country. Forty-six direct hits were suffered by St. Joseph's. On the third day, Dr. Shlomo Gorfunkel, a Hadassah X-ray specialist who had organized the Vilna Ghetto uprising and served with the partisans in the Vilna forests during the Holocaust, was killed by Arab fire in the streets of Jerusalem.

The fighting finally ended in Jerusalem on July 19, although sniping and occasional shelling would continue for several years. From the beginning of the shooting in December, Hadassah had treated most of the Jewish casualties in the city—a total of 3,550.

At the time, United Nations peace mediator Count Folke Bernadotte² was in Jerusalem offering compromise solutions—among them a considerable withdrawal by Israeli forces. On September 17 he and his French aide were fatally shot by members of LEHI. On arrival at Hadassah there was no hope for their lives. The provisional government of Israel under David Ben-Gurion condemned the act. Three days after the assassination, the Mufti proclaimed a Palestine Arab state—one he could have had less than a year earlier without bloodshed—but now it was too late. King Abdullah outfoxed him and in October mobilized 5,000 notables to accept his sovereignty over all Arab Palestine. In another year he would annex the West Bank and East Jerusalem to his newly-named Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

But the war was still not over. In mid-October, Israeli forces, now an organized army, moved south to take the Bedouin village of Beersheba. Hadassah would soon follow the troops to open a hospital there—Hadassah's first in the Negev—as a memorial to Haim Yassky. At October's end, the Israelis consolidated their gains in Galilee.

The final campaign of Israel's War of Independence occurred as the year ended. Forces moved deep into the Negev and Sinai and on January 19, 1949, the shooting war came to an ironic end. Hours before the cease-fire went into effect, five British-piloted Spitfires flew from Egypt to determine whether the Israelis had, as agreed, withdrawn from the Sinai. Mistaking the planes for Egyptians, the Israelis brought four of them down in air-to-air combat and one by ground fire. The word flashed around the world and for a few days it seemed as though the triumphant Israelis might have to fight the British. President Truman and others, including friendly British leaders, scolded the Royal Air Force for having stuck its nose where it did not belong and the crisis subsided. In the Rehovot home of Chaim Weizmann, the soon-to-be President informed a British friend and Member of Parliament, Richard Crossman, of the incident. Crossman is said to have replied, "Don't worry. This means you are now a state. Britain will recognize you within the month." On January 30, 1949, a chastised and humiliated British Foreign Secretary Bevin accorded *de facto* recognition to the State of Israel.

Succeeding Count Bernadotte, American mediator Ralph Bunche negotiated armistice agreements with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria in the months of February, March, April and July. Iraq refused to negotiate and removed its troops from the West Bank. While the armistice lines would be the frontiers of Israel for the next nineteen years, the agreements were flimsy and did not, as hoped, lead to peace pacts. But they

were a measure of the state's permanence and no one who had gone through the War of Independence in Israel new doubted that the infant state would survive.

Hadassah had been a midwife to the state all through its difficult birth. In recognition of that service, David Ben-Gurion, after becoming Prime Minister in Israel's first elections held on January 25, 1949, said:

The achievements of Hadassah in Zionism generally; its invaluable contribution to our war of liberation and independence; the work of its people here under fire on Mount Scopus and on the fronts, will live in the history of our nation forever.

¹ Palmach veteran Avi Levanon, 25, the deputy commander of Mount Scopus, was employed by Hadassah in the technical department. He was returning to his post after going home to celebrate Yehoshua's second birthday.

² Bernadotte, who had arranged the month-long truce in June, proposed a peace settlement that would have given all of Jerusalem and the Negev to Jordan in exchange for western Galilee. Later fighting would, in any case, win all of Galilee for Israel.