
JUBILATION AND DISAPPOINTMENT

Following the U.N. partition plan for Palestine, the first phase of the War of Independence began—a civil war between the Arabs and the Jews of Palestine. In fighting on a new front against the Arab countries and the Palestinian Arabs, who opposed the partition, Etzel needed capabilities that it had not yet developed, and its two major military operations—seizing Deir Yassin and Jaffa—sparked great controversy.

In 1948, Deir Yassin was a relatively small Arab village west of Jerusalem, and its residents maintained peaceful neighborly relations with the nearby Jewish communities—despite the occasional times they opened fire in their direction. The village symbolized the historic relations between Jews and Arabs throughout the twentieth century, and though it had no strategic value, it was considered important mainly because it was one link in the chain of villages through which Arab reinforcements made their way from Hebron and Bethlehem to the battles in Jerusalem. The Jews valued the location because next to the village was a flat spread of land that was intended for the establishment of an airfield.

In early April, Ben Gurion ordered Operation Nachshon—the breach of the siege of Jerusalem—despite the opposition of many commanders, who feared defeat. During the operation the Palmach fighters seized Qastel Hill, but the Arabs recaptured it. At the height of the battle the Haganah asked Etzel and Lehi for assistance (that April an agreement of operational cooperation had been signed among Etzel, Lehi, and the Haganah), but Mordechai Raanan, Etzel's Jerusalem commander, said that his forces were not ready. When he announced