

THE FALL OF JERUSALEM, 1967

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Monday morning, June 5, 1967. At 0850 an Aide-de-Camp called the Palace in Amman to report to King Hussein Radio Cairo's communiqué that Israel had attacked Egypt. By 0900 the Egyptian General Abdul-Moneim Riad — who had arrived in Amman with a small group of staff officers to take command of the Jordanian front a few days before the war began — had received a coded message in Amman from UAR Field Marshal Amer. The UAR, the message said, had put out of action 75 per cent of the Israeli planes that had attacked the Egyptian airports and the UAR Army, having met the Israeli land attack in Sinai, was going over to a counter-offensive. "Therefore Marshal Amer orders the opening of a new front by the commander of the Jordanian forces and the launching of offensive operations according to the plan drawn up last night."¹

In Arab Jerusalem, Ishak Duzdar and Bahjat Abu Gharbiyeh, leaders of the civilian resistance committee formed at the end of May, were at the Governorate demanding arms. Governor Anwar Khatib had already called the army and had been promised they would be delivered that day. The two men returned to the Old City to await the rest of their staff at resistance committee HQs.

And at 0910 hours, according to the Churchills' account (based on the Israeli War Diaries) the Israeli commander of the Central Front, General Uzzi Narkiss was on the telephone on the other side of the cease-fire line, talking with Teddy Kollek, Mayor of Israeli Jerusalem.

"It's a war but everything is well under control. You may well be Mayor of a united Jerusalem."²

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¹ Extract from the Jordanian War Diary as published by Hussein in *Ma Guerre Avec Israel* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1968), p. 74.

² Randolph S. and Winston S. Churchill, *The Six Day War* (London: William Heinemann, 1967), p. 128.

Firing broke out in Jerusalem an hour later along the length of the Mandlebaum Gate frontier positions. Both sides were using machine guns and bullets whined through the air. All of the shops on the Jordanian side were shuttered and dozens of businessmen were driving off from the commercial quarter to their homes in the surrounding suburbs.

In the Jordanian Governorate, Anwar Khattib was reviewing the military situation with Hazim Khalidi, a former British officer and instructor in the Syrian army college, who had become Director of Arab Jerusalem's Tourism. Khalidi asked Khattib how many soldiers were defending the district.

"We have five brigades ... what does that come to in numbers of men?" "Between 15,000 and 20,000 soldiers. But are you sure there are five brigades?" Khalidi asked.

The Governor said he was certain. He had been told this two days ago by Sherif Nasser, the uncle of the King. But he looked disturbed. Khalidi told Khattib not to worry.

"If we have that many we can take the New City and if we don't do that we could hold out here for a month." They set out for the police compound of Karm el-Alami, where the Forward Command Post Staff was headquartered under Brigadier Ata Ali, the commander of the Jordanian forces in Jerusalem.

At the forward command post Khattib and Khalidi found the Brigadier, chief of police Colonel Mohammed Sarif, two Army sergeants from the Signal Corps manning telephones and an artillery sergeant and two policemen operating a wireless radio in contact with Amman headquarters. A jeep with wireless radio was parked outside the post for contact with field commanders.

The police station compound had not been fortified. There were no sandbags in sight nor were there any soldiers dug in to provide security. The policemen had been issued helmets and rifles, but they moved about without any apparent orders and later in the morning a drove of foreign correspondents were allowed to pour into the cramped command post. At Khattib's request Khalidi was to usher the press outside, promise occasional briefings by the compound gate and then order the police to bar journalists from entering the compound in the future.

The Brigadier was issuing his orders by telephone and wireless for the disposition of troops and Khalidi realized minutes after he had entered that Ata Ali did not have five brigades. There were no staff officers present as liaison for other brigades and Ata Ali was directing the movement of platoons and companies, not battalions. Khalidi drew Khattib aside to explain the situation but the Governor, while obviously disturbed, refused to believe him.

Khattib was called to the telephone. King Hussein was on the line in Amman. When he asked about public morale, Khattib reported that it was high. The Governor was not exaggerating; hundreds of young men were

flocking to police and civil defence posts throughout the district demanding arms, the Jordanian positions appeared to be dominating the small arms fire fights and the Radio Cairo communiqués were exhilarating.

But the King had sounded depressed over the phone and Khalidi suggested to Khattib this might mean the spectacular radio claims were not true.

“You always look at things in a pessimistic manner and exaggerate dangers, like thinking we don’t have five brigades,” Khattib said.

They argued the point and the Governor pressed Khalidi to speak up; he was a military man and it was not the time for niceties.

As soon as Ata Ali was off the phone Khalidi told the Brigadier that despite the Governor’s assurances he could not believe there were five brigades defending the district and gave his reasons.

Colour drained from the face of Ata.

“We will have five brigades here by this evening. This is part of the war plan for defending Jerusalem but we have been caught unawares.”

One brigade — three infantry battalions, one artillery regiment and a field engineers’ company — was stretched about the district of Jerusalem like a wobbly amoeba attempting to contain the narrow Israeli territorial thrust into the West Bank known as the Corridor and crowned by Jewish Jerusalem.

The southern perimeter was defended at its bottom half by a battalion (500 men) positioned at Sur Baher, a high ground village which overlooked the main road linking the northern and southern parts of the West Bank. The upper half of the perimeter, broken in the middle by a demilitarized zone, was held by a company (120 men) at the village of Abu Tur.

The central perimeter consisted of less than one battalion, manning the walls of the Old City from Damascus Gate to Zion Gate. The soldiers in the Old City were reservists who had received their three months training in early spring and had been called up shortly before the war. These reservists were fresh from the Hebron district and they were not familiar with either the city or its suburbs.

The northern perimeter, from Damascus Gate to Ammunition Hill, was the only seriously fortified Jordanian position in the Jerusalem District. It was held by an elite unit — The Second King Hussein Battalion — recruited from the East Bank and Palestinian peasantry. Still further to the north a company of reservists covered the approach-road to Jerusalem at Nebi Yacoub; under a platoon of infantrymen were drawn from this company to defend the critical position of Nebi Samuel, which guarded the entire northern flank of the district.

The artillery units possessed only two 120 mm. mortars within the walled city, eighteen 25-pounder guns, largely concentrated in positions north of the city, and jeep-mounted anti-tank recoilless rifles attached to the infantry

battalions. There were no anti-aircraft guns in or around the city, nor tanks, nor heavy artillery nor any heavier anti-tank weapons than the 106 mm. recoilless.

Less than 5,000 men defended Jerusalem out of an army of approximately 56,000. Against this one brigade were to be ranged three Israeli brigades — the local “Jerusalem” Infantry brigade and a paratrooper brigade (both with tank support) and an armoured brigade, all under the central command of General Uzzi Narkiss.

The Jordanian soldier carried either the American M-1 Garand or M-1 carbine (semi-automatic, short-clip loading rifles that were considered obsolete at the time of the Korean War and replaced in the American Army with automatic rifles by the late fifties). These weapons were supplemented by the use of Bren automatic rifles.

The Israelis all carried automatic weapons — either the Israeli-manufactured Uzzi submachine gun or the FN — the Belgian manufactured standard NATO automatic rifle.

At 1130 hours, on orders from West Bank HQs, Ata Ali opened up artillery fire on the Israelis. In reply to his requests for air cover the Brigadier was told by Amman that all planes were engaged in a battle for air supremacy but they would come in due course. A few hours later, after one cursory strafing and bomb run over Israel, the Jordanian air force was caught on the ground refuelling and destroyed.

UN General Odd Bull was working for a cease-fire in Jerusalem. Between 1130 and 1530 hours when the telephone lines were finally cut, Colonel Murray Stanaway at the Mixed Armistice Commission HQs near Mandlebaum Gate attempted three times to arrange a cease-fire. Each time he called, the Jordanian MAC representative accepted the request but on condition that the Israelis cease fire first since they had initiated the artillery duels earlier in the morning farther north and Jenin was under heavy Israeli fire. The Israelis also agreed to the cease-fire but the shelling continued.³

Shortly after noon, the West Bank Command HQs ordered the immediate occupation of Government House, the headquarters of the UN in Jerusalem. Ata Ali called his battalion commander at Sur Baher village and told him to commit two of his three companies to the attack by 1300 hours.

Both Khalidi and Khattib feared the international repercussions of the attack. The Governor asked the police chief to find out whether the Prime

³ The Churchills, quoting from the Israeli Central Command (General Narkiss) Diary provide an idea of what happened to Odd Bull's cease-fire: “1200 (hours) The United Nations asked for a cease-fire. Narkiss agreed. 1210 — Narkiss spoke to Barlev (Deputy Chief of Staff) and told him: ‘I think we must act. I consider the Jordanians would like only to be able to say that they have fought, then they will shut up. But I would very much like to get in and take the positions mentioned.’” *Ibid.*, p. 129.

Minister knew of this order: fifteen minutes later Amman called back to confirm that Prime Minister Juma'a knew of the command. Khalidi cursed.

The attack was to be a haphazard affair. There had been no prior planning; there were no tanks or other armour in Arab Jerusalem and the only anti-tank guns available in case of counter-attack would be three short-range 106 mm. recoilless rifles mounted on jeeps.

The Jordanians could expect to take Government House with minimal or no resistance from the UN command and be in defensive positions within half an hour. But within a short time after that the Israelis could be expected to mount a counter-attack in strength spearheaded by tanks. The recoilless rifles could at best take out two tanks each before being located and destroyed and the position overrun.

Khalidi suggested that the attack should be delayed until 1700 hours and mines planted on the approaches in the meantime. The Israelis might hesitate to launch a night attack, and this would leave time to reinforce the position with troops due to arrive in Jerusalem that night. Ata Ali rang up the company of engineers but found that none of the officers could be located immediately and that no armoured personnel carriers were available to carry the mines. Khalidi suggested calling upon the civilian population to carry the mines. But Ata was determined to attack at 1300 hours. By 1330 Government House was in Arab hands, and all posts in the district were reporting Jordanian domination of the artillery and small arms fights.

At 1500 hours an Israeli tank battalion and infantry units from the local brigade began the counter-attack. Twelve tanks led against the Sur Baher position and twelve against Government House. The remaining Jordanian company at Sur Baher, lacking anti-tank weapons, withdrew to the next hill.

The first Israeli assault against Government House failed. Two of the tanks were destroyed and six others hit. In exchange the three Jordanian recoilless rifle jeeps had been wiped out. But within half an hour six of the tanks that had taken Sur Baher moved up to renew the attack and by 1545 they were pounding Government House unopposed.

The Jordanian commander was in a tight spot; his men, taking casualties, had fallen back into Government House. His wireless operator was dead and the position about to be encircled.

"Hold firm, hold firm," Ata Ali kept telling him over the wireless.

In the forward command post Ata paced the floor. "What can I do? The man must hold."

"Tell him to use his common sense," Khalidi said.

"He'll withdraw"; the Brigadier replied.

So the Jordanian commander withdrew. With the help of a Jordanian platoon to the east which covered his retreat, he and his men went out of the

back door of Government House. When his unit regrouped he reported back 139 dead or missing out of 400; a number of his men had either lost their way or deserted when the position fell.

The first day was to be one of missed opportunities for the Jordanians elsewhere. A study in the official journal of the British Royal Artillery was later to comment with surprise on the behaviour of the Jordanian artillery on the central front: "Once hostilities had started, all the main Israeli air bases... were within reach of the Jordanian 155 mm. guns. Had they taken on these vital targets, the Jordanians could have caused havoc amongst the Israeli aircraft refuelling; they may well have missed a vital opportunity to change the course of the war." According to authoritative Israeli sources — whose interest would be to exaggerate Jordanian bombardment as the alleged justification for invading the West Bank — only one shell ever fell in the Tel Aviv area, fired at 2100 hours on Monday night [June 5].

Earlier on Monday afternoon in Jerusalem, 260 Enfield rifles, 20 sten (submachine) guns, 20 Bren guns and ammunition were delivered to Bahjat Abu Gharbiyeh at a secret arms centre maintained by the resistance committee.

Some of these arms were distributed in the immediate suburban districts already in danger and almost none within the walled city where thousands were waiting for weapons. One hundred weapons were distributed directly by the Army in small consignments to a few selected civilian centres in Jerusalem and Abu Tur. One thousand additional small arms, to be brought in by convoy with the reinforcements expected by nightfall, were promised to the committee.

I had been in the Jerusalem radio station as the men were wiping the last bits of protective grease off a dozen sten guns delivered by the Army. The girls on the staff were loading cartridges into the few dozen ammunition clips that had come with the weapons. There were no sand bags available to buttress the building and men were taking up firing positions behind closed and untaped windows. An army machine gun squad on the roof (to be pulled out later and thrown into the line) protected the building and a few holes dug in the front garden were manned by armed civilians from the station.

Most of the men had never received military training.

At 1700 hours an Israeli armoured brigade commanded by Colonel Uri Ben-Ari began to assault the barely defended mountain ridges north of Jerusalem and Ramallah, key to control of the entire Judean Hills area.

The Jordanians had mined the approaches but the positions at Sheikh Abd-al-Aziz, Radar, Beit Iksa and Nebi Samuel were either abandoned or barely manned. The Israelis had begun mine clearing in the afternoon and by midnight their tanks were to be well within Jordanian territory.

None of this was known at the forward command post in Jerusalem and one of the great mysteries of the war on the West Bank was this sort of breakdown in accurate communications.

By 1800 hours all telephone lines outside of Jerusalem were cut; by 1930 hours the Ramallah radio transmitter was knocked out and the Jerusalem station forced off the air. Electricity lines were also down but the local electric company crews managed to get out of the city under fire and make repairs.

By nightfall all hope in the Jerusalem forward command post still centred around the idea of four relief brigades. Ata Ali and Khalidi discussed the situation and assumed that if reinforcements were assembling in Jericho after sundown and given an hour for organization, two hours en route and an additional two hour margin of error, they would enter the city between 2200 hours and 0100 Tuesday morning, leaving a minimum of three hours for dispersal before dawn.

Communication outside of the city was now possible only by wireless. "Reinforcements are coming," Amman kept repeating. But the forward command post was unable to make contact with the West Bank HQs of Major General Salim. Only later were they to discover that the headquarters staff, responsible for the command of all Jordanian forces committed to the West Bank, had withdrawn after sunset that first evening.

About 2100 hours flares could be seen falling in the distance followed by the sound of bombs bursting in back of and beyond the Mount of Olives.

It was the Israeli air force smashing the relief column, a tank regiment drawn from the 60th armoured Brigade and one infantry battalion — all that remained at Khal al-Ahmar to the Imam Ali Infantry Brigade after earlier reinforcements sent to Jerusalem had been broken up on the road by Israeli air strikes.

By 2300 hours all was quiet to the east; there were no longer flashes across the skyline. Brigade HQs at Eizeriya informed Ata Ali that the relief column had been wiped out.

The Brigadier was shaken to the bone. Khalidi advised Ata Ali to request support from the Hitteen Infantry Brigade to the south in the Bethlehem-Hebron region and ask for the support of an additional infantry brigade to be moved down from the north. Eizeriya HQs replied that the brigade in Hebron was braced for an attack and could not move. The same was true for units being held in reserve in the Ramallah area.

Command HQs calculated that an infantry brigade drawn from reserves concentrating around Jericho and driven for as far and as fast as possible by truck could then be forced marched to evade Israeli interception and still reach the city by morning. Response from Amman HQs was favourable and the forward command post began to live again on hope.

Inside the Old City no one knew how desperate the situation had become and the lulls in firing in the early evening were disarming. The resistance committee staff had decided to leave their HQs for their homes and return early in the morning in the hope of an arms delivery. Both Duzdar and Abu Gharbiyeh slept outside the walls of the city and before dawn they were to be cut off by the Israeli attack that night. From early Tuesday morning civilian resistance was to become a purely personal, unorganized affair and at least a hundred armed civilians would die fighting in Wadi Juz, on the city walls or as isolated snipers in the final minutes of battle.

In a modern open-end city under attack, the sound of battle advances and recedes like the motions of a fluid front in the countryside. But within the Old City for the next thirty-six hours — dividing my time between shelters and visits to civil defence and command centres, walking through almost empty streets with only occasional patrols in sight or CD teams racing with boxes of ammunition to a threatened portion of the wall — the feeling was distortedly medieval, the ludicrous sense of an old-fashioned garrison under siege in a war fought with supersonic jets, napalm and tanks.

A little after 2300 hours the Israelis opened up with all their mortars and heavy artillery while search lights from the New City and the Mount Scopus enclave sought out targets for incoming fire. It was well past midnight when an observer on the roof of police headquarters next to the command post noticed that the search light beams were now meeting on empty spots of terrain and fixing there minutes at a time without any incoming fire following the exercise.

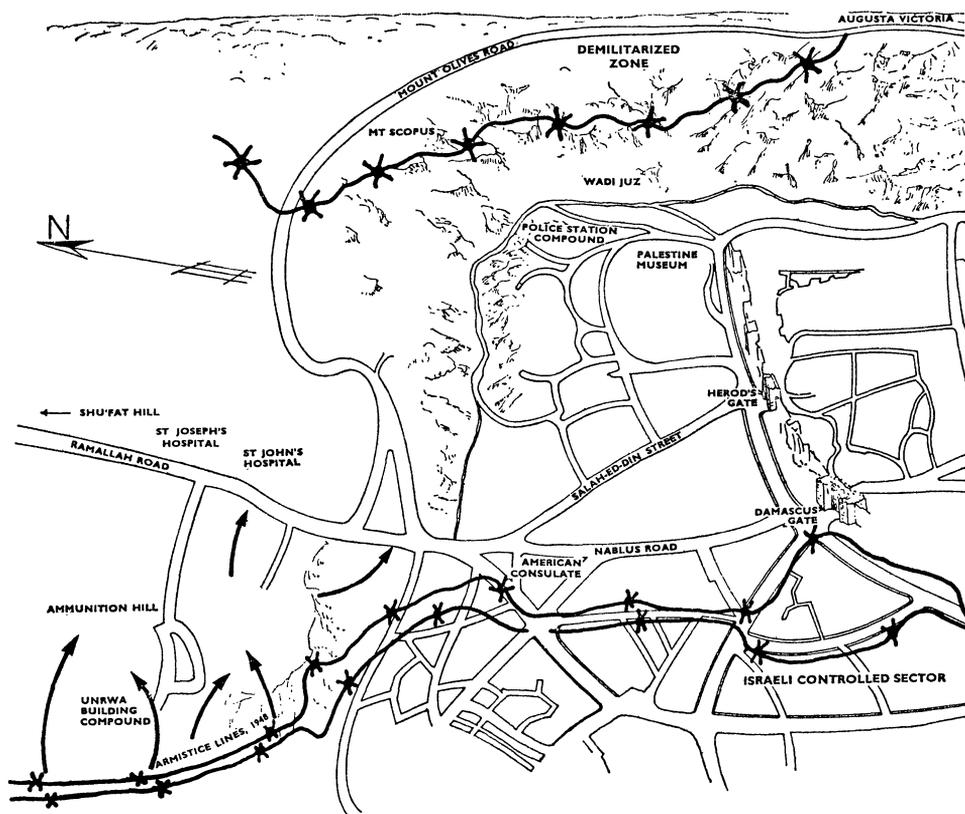
The Israelis were fixing hovering points for helicopters to discharge troops. Within fifteen minutes of the sighting, people from Wadi Juz were reporting to the forward command post that a small force of copterborne paratroopers were landing on the slope above Wadi Juz in an attempt to outflank the frontier positions along Nablus Road, the UNRWA building and Ammunition Hill. At least forty paratroopers were brought in behind Jordanian lines in four separate drops and the sound of hovering helicopters could be heard even in the forward command post.⁴

Ata Ali ordered a platoon off Ammunition Hill and into the wooded area northwest of the British Military Cemetery on Mount Scopus to cut off the advancing paratroopers. A band of armed civilians operating in loose

⁴ There is no account of this action in any of the studies in English based on Israeli Army sources that I have checked, including the otherwise very authoritative if discreet Israeli Defence Ministry edition *The Six Days War*. It may be that helicopter techniques utilized so dramatically in raids beyond the post-June War cease-fire lines since the war were considered as classified material in 1967.

coordination with the 2nd Battalion holding the now threatened northern perimeter were sent into Wadi Juz to open fire on the paras' flank.

The paratroopers were soon pinned down not far from St. Joseph's Hospital by intense fire from the Jordanian interceptor platoon.



MAP 1. Places named in the description of the capture of the suburbs.
(Arrows indicate the origins of the main Israeli thrust).

At 0200 hours the rest of the paratroopers' brigade began a push against Jerusalem's northern perimeter. Artillery fire concentrated on the Jordanian emplacements and two Israeli battalions, one operating in the UNRWA building area and the other against the Nablus Road defences moved across no-man's land behind tanks. Searchlights were to enable Israeli aircraft to fly support missions against the UNRWA building compound and Ammunition Hill, bombing and strafing the Jordanian lines.

Whenever the Israeli planes appeared, whether to strafe infantry fortifications or to rocket and bomb out artillery positions, the Jordanians opened up with what automatic rifles they had and the bullets from their Bren guns arched over the Old City and Augusta Victoria like a playful fireworks display — not the angry, hopeless gesture that it was, of an army deprived of anti-aircraft weapons.

The sound was deafening. A mile away in the heart of the Old City I thought the walls were being assaulted.

Khalidi called the command post. It was thought there that the platoon brought in by helicopters had broken out of the ambush by the Jordanian battalion and was moving up against the UNRWA compound at the very moment the Nablus Road defence line was about to be overrun.

That information was wrong. Somehow this one Jordanian battalion (and a handful of armed civilians), abandoned by many of their officers, fought on for five hours despite intense artillery and tank fire, air strikes and the advance — at two concentration points — of two and then three Israeli paratrooper battalions. Outgunned by superior Israeli small arms fire the Jordanians held in their trenches and bunkers, meeting the Israeli rushes with fixed bayonet, forcing the paratroopers back, until rushed again — their bunkers blasted by dynamite charge or artillery and tank fire, their trenches overwhelmed.

From Mandlebaum Gate, along Nablus Road to the UNRWA compound and Ammunition Hill the front became fluid. Israelis would pour through the Jordanian line only to be cut down in the streets by Arab soldiers and armed civilians who had fallen back to take up new positions at windows and on roofs of neighbouring houses.

Everywhere else, on the West Bank, in Sinai and on the Golan Heights the “mailed fist” tactic of fast moving armour and infantry breakthroughs, following in the wake of air strikes, effectively demoralized both Arab regulars and any potential if unorganized civilian resistance once the initial assault had punched its way through static Arab front lines placed well outside the cities.

But in Jerusalem the tight geography of the 1949 armistice line meant that along the northern perimeter the Israelis were up against committed soldiers and individual armed civilians able to fall back from their punctured line to fight in a close-by built-up area. Here, according to the Israeli Defence Ministry account, was the scene of “the toughest fighting of the war” and here, in proportion to the number of troops committed, the Israelis took their most severe casualties during this sole occasion in the June War of serious house-to-house combat.

Shortly after dawn, Israeli planes were finally able to finish off the remaining Jordanian artillery positions that had slowed down the assault. The last

centre of Jordanian resistance on Nablus Road — a gas station opposite the American consulate — was wiped out by a column of seven Israeli tanks which then pushed down the road to Damascus Gate and opened fire against Jordanian positions on the wall at close range. The return fire from the Arab soldiers and civilians manning the wall was intense and the tanks withdrew to rejoin the main paratrooper thrust past the Palestine Museum.

Just after dawn on Tuesday, Ata Ali called the Governor at the hotel where he had slept and reported the breakthrough on the city's northern perimeter. The Israelis were already at Schmidts Girls School opposite Damascus Gate, had pushed through the centre of the Zahera commercial district to seize the Palestine Museum and were threatening Salah-ed-Din, the last main street in Jordanian hands leading back to the Old City. By now an Israeli flag was flying from St. John's Hospital in Sheikh Jarrah. The suburbs were lost.

The Brigadier was going to withdraw into the Old City before being cut off, and he advised the Governor to stay where he was since he doubted that Khattib could make it. The Governor and Khalidi nevertheless went out through the streets and succeeded in reaching Herod's Gate under heavy fire.

Major Mansour Kraishan, the commander of the elite Second Battalion was at the gate and he told Khattib and Khalidi that aside from a company drawn from his unit and now dug in on Shu'fat Hill (known to the Israelis as "Hamiviar") there were only 69 men left under his command. He had been bombed out of his own HQs next to Rashidiya College opposite Herod's Gate and had moved with the remnants of his magnificent battalion into the walled city. Kraishan, a tall, handsome man in his early forties was a brave officer; he survived the war with rare honour to die along the River Jordan on February 14, 1968 during an all-day Israeli artillery attack against the Eastern Valley refugee camps and villages.

Ata Ali had established headquarters in the basement of the Armenian convent on the Via Dolorosa but the Governor, in great emotional distress, refused to go there. If Jerusalem was to fall he would wait in Beit al-Majlis... the "House of the Miracle"... the Haram.⁵ So Khattib, Khalidi and an escort of policemen made their way to the Haram al-Sharif and into the almost deserted *Awqaf* building⁶ and turned it into the last civilian command post.

⁵ The Haram al-Sharif (The Noble Sanctuary) is a 34 acre compound on the east of the Old City, occupying a quarter of the area of the city. Its precincts include the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, prayer platforms, religious court buildings, tombs of the holy and numerous sites associated by history and tradition with Malki-Sedik the Jebusite, Abraham, David, Solomon, Jesus and Mohammed. It is, with Mecca and Medina, one of the three Noble Sanctuaries of Islam authorised for pilgrimage.

⁶ The offices of the *Waqf*, a religious, educational and charitable Islamic endowment.

Outside the city walls the Israelis pressed on with their mopping up operations against isolated Arab snipers who continued to harass them through the day. At 0700 Khalidi left the *Awqaf* building to join Ata Ali at Army HQs. Brigade HQs at Eizeriya had reported no sign of the forced march relief column.

Ata Ali reviewed the situation. All of his gun emplacements had been napalmed out except for two within the Old City which were still firing. He had 500 soldiers left from the Brigade within the walled city (many of whom were reservist trainees) and plenty of ammunition. The only positions outside the walls still in Jordanian hands were Shu'fat Hill — cut off from Jerusalem by the Israeli paratroopers; the Augusta Victoria position between the Mount of Olives and Mount Scopus; Abu Tur, and Ras al-Amoud (a reinforced police post on the southernmost slope of the Mount of Olives).

The Brigadier believed that the Old City could still hold out. Khalidi agreed and returned to the *Awqaf* civilian command post to brief the Governor.

But by the second morning of the war, the Israelis on the West Bank had captured the Beit Ikse-Nebi Samuel ridge to the north of Jerusalem and had also taken Beit Hanina without resistance, putting themselves in control of almost all routes leading north to Ramallah and south to Jerusalem. From Beit Hanina they began to move against remaining elements of the Jordanian army cut off between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Other parts of the northern armoured brigade moved against Tel-el-Ful and would soon be in a position to cut off the Jerusalem-Jericho road.

A separate column of Israeli tanks and mechanized paratroopers had taken the critical Latrun Salient in the north. According to Trappist monks in a nearby monastery the Jordanian Army had evacuated the position — the scene of bitter fighting in 1948 — without firing a shot.

To the south-east, the Jordanian Hitteen Brigade in Hebron — which never entered combat — had withdrawn, as had the Ramallah Brigade. An Israeli armoured column was now moving on the Mar Elias monastery west of the Jerusalem southern perimeter and gateway to Bethlehem.

When Governor Khatib arrived at Ata Ali's command post late in the morning with Khalidi, the Brigade staff at Eizeriya HQs had finally discovered the extent of the rout and retreat and were radioing back their panic to the Brigadier.

Ata Ali told Eizeriya to contact the remains of the Battalion that had fought in the Government House-Sur Baher sector and had fallen back to the east on Monday evening, and order them to join up with the company defending Abu Tur south of the walled city.

The plan worked out by Ata Ali and Khalidi sought to maintain diversionary strong points at Abu Tur, Ras al-Amoud, Augusta Victoria and Shu'fat Hill to keep the Israelis busy all Tuesday and thus delay any concentration against the Old City, whose defences were reeling.

At 1200 hours after unopposed air attacks to soften up the exposed position, elements of the Israeli armoured column moved against the Jordanian company on Shu'fat Hill (reinforced in the early hours by survivors from the Wadi Juz and Ammunition Hill battles of the night before). The first Israeli assault wave swept into the lower trench work only to be hurled back by the Jordanians who had held their ground despite the preparatory pounding and then had fallen upon the Israeli infantrymen who had entered the trenches. At the sight of serious resistance the Israelis withdrew but shortly after noon their second assault carried the hill and the position fell.

Abu Tur, defended by combined Arab elements not quite equivalent to a battalion, fell to the Israeli local infantry brigade but not before three Jordanian strong points in this southern suburb had held up the Israeli advance for several hours.

In the afternoon Ata Ali received by wireless relay a message from King Hussein promising that a counter-attack to relieve Jerusalem would be launched that night.

And throughout the day the Jordanians on the wall kept up intense small arms fire upon the Palestine Museum (turned into a strongpoint and brigade HQs by the paratroopers) and any other visible Israeli concentrations.

Although there was still a considerable stock of ammunition on hand in Jerusalem, medical supplies were exhausted and the situation at the hospitals was now desperate. St. Joseph's, Augusta Victoria and the Government Hospital at the old Austrian Hospice within the walls had run out of blood by Monday afternoon and when they called the Blood Bank they were told there was nothing. Calls to the Ministry of Health bureau for bandages and anti-biotics on the same day brought promises but again nothing was to come. Everywhere staff members took turns giving transfusions but still three patients died at St. Joseph's (which handled the burden of casualties from the Nablus Road-UNRWA compound battles) due to loss of blood. According to the St. Joseph's staff there were no officers there among the Army wounded.

On the Via Dolorosa Musa Bitar's CD unit and the nuns of the Sisters of Zion and the Companions of Jesus holy orders cared for the wounded but here too shortages made conditions unbearable. But at the Government Hospital it was impossible even to estimate the number of soldiers and civilians who died for lack of blood and other supplies. There was nothing here but a charnel house; neither bandages, nor medicine, nor food nor even bread... only a desperately harried staff and rooms of wounded and dying men cursing

their officers for deserting under fire, cursing the King and his uncle Sherif Nasser for their lack of rations, for defective ammunition, for the absence of reinforcements.

Sunset, Tuesday, June 6. The Israeli paratroopers moved out from their concentration point near the Palestine Museum in an assault on the Augusta Victoria position. While Israeli tanks stationed near the Museum shelled the hillside, another (and reduced) tank battalion spearheaded the advance of two paratrooper battalions and a reconnaissance scout unit moving against the reinforced platoon of Jordanian reservist trainees holding the heights. The Israeli main force went up the northern slope, but a lead reconnaissance unit made the wrong turn and came under blistering fire from the Jordanians manning the northeast and eastern city walls.

At the same time the men dispersed over the Augusta Victoria area opened fire on both the main Israeli column and the reconnaissance unit, now trapped in a Jordanian cross-fire. Two tanks and a number of reconnaissance jeeps were destroyed. After two hours of fighting and mounting casualties, the Israelis fell back.

At 2200 hours the Jordanian counter-attack from the east began; a hopelessly delayed, doomed attempt by the Arab army to save Jerusalem. This time when the Israelis opened up on the relief column moving up from Jericho it was not only possible to see flashes of fire and flares as on the previous night but to hear the sound of battle for now the Israelis were in the Beit Hanina area and able to direct artillery fire against the column from the north as well as call in air strikes.

The relief column, its advance section shattered by air strikes and artillery fire, consisted of a Jordanian brigade. They had not heeded the original proposal for a night's forced march taking evasive measures, but had come straight up the road with tanks and trucks until the napalm blackened wreckage of their own armour blocked the road and barred any further advance.

As the sound of the battle drifted back to the Old City, religious fervour seized the enlisted men and civilians manning the wall. "*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar...* God alone is great" they chanted for two hours until the fire died down after midnight and the city understood that the counter-attack had failed.

At 0030 hours Wednesday morning, shortly after the sound of battle had died down to the east — to be replaced by intensified Israeli machine gun and mortar fire aimed at and over the walls — Ata Ali went to the *Awqaf* building and told Khattib that all but two of his officers had deserted earlier in the night.

The Brigadier went on to say that under such circumstances and with the troops on the walls profoundly demoralized by the desertions, by fatigue and by hunger, he could not continue fighting. Since the rest of the army in most

of the West Bank seemed to have withdrawn, he felt that he too had to withdraw. Khattib asked the Brigadier to try and hold on but Ata Ali described the difficulties involved in controlling troops without officers.

The Governor then suggested mobilizing popular resistance and using notables in the city as officers.

“All you’ll be doing is destroying Jerusalem. Jerusalem will definitely be assaulted by dawn and my troops are in no condition to resist,” the Brigadier declared.

Ata Ali invited Khattib to withdraw with him but the Governor refused.

“You are the military commander and you decide military behaviour, but Jerusalem is my adopted city and I’m not ready to leave it that way. If it is the will of God that I should die, I would not want to die anywhere else,” Khattib declared.

A group of NCOs arrived at the *Awqaf* at 0100 and reported to Ata Ali that some of the men were beginning to abandon their posts. About thirty civilians were standing around in the *Awqaf* and in order not to disturb them Ata Ali told the NCOs to return with him to their posts. But instead he went to the walls and passed word for the soldiers to get up and quietly assemble at Dung Gate. From there they slipped away.

Ata Ali’s departure left the Governor speechless and after five minutes of silence, Khalidi — fearing Anwar Bey would have a heart attack — gave him sedatives. Khattib asked to be alone for fifteen minutes and told Khalidi to act on his behalf until then.

A tremendous furore broke out at the door to the *Awqaf* as the civilian volunteers poured into the building to report that the troops were pulling out. There were about a hundred men in the crowd but not all of them were armed.

Khalidi restored order and told the volunteers that while the Governor knew nothing about this, there was nothing he could do; that you cannot force people to fight and that instead of shouting they had better man the walls.

The volunteers calmed down and moved off to take up the abandoned positions. The Governor rejoined Khalidi and the policemen standing by, and asked him to take over military affairs and consider the remaining possibilities of defence. Then Khattib wrote down the names of the municipal councillors and told a policeman to bring these men to the *Awqaf* for an emergency meeting.

A few minutes later twenty policemen appeared at the *Awqaf* to turn in their arms. By 0230 hours more policemen, volunteers and individual soldiers — who had either been left behind at their posts or decided to desert — began to hand in their weapons. A few other soldiers had also decided to stay behind and fight.

For the rest of Wednesday the Israeli air force, artillery and armoured

columns were to break up or overrun what Jordanian forces had remained on the West Bank, massed to the west of Nablus and at Qabatiya Junction, and by 1000 hours when the Israeli Northern and Central Command armoured units linked up at Damiya Bridge the entire West Bank had fallen.

In Jerusalem there were still a hundred armed men, civilian volunteers and a few soldiers manning the walls by 0800 hours, mainly clustered at Damascus Gate and Herod's Gate. But the city was finished and while some of the youths threw their briefly acquired arms into the open doorways of civil defence centres, the more far-sighted began to dig hiding places for their weapons.

The Mayor and a handful of councillors had returned to the *Awqaf* for the meeting in the Qadi's office while more than a hundred civilians milled about the building and outside the door.

Khalidi analysed the situation. The army had withdrawn but there was a considerable stock of arms and ammunition in the city.

Khalidi believed that it might be possible to hold the walls until nightfall but by then it would be necessary to fall back and fight through the streets, house by house.

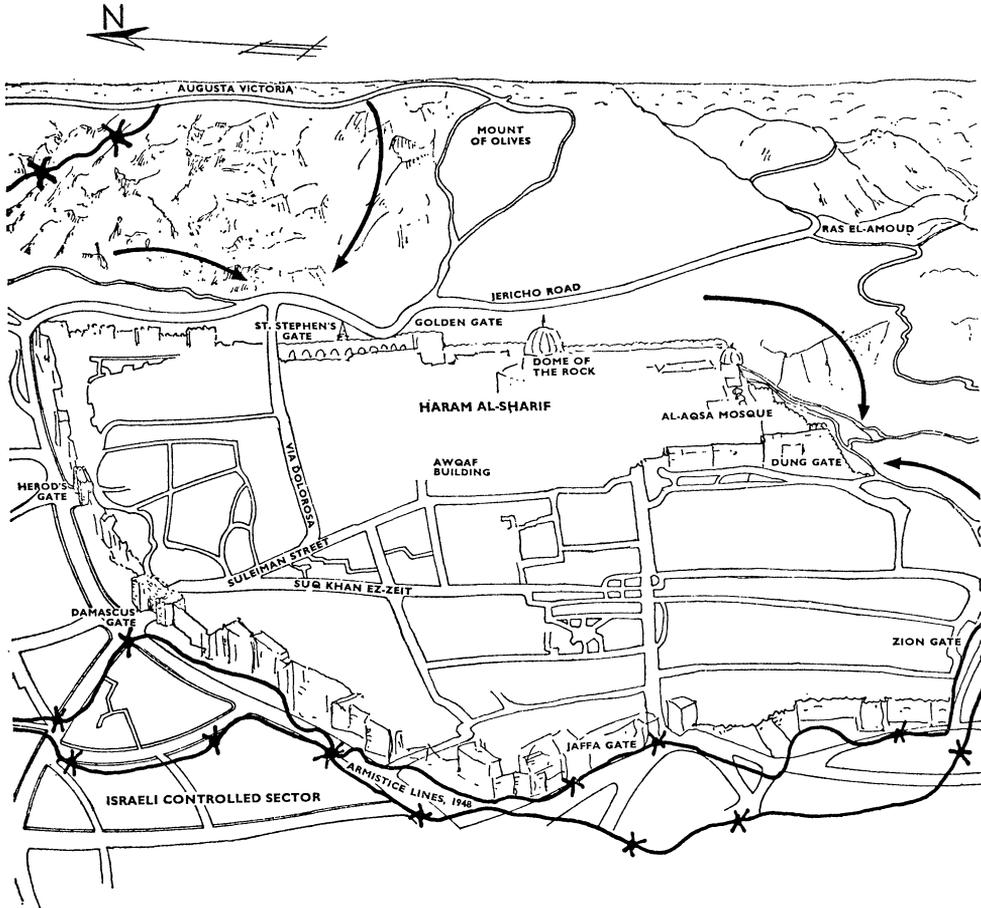
"You all must realize that if we fight the city will be destroyed because the enemy, to protect his own troops, will shell and bombard us."

Khalidi had barely finished his analysis when a squadron of Israeli fighter planes swept low over the Haram to drop high explosives and napalm upon the Augusta Victoria positions. The wind was blowing to the east and the dust from the explosive charges appeared to be rising over the Israeli enclave on Mount Scopus. The *Awqaf* was filled with the sound of wild cheers for the people thought it was the Israelis who were being bombed and the planes Iraqi. Armed volunteers in the lane outside the *Awqaf* began to fire off their rifles into the air, overjoyed by this sudden promise of deliverance.

Khalidi tried to explain that the planes were Israeli but he only succeeded in infuriating members of the crowd and someone accused him of being a British agent. The meeting had already dissolved into the general chaos flooding the building, there still was no quorum of councillors and Anwar began to fear for Khalidi's safety. The Governor adjourned the meeting until 1200 hours and Khalidi sat down to prepare a plan for improvised house to house resistance.

But the view of Augusta Victoria and the splashes of napalm boiling down the hillside slope had been clear enough. Whatever remained of a single platoon of Jordanian reservists, fighting under the command of a sergeant, having held up an Israeli paratroop brigade the day before, had now been wiped out from the air. When the dive-bombing had ended the paratroopers advanced under heavy artillery cover against the desolate position from Mount Scopus and directly up the Mount of Olives road from Wadi Juz. Tanks,

APCs and recoilless rifle-mounted jeeps swept across the ridges unopposed while an additional armoured element from this brigade moved from the Museum directly down to the Jericho Road, to take up an assault position in the valley below St. Stephen's Gate.



MAP 2. Places named in the description of the attack on the walled city.
(Arrows indicate the direction of the Israeli assault).

A few hours before the assault a Jordanian sergeant and two soldiers who had abandoned the city earlier in the morning reappeared at the *Awqaf*. They had reached the Mount of Olives in time to see the sun rise over Jerusalem, its rays catching on the Dome of the Rock, the vast platform of the Haram bathed in sudden light before their eyes and they could go no further. They had returned "to seek martyrdom."

The sergeant was from the Nablus region. The other two soldiers were also Palestinians. They drew a bazooka and eight rockets from the store of

arms and went over the eastern wall into the Moslem cemetery hugging Jerusalem high above the Kidron Valley. Here they dug a trench less than a hundred yards below the blocked-up Golden Gate — the gate of Mercy and Repentance — and waited for the assault to knock out two of the paratroopers' tanks before an Israeli plane could napalm their position.

Linking up at Augusta Victoria by 0930 the two Israeli battalions turned sharply towards the city and the tanks and artillery of the entire brigade opened up on the north-eastern Moslem quarter of the Old City. Pillows of smoke and dust rose above the walls and I thought the city was on fire.

By now the walls were deserted, but for a solitary Jordanian soldier who had remained to climb up into the St. Stephen's Gate minaret armed with a Bren gun and open fire as the paratrooper brigade advanced upon the city, their APC and tank machine guns working furiously.

Like Godfrey de Bouillon leaping first upon the wall, the Israeli commander jumped into his half-track and led the armoured spearhead through the gate in that "frenzied, reckless, mad race into the city..."

Ten to fifteen armed civilians and Arab soldiers scattered throughout the city sniped at the paratroopers pouring into Jerusalem. A few fought and died around the Via Dolorosa, others made their last stand near Damascus Gate or found their solitary deaths on roof tops and in obscure alleys in the centre of the city. Outside the city the handful of armed civilians who had taken over the abandoned el-Tur - Ras al-Amoud position were shelled and quickly overrun by the paratrooper reconnaissance company which had continued south along the Mount of Olives ridge. Along the south-western wall of the city a few snipers opened futile small arms fire upon the Israeli infantry brigade sweeping down from Mount Zion and into the Old City through Dung Gate.

The leading elements of the paratroopers, upon driving into the city, swerved sharply to the left and pushed on to the Haram al-Sharif. Within minutes they moved into the *Awqaf* from the north to take as prisoner the Governor, the Muslim Qadi and Khalidi. Heavy armour could not pass even through this northern and most accessible gate, so the paras stormed the shrine by foot and in jeeps with a tremendous roar that told those at the other end of the Haram that Jerusalem had fallen.

If Jerusalem (or any other West Bank city) had been prepared, if serious resistance had existed, the almost infinite lanes and narrow streets, tunnels, intersecting roofs and buttressed houses, cul-de-sacs, half-forgotten vaults and caves supporting the visible urban crust, rooms sunk beneath the street like cellars at one end that opened out upon roofs at the other end, would have provided the cover and confusion to have held off a division for days.

And if this hypothetical possibility had been duplicated systematically by a West Bank population armed and provided with elementary militia and guerrilla training, Jordan could have posed the one problem the Israeli army never was to confront (not even during the one night of stiff fighting outside the walled city of Jerusalem along Nablus Road) — the necessity to assault and capture any number of built-up areas in protracted door-to-door and hand-to-hand combat against opponents who knew every twist and turn of the urban terrain.

Powerful moral and political factors come into play when the energies of an entire people are called upon in the defence of their own land; factors which cannot so easily be calculated by Pentagon computers or CIA analysis.

It is difficult to estimate, this side of fantasy, what the effect would have been upon the result of the June War if the advancing Israeli army had faced armed and resisting Arab enclaves within the walled city of Jerusalem, in Nablus, Jenin, Hebron, Ramallah, Beit Jala, Qalqilya, Jericho and the refugee camps and the threat of armed bands of peasant partisans from the villages harassing their communication lines in the event of the prolonged hostilities that such popular resistance might have provoked.

But a blue and white flag now flew above the Wailing Wall. Later I read how Lieutenant-Colonel Moshe Peles, deputy commander of the paratroopers, had tied the flag on the sharp horizontal spokes of an adjacent iron fence to the cheers of his men below, to the cheers of all Israel, and, as the telephotos flashed away, to the cheers of Europe and America.

How proud Peles must have been. Never before had the Israelis been so triumphant or convinced that the Arab East was finally at their feet. That day Moshe Dayan told the press that he supported a confederation of Israel and Jordan. “The only country that can protect Jordan is Israel” he said.

As for the Lieutenant-Colonel, he was to be killed fourteen months later near Toubas, in the Nablus region, when his detachment was ambushed by al-Fateh fedayeen.