The Safsaf Massacre, 1948: Men Tied, Shot at a Well, and a Haganah Admission

Shortly before dawn on 29 October 1948, Zionist forces stormed the village of Safsaf in the Safad district, as part of Operation Hiram to occupy the Galilee. After the village fell, its men were tied with ropes and shot, women and girls were raped, and the remaining villagers were driven out to Lebanon.

The Village of Safsaf

Safsaf was a Palestinian Arab village in the Safad district, on a low hill east of the road between Safad and Tarshiha. In 1945 it had **910 inhabitants** and **124 houses**, along with a school, a mosque and several water springs.

Its people lived from farming. In 1945, **2,586 dunams** were used for grain, and **769 dunams** were irrigated or planted as orchards.

The Occupation of the Village

Safsaf was the headquarters of the Second Yarmuk Battalion of the Arab Liberation Army. As part of Operation Hiram, the **Seventh (Sheva) Brigade** attacked the village with armoured cars and tanks. The villagers and Arab Liberation Army fighters resisted, but Zionist forces took control of the village shortly before dawn on 29 October, and the Arab Liberation Army fighters withdrew towards Lebanon.

The forces surrounded the village on three sides, then gathered the residents who remained.

The Massacre

After taking the village, soldiers picked out dozens of men, tied them with ropes and shot them. Soldiers took four girls to empty houses and raped them.

A villager told the Palestinian historian Nafez Nazzal that the soldiers blindfolded **about 70 of the village's men** and executed them by firing squad in front of the villagers.

An Admission from Within the Zionist Leadership

The details of the massacre do not come only from the villagers' testimony. Israel Galili, the former chief of staff of the Haganah, recorded a list of the crimes committed by soldiers in Safsaf:

> "52 men tied with a rope and dropped into a well and shot. 10 were killed. Women pleaded for mercy. 3 cases of rape. A girl aged 14 was raped. Another 4 were killed."

Expulsion

After the massacre, the remaining villagers left under cover of night, four or five at a time, until Safsaf was empty. Most of them took refuge in Lebanon, where their descendants still live in refugee camps today.

The occupation destroyed the village and built the settlement of Ha-Shahar, later renamed **Safsufa (Sifsofa)**, on its land in 1949, followed by the settlement of Bar Yochai in 1979.

Frequently Asked Questions About the Safsaf Massacre

When did the Safsaf massacre take place?

Shortly before dawn on 29 October 1948, during Operation Hiram to occupy the Galilee.

Where was Safsaf?

In the Safad district of the Upper Galilee, east of the road between Safad and Tarshiha.

Who carried out the Safsaf massacre?

The Seventh (Sheva) Brigade of the Israeli army.

How many were killed in the Safsaf massacre?

According to Israel Galili's list, 52 men were tied up and shot, 10 of whom were killed, and another 4 were killed. According to a villager's testimony, about 70 men were executed.

What was built on the land of Safsaf?

The settlement of Safsufa in 1949 and the settlement of Bar Yochai in 1979.

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