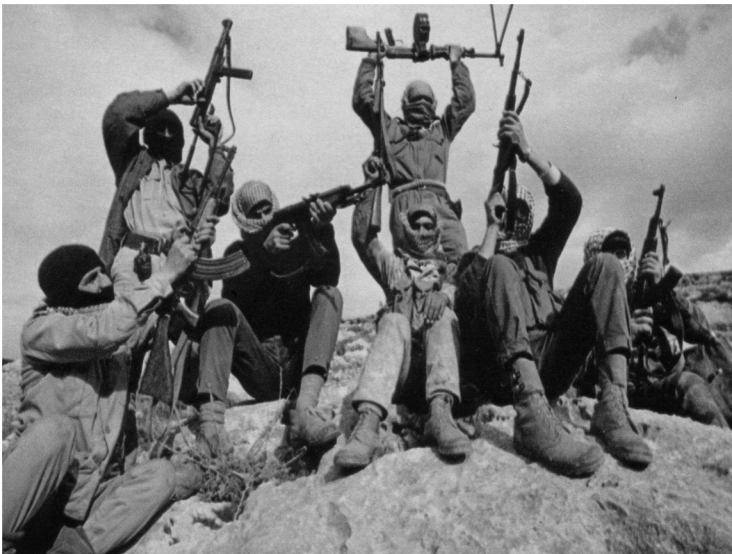
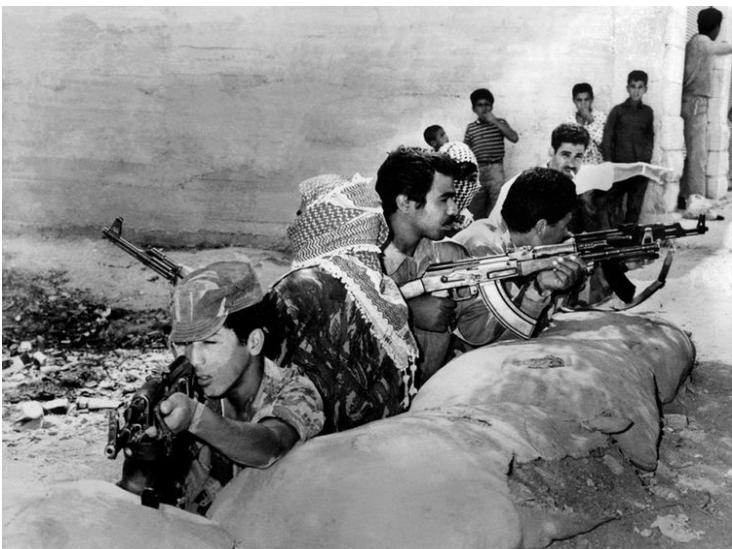


5. Wahdat refugee camp is on the southern edge of Amman. Slightly larger than Hussein camp, Wahdat houses seventy-five thousand people who were forced out of Palestine in 1948. For eight days Wahdat was severely shelled, and phosphorus bombs were freely used against it by the army. A quarter of the houses at Wahdat camp were completely destroyed, according to a survey by the Red Cross.



DIARY OF A PALESTINIAN FREEDOM FIGHTER

1970

AMMAN, JORDAN — *The following is the journal of a Palestinian resistance fighter. It was written in Amman in the last half of September, during the days of bitter fighting when King Hussein attempted to crush the commando movement.*

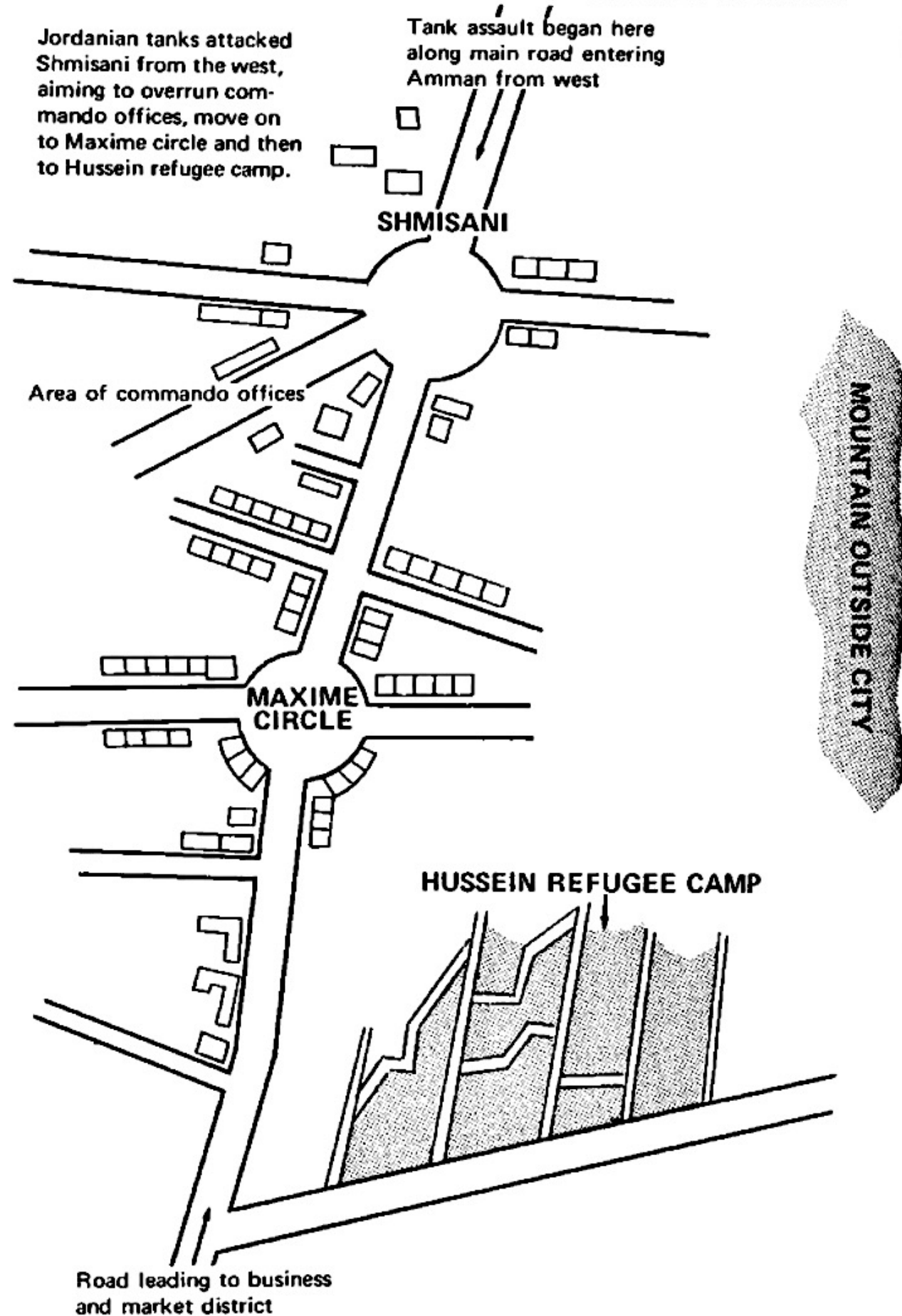
The journal concerns the battle in the area of Hussein refugee camp, on the northern edge of Amman. Sixty thousand people live in Hussein camp, a tangle of alley ways and small tin roofed shacks: they were driven from their homes in Palestine in 1948.

The author of the journal is a fighter of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, one of the Palestinian commando groups.

It is not known what happened to the writer, whose code name is "Rassem," after he made the final entry in this diary.

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SIMPLIFIED MAP OF AREA OF AMMAN DISCUSSED IN DIARY



am afraid all of them are cooking up something against us." I felt a little scared, as if a hand had caught my neck in the darkness.

Monday, September 21

I couldn't write yesterday. But the tanks are still outside our lines and today for the first time we were asking ourselves about the end of all this.

We are now in the fifth day. A lot of stories are being told about the capture of a few leaders of Fateh. Tanks are now able to enter some areas of the refugee camp, but they cannot remain. They rocketed the area between Hussein camp and the nearby mountain. Long ago the Democratic Front had an *ashbal* camp for young boys there; today it wasn't there any more.

Abu Eyad's letter broadcast on Amman radio today left a kind of sadness in all the comrades. [4]

They have destroyed all the commando offices outside the refugee camps. We have less and less anti-tank ammunition. They rocketed the Hussein and Nuzha refugee camps and Hadadi Valley more than ever today. In fact now no one cares about burying the dead.

In the evening the loudspeakers again called us to surrender. They are calling to the commandos and to all the young men. All the young men—this is a fantastic equality. But it shows that they are planning a genocide, a genocide that neither bothers to disguise itself nor is ashamed. They have threatened to level all the refugee camps.

So now they are making no distinctions between commandos and young men, between resistance and refugee camps. Is there some significance in this? Yes, of course. Our friends are still holding fast.

The men of the Popular Front are everywhere. Their faces look alike, exhausted, covered with grime, determined.

Today in a moment many things were equated—things I thought would never be equated: a glass of water and bullets and a piece of bread, sleeping and death, comrades and the camp.

4. Abu Eyad, a leader of Fateh, was captured by the Jordanian army. Subsequently, Amman radio broadcast what purported to be a letter from Abu Eyad to King Hussein, asking for an end to the bloodbath and requesting a cease-fire under terms unfavorable to the commandos. The Central Committee of the PLO rejected the cease-fire arrangements, saying that Abu Eyad did not know the real situation of the fighting and that no agreements could be made by leaders who were prisoners of the army.

Tuesday, September 22

I am afraid that here at least everything is coming to an end. I can see only that people prefer to die resisting.

Today resistance was weak on the nearby mountain, but very heroic and brave in this refugee camp. I wanted to think our gunfire is faltering because we haven't enough ammunition, not because our men are being killed. But the facts are frightening. Many friends have been killed. Many bullets are gone.

We don't have enough food and we haven't slept sufficiently. Now all day long the loudspeakers are asking the refugee camp to surrender. No one really understands the meaning of these words. How can a refugee camp surrender, and to whom? Is there a surrender greater than that of the life of the camp?

My comrade told me that a young man went to a woman's home and asked her to give him refuge. She refused, and said to him, "You are no better than my son, and my son fought until he was killed. So why shouldn't you fight to the last drop of blood?" Sometimes heroism takes on a harsh voice, but it seems necessary.

Death is in every square inch of the Hussein refugee camp. Also thirst and hunger. The crudest thing is for death to look into the eyes of a scared child.

Wednesday, September 23

The king's infantry entered the refugee camp. They concentrated their power behind the ruins, while the tanks shelled incessantly. We didn't have a real supply of ammunition left in the camp. We fought from house to house. They paid a very steep price for every yard they advanced.

They killed many young men, a number I can't count. A certain weeping spreads throughout the camp, like the weeping of one woman, like the weeping of the mother of the camp—weeping for the hungry, thirsty, fearful, those waiting for the unknown, weeping for a person dying alone under a hammering he cannot resist.

These people gave a real lesson to those who are watching.

My comrades and I gave what was left of the food to women and children. Now our men fight starvation in the first line as they face the tanks.

The headquarters of the Popular Front asked me to give my position over to our woman comrade, S., and to try to reach the Wahdat refugee camp. [5]

Wahdat is said to be in a stronger position, but the road to Wahdat is death. Wahdat camp is death, exactly as Hussein camp is death. And I don't know if I will be able to reach there.

two tanks turned around and went back to the place where the other two tanks were still burning. The three children were still sitting in the ruins, as if they were immobilized by sadness.

Suddenly Abu Hussein appeared behind the ruins of the house, exactly behind the children. He called to them, but they didn’t look at him. He crawled up until he reached them and pulled one of them toward him. He took the small hands of the other children, and they all disappeared.

We waited a few minutes and again we shot our RBJ bazookas. Another tank caught fire with a tremendous roar. Everybody started shooting from everywhere, while the other tank moved about and shot madly at the houses around it. Then, when it was far enough away, it fired ten rockets and hit many houses.

A new column of tanks approached Maxime circle, but again we forced them back. The tanks gathered in a special formation and rocketed and shelled Hussein Street methodically, inch by inch, as if they wanted to destroy the barricades and detonate the mines we had planted.

Fire was everywhere. Shells were exploding all over the street, but we held our position. We heard people crying from many places.

At that moment I received a message to return to the refugee camp. We were expecting the war to come to every house in the camp.

They shelled the outskirts of the camp as I reached it, then artillery began hitting the camp like a rain of fire. All at once, death lost its meaning. One could think that the people lying there were sleeping, resting on the side of the road. Death, ruins, gunpowder, dried blood looking like red mud, the pale faces, fear—in a few hours all this can become a sort of habit which a person can really coexist with.

We formed special teams and moved most of the dead and injured to houses, schools and UNWRA centers.

I really needed the order which came to me at five o’clock from the headquarters of the Popular Front: “Go home and sleep well. We’ll need you all day tomorrow.”

Tomorrow, who knows?

Friday, September 18

Again we forced them to retreat. The day ended with us still keeping them from Maxime circle, which by then was like a garage full of burned steel.

The shelling was frightening today. Artillery shells rained on the streets and the refugee camp, which cannot defend itself from that death falling from the

sky.

The most important thing that happened today is that the army called on loudspeakers for the commandos to surrender. We shot at those loudspeakers and silenced them.

When the tanks moved on us at noon, with the soldiers hiding behind them, we forced them to pull back again.

I had a feeling that this would be a very long, long battle. Comrade Z. told me today that we have enough ammunition to fight three months. There is enough food for now, but he asked me to think about a way to get more if we need it.

Comrade Q. was afraid today. I felt rather sad when I saw him feeling shy after we discovered him spending the day hiding. I began to think about the meaning of courage and the meaning of cowardice. One day I think I’ll write about these magnificent words which actually mean nothing. They are words we use to describe our feelings in a certain situation, but we use them only when we are no longer in that situation.

I am very tired today. I don’t know what is happening in Amman and the rest of the cities. I don’t know what is happening to our comrades.

And now I am looking at my fingers as they write, and at the gasoline lamp, and I ask myself how many things the human being can learn. These fingers which are writing now were pulling the trigger all day and counting bullets, moving the dead bodies, digging graves and patting the shoulders of frightened children.

A while ago we dug a grave for many martyrs, and we buried them. Now they are embracing one another beneath the earth, in limitless love, completely united. And this, I think, is the fate of poor oppressed people, fighting for their share in this world.

Saturday, September 19

If things are relative in this world, even concerning human death, I could say that today was better than yesterday. Today we got more people from the Popular Liberation Forces and Fateh, and the Popular Front sent us more ammunition and people.

A volunteer from Aleppo—I don’t know how we found him among us—said that he wanted to fight. We spent the entire day planting mines in the streets of Hussein refugee camp. I can truly say that we built our own hell under the hell of their tanks.

When their tanks reached our area this morning, they had to retreat. They started shelling and again death started.

At noon, the man from Aleppo, as we call him, remarked to me, “These Arab regimes are still silent. I

This unusual document is the battlefield diary of a PFLP resistance fighter, covering roughly the period from King Hussein’s declaration of martial law (September 17, 1970) to the cease fire negotiated between the government and the guerrillas on September 25. It describes the battle in the area of Hussein refugee camp, on the northern edge of Amman, where sixty thousand people live in a tangle of alleyways and small tin-roofed shacks. The worst casualties in the fighting were in the camps, where thirst and starvation exacted an equal toll to napalm. The identity and fate of the diarist (known only by his code- name, “Bassem”) are unknown. The journal was first published in al Hadaf, the Popular Front newspaper, then released on November 12 by Liberation News Service through its Amman correspondents, George Cavalletto and Sheila Ryan, who provided the notes.

Wednesday, September 16

Everybody is expecting the onslaught of the storm. I heard most of the Arab radio stations saying that the silence in Amman is the tense quiet before the storm. But I have been telling my friends all day that I am not expecting anything. The tension in the streets, the tension among the people, is only superficial. In fact I think the tension among the people is increasing because the radio keeps saying that this is the tension before the storm.

Anyway, I don’t think that anything is going to happen soon. The king still needs time. Many days still lie ahead of us. The city was very normal this morning after the king established the Daoud military government. [1] But since noon, tension has been rising without a real, direct cause.

I noticed this when I was near the Philadelphia Hotel, so I went to ask about it at the office of the

1. On the morning of September 16, King Hussein appointed a new military government, nominally headed by Brigadier Mahmoud Daoud, the prime minister, but actually run by Hussein himself and Field Marshal Harbes Majali, whom Hussein made commander-in-chief of the army and military governor of Jordan. (Several days later, when Daoud was sent to Cairo to represent the king at the Arab summit conference, he resigned, denounced Hussein’s attempt to liquidate the commandos and asked for political asylum in Libya.)

Hussein had been preparing this new attempt to crush the Palestinian resistance since August, when he agreed to the “peace plan” put forward by U.S. Secretary of State Rogers.

In the last weeks of August, Hussein pulled his army away from the border with Israeli-occupied Palestine, concentrating the troops around Amman. In the first two weeks of September the Jordanian army destroyed a number of guerrilla bases in southern Jordan, attacked bases in the north and engaged in almost nightly firefights with commandos and militia in Amman.

In the first two weeks of September the king’s strategy emerged: Hussein’s forces were clearing the commandos out of certain areas (especially in the south), forcing the commandos to expend valuable ammunition and trying to erode the morale of the fighters and the population in general.

The final phase in Hussein’s strategy began to unfold early Wednesday, September 18, when his new military government declared martial law and ordered the fedayeen militia, the part-time fighters who make up most of the resistance’s armed men, to turn in their weapons to the commando offices.

The commandos responded by placing all their fighters under a unified command, and called for a general strike to begin the next day and to continue until Hussein’s “fascist military government” was toppled.

Popular Front nearby, at the edge of the Jaufa district. Z. was there. He also thought that nothing would happen, but he believes that everyone should act as if the battle is going to break out in a minute.

Comrade A. told me that a lot of tanks have been seen gathering at many points around the city since morning. According to him, tanks were coming from Madaba in the south toward the capital. Comrade A. thinks that the hours of the night are going to be critical, that then the explosion will happen and the battle will begin. But he didn’t convince me, and he couldn’t explain to me why he thought as he did. Laughing, he told me that my problem is that I use logic to analyze people’s illogical behavior.

When I was leaving the Jaufa office I heard the Haj, who was in his fatigues, saying to the young men, “Oil your Klashnis, men.”

And suddenly the city was rudely silent and empty, as if something had happened while I was in the office. I couldn’t find a car, so I walked to Hussein mountain. The whole time I was thinking about what might happen. I am sure that this is muscle-flexing, no more. No one really knows why this military government was established just now, but someone told me that the king had discovered a plot among some of his officers which was scheduled to go into action Saturday. This story makes me even more certain that what we see is only muscle-flexing.

Note: a few minutes ago, Comrade A. came. He says that the Popular Front has put him on alert, and that he is supposed to sleep in my room here in Hussein refugee camp. He said that people are saying that a lot of officers were put in jail.

For the first time, writing in this book has become very difficult: it is different now—like carving a tombstone or composing a will.

Today was terrifying. We were angry. We were tense. We quarreled with each other. I think this was because of the continuous explosions. But our young men fought bravely.

I was in the streets all day. When I came back a few minutes ago, I was looking around and it seemed to me that yesterday was a very distant day in someone else’s imagination.

The men of the Popular Front are everywhere. Morale is excellent. Everyone is awaiting two alternatives; they feel it every instant. Either to die or to win.

I met Comrade A. when I was coming home. He was moving a lot of ammunition. “You know,” he said, “I believe more than ever that our people are going to win. Do you know Abu Hussein? His house was destroyed and his wife and daughter were killed. He wrapped his wife and daughter in a blanket, and he took up his gun. He is standing over there; you can see him.”

Many people died today. The shooting cannot possibly stop tomorrow.

I was on alert all night and I went out with a reconnaissance patrol.

At about five o’clock in the morning, Comrade Abu Ali told us that tanks were coming along the Ainrazel road and from Suwelih, and have concentrated before the hills of Sports City. Shelling started before he finished speaking.

2. *At approximately five in the morning on Thursday, September 17, King Hussein’s artillery, positioned on the hills surrounding the city, launched a merciless attack on Amman. Soon tank columns tried to enter the city at strategic points, one being the main road from Suwelih, west of the city; this road enters the city in the Shmisani district, where many commando groups had offices. (The army’s objectives in this area were to overrun the commando offices, move on in the large traffic circle known as Maxime, and then to the nearby Hussein refugee camp.)*

King Hussein later admitted that when he ordered his army’s attack he thought he could crush the resistance movement in one day. Captured Jordanian soldiers told commandos that their officers had said they would eliminate full-time commandos in four to six hours, and that it would take them almost no effort to crush the fedayeen militia.

It seems that the cannons of the tanks were aimed directly at the offices of the commando organizations. Immediately our men went down and started machine-gunning the tanks from a distance. I saw heavy firing from our anti-tank guns and RBJ bazookas.

Our friends reported that about fifty trucks full of infantry were driving behind forty Centurion and Patton tanks and around thirty armored half-tracks. Then the men of Fateh started using their mortars. The tanks stopped shelling for fifteen minutes.

At about six o’clock the infantry charged under the cover of fire from the tanks and started moving on our offices in Shmisani.

The offices of the organizations are all near each other: the headquarters of the Popular Liberation Forces, the Palestine Armed Struggle Command, the Arab Liberation Front, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Popular Liberation Army, and the Democratic Front. The attack was against all of them, completely simultaneously.

Suddenly we all got together. All the barriers between organizations disappeared. We met together in a trench, behind a wall, on the sites of the ruins of the offices. All of us from different groups were working together without hesitation.

We waited until the infantry approached us. I don’t remember that any of us shot. Then all at once we opened up with our machine guns. After two minutes the army men started running away. We watched them run under the light of shells and artillery until they reached their tanks and hid.

At seven o’clock in the morning the guards in the Popular Forces headquarters at Shmisani were fighting bravely. I had never seen people fighting that way. Their office had been nearly completely demolished, and the tanks had gotten very near. We saw no one leave the battle until they all left, the officers last.

By about eight o’clock all the ammunition had been used up for the B-10 anti-tank rocket launcher in the Arab Liberation Front office. It was very clear that a gap had opened in our lines. Then the Popular Liberation Forces started using their mortars, and for the first time we used our Grinoff and the Fateh men used their Deutschka [anti-armor machine guns] .

The tanks stopped suddenly. We didn’t understand why until the artillery on the hills started firing at us again.

It seems that the Arab Liberation Front lost many heavy machine guns in this shelling, and that they ran out of Haun ammunition.

It is very clear that the Jordanian artillery tried to concentrate on the Palestine Armed Struggle Command office, but shells landed on the Arab Liberation Front

office, which is close to the PASC headquarters. I was with two men from Fateh and one comrade from the Popular Front and one from the Democratic Front when the tanks moved, like iron hills. We had never seen such intense fire. The heavy machine gun of the Democratic Front was silent because there was no ammunition for it. If we had more ammunition we would have used it effectively to hunt down the soldiers hiding among the low hills.

At 8:40 the army’s rockets and tanks totally destroyed our office. We continued to hide in the ruins until the tanks reached the square in front of the Ministry of the Interior. They stopped firing and began to shell.

At 9:15 the tanks stopped firing. They began to use heavy machine guns until new tanks came to complete the circle around the offices. Only then did we retreat.

I think among all the commandos we lost twenty killed and thirty wounded during the fighting up to ten o’clock in the morning. We said to each other, now the battle has started. The tanks had taken one line of no real value. But now if the tanks want to advance, they must fight with us for every square inch.

We were everywhere. We went up very near to the blind tanks and when they drove forward we fought them at close range.

Then something unexpected happened. The cannons of the tanks shelled the houses in a totally unnecessary way, savagely, without even differentiating between homes and commando offices.

It was really frightening. We were paralyzed, seeing the houses collapsing and suddenly seeing in the unexpected rubble many of the small private things of people, the warm small things of people, torn, sometimes bloody. In the midst of that hell we heard people crying out: “Comrades, please rescue me.” “Comrades, I am wounded.” “Comrades, I am dying. The army killed me.”

It was a horrible shock. Like blind steel beasts, tanks rolled toward Maxime circle. All the commando organizations evacuated their offices and retreated. Men were running from the tanks as if the surprise had really worked, as if everybody really didn’t know what to do.

Something really strange happened. Abu Ammar [Yasser Arafat] came down to Hussein Street. He asked the fighters who were retreating to stop running away and to plant mines and build barricades of cars, gas cans, any kind of metal.

He brought his own car himself, and with some other men, pushed it into the middle of the street. Immediately high morale filled the area and men started to come back.

Abu Ammar shouted, with his Egyptian accent,

“Two hours, my comrades, and by God, we are going to give them a lesson they’ll never forget.”

From between the houses, men came back with the RBJ bazookas to Maxime circle. Suddenly Maxime circle turned into an unimaginable hell. The tanks began to pull back very rapidly. The tanks were so large that when they were retreating they looked, in a way, comical. They went back on the road as far as their morning position, where they had been before the battle, and from there started shelling the houses around Maxime again.

As I went back with my group I saw Abu Ammar, Abu Maher, Abu Eyad, Naef Hawatmeh, Dr. Monef El Razaz and Farouk El Kadoumi leave the office of the Popular Front-General Command. [3] Everybody went off alone.

Abu Maher and Dr. Razaz were walking together, and when Abu Maher saw me, he laughed and called. “I hope you are feeling good. The bastards ran away.”

At one o’clock in the afternoon, the tanks tried again to take Maxime circle. This time they didn’t come by the main road, but by the smaller streets between the houses. Four tanks parked beside the office of the Popular Front-General Command for nearly fifteen minutes without moving. Then two RBJs fired from a short distance away and hit them; two tanks erupted into flames and explosions, while the other two retreated and shot wildly.

We knew that the soldiers in the tanks had been shocked but that the shock would pass and they would return to search the area. So we pulled back from the positions where we had ambushed the tanks.

The tanks returned then, the two of them, and rocketed the houses. They destroyed one completely and hit the others. The owner of one house lay dead under the rubble; his three children were still miraculously alive. They were sitting alone in the ruins. It was very sad to see them.

We could see them but we were unable to approach them. The tanks kept coming and demolished the Arab Palestine Organization office. Like an animal with a nervous breakdown, a tank clambered all over the cars parked nearby.

The two tanks turned around and went back to the place where the other two tanks were still burning. The

3. *Leaders of different resistance groups, who sit on the Central Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization. Abu Maher, who speaks to “Bassem” in the next paragraph, is a leader of the Popular Front. Members of the Central Committee met at least once a day in Amman throughout the war to coordinate the fighting.*