

## Chronology of Events – Palestine, Trans-Jordan and Syria

**1915**

January

German led Ottoman (Turkish) forces invade the Sinai Peninsula with the aim of capturing the Suez Canal. They are held, and eventually in 1916 pushed back out of Sinai into Palestine.

**1916**

March

The last of a series of ten letters between HUSSEIN bin Ali, Sharif of Mecca, and the British High Commissioner in Egypt (McMAHON) affirms the U.K. commitment to recognise Arab independence after the Great War in exchange for Arab support in the war against the Ottoman Empire, and the launching of an Arab revolt against Turkish occupation of Mesopotamia, Syria, Trans-Jordan and Palestine.

16 May

The U.K. and France sign the SYKES – PICOT Agreement, which includes the then Russian Empire, apportioning spheres of influence over Turkey, Palestine and Western Persia when the Ottoman Empire was defeated in the war. The U.K. would have control of a coastal strip of Palestine, including the ports of Haifa and Acre, up to the River Jordan, and southern Iraq from Basra up to Baghdad along the two main rivers of the region (the Euphrates and Tigris). France was to gain control of south-eastern Turkey, Syria and Lebanon, and Russia Istanbul, the Turkish Straits, and Armenia. The Arab peoples were excluded from this agreement, as were any Jewish representatives.

**1917**

October – November

British forces defeat the Turkish Army at the Third Battle of Gaza, leading to a large scale retreat by Turkish forces.

9 November

The letter sent by Foreign Secretary of the U.K. (Arthur BALFOUR) to Lord ROTHSCHILD (a leader in the British Jewish community) is published in the British press. It stated:

*His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.*

**1918**

The British advance continues, with the capture of Damascus and Aleppo, and heavy losses to the Turkish Army.

30 October

The Ottoman Empire agrees to the Armistice of Mudros, ending the war between the U.K. and Turkey. The U.K. and France assume responsibility for the military governance for the occupied territories.

**1920**

25 April

The United Kingdom is assigned the League of Nations Mandate of Palestine, a country created out of the demise of the Ottoman Empire, which was dissolved following The Great War. Sir Herbert SAMUEL is appointed the first British High Commissioner.

**1922**

1 February

Palestine Command formed to command all British Forces stationed in Palestine and Trans-Jordan.

**1923**

29 September

The United Kingdom formally assumes responsibility for the Mandate for Palestine and Trans-Jordan.

**1926**1<sup>st</sup> October

Palestine Command redesignated as Headquarters Trans-Jordan and Palestine as an R.A.F. command. The R.A.F. assumes the lead responsibility for military operations in the territories.

**1928**

21 February

Headquarters, Trans-Jordan and Palestine reduced to Group status.

**1929**

14 August

Large scale Jewish march and demonstration took place in Tel Aviv, while the Zionist Conference was taking place in Zurich.

15 August

Demonstrations at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Nationalist Jewish youth groups raised their flag, and shouted Zionist slogans and sang the Jewish national anthem.

16 August

Thousands of Muslims descended on the Western Wall after Friday prayers, with incendiary speeches.

17 August First Jewish death in an affray with Arabs. The following week, serious rioting breaks out in Jerusalem, and with a lack of troops and British police officers, violence spreads across Palestine. British troops rushed into Palestine from Egypt, and eventually violence is quelled. 133 Jews killed, and 339 wounded, with 116 Arabs killed and 232 wounded. Several killed by British troops when putting down riots.

**1936**

15 April

Two Jews are murdered on the Tulkarm – Nablus road.

16 April

Two Arabs are murdered in retaliation near Petah Tiqva. Rioting and anti-Jewish attacks break out over the next few days in Jaffa and Tel Aviv. This spreads across Palestine.

21 April

Arab general strike commences. Violence breaks out between Arab and Jewish communities in Palestine.

8 September

Lieutenant General John Greer DILL, C.B. C.M.G. D.S.O., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.*, appointed General Officer Commanding Palestine and Trans-Jordan.

October

British troop reinforcements brings garrison to about 20,000 men. Arab general strike ends. Royal Commission formed in U.K., headed by Lord PEEL, to investigate cause of disturbances.

**1937**

20 September

Lieutenant General DILL replaced as G.O.C. by Lieutenant General Archibald Percival WAVELL, C.B., C.M.G., M.C., *p.s.c.*<sup>1</sup>

October

The Peel Commission reports, recommending the partition of Palestine into an Arab and Jewish state. This is rejected by the Arab leaders, although accepted in principle by Jewish leaders.

**1938**

3 March

Sir Harold MacMICHAEL assumes the role of High Commissioner, vice Sir Arthur WAUCHOPE.

26 March

Major General Robert Hadden HAINING, C.B., D.S.O. appointed General Officer Commanding Palestine and Trans-Jordan, on promotion to the rank of Lieutenant General, replacing Lieutenant General WAVELL.

<sup>1</sup> WAVELL was promoted Lieutenant General on 29 January 1938 while in post.

29 September Major General Richard O'CONNOR, D.S.O., M.C. appointed General Officer Commanding 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and Military Governor of Jerusalem.

28 October 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division formed, commanded by Major General B. L. MONTGOMERY, D.S.O., *p.s.c.* Takes under command the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigades.

**1939**

March Arab revolt ends. Estimated that more than 5,000 Arabs, 400 Jews, and 200 British people died during the three years of the Arab revolt.

May U.K. government issues a White Paper, following the London Conference, limiting the Jewish immigration into Palestine to maximum of 75,000 for the next five years, after which Arab consent would be required for any further Jewish immigration.

11 August Lieutenant General HAINING replaced as G.O.C. by Lieutenant General Michael George Henry BARKER, C.B., D.S.O.

31 August Headquarters, 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division closes in Jerusalem, and moved to Egypt.

**1940**

31 January Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division opens at Haifa, Palestine.

21 February Lieutenant General Sir George James GIFFARD, C.B., D.S.O., *i.d.c.*, *p.s.c.* assumes command of Palestine & Trans-Jordan Command, vice Lt. Gen. BARKER who is posted to command I Corps in France.

28 February 8<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division disbanded.

10 June Italy declares war on France & U.K.

26 June August 1940 – 26<sup>th</sup> February 1941  
Lieutenant General Philip NEAME, V.C., C.B., D.S.O.

28 October Italian forces invade Greece.

29 October First British forces land on Crete to form garrison on island.

**1941**

- 26 February Lieutenant General NEAME is posted to Cyrenaica as G.O.C., and is replaced by Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland WILSON, K.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.* w.e.f. 6 May.
- 7 March First British and Dominion troops land in Greece, having been deployed in support of the Greek government.
- 6 April German forces invade Yugoslavia and Greece.
- 15 April British and Dominion forces commence withdrawal from Greece.
- 28 April Last British and Dominion forces evacuated from Greece. Greece falls to German occupation.
- 30 April 'CreForce' established on the island of Crete, commanded by Major General FREYBERG.
- 6 May Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland WILSON, K.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.* assumes appointment as G.O.C. Palestine & Trans-Jordan Command.
- 20 May German airborne forces commence attack on Crete.
- 21 May British and Dominion forces withdraw from Maleme airfield. German build up on island continues.
- 28 May British and Dominion forces begin evacuation from Crete.
- 1 June Evacuation from Crete finishes. The island is now under German control.
- 8 June Allied Forces invade Syria. Three columns advance into Syria, drawn from 7<sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Division, 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, and Free French Division.
- 18 June Major General J. D. LAVARACK, Aust. I.F., assumes command of all British, Indian, Australian and Free French forces in Syria.
- 21 June Allied Troops capture Damascus.
- 3 July Deir ez Zor captured by units from the 10<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division. Palmyra captured on the same day.
- 7 July Al Qamishliye in northern Syria falls to British Indian troops.

9 July	The town of Homs is captured by units from 'Habforce', which had entered Syria from Iraq.
12 July	Vichy French forces surrender.
13 July	Armistice signed with Vichy French forces in Syria and The Lebanon.
1 August	Headquarters, 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division redesignated as Headquarters, 10 <sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.
19 October	Lieutenant General Sir Henry Maitland WILSON, K.B.E., D.S.O., <i>p.s.c.</i> is appointed G.O.C.-in-C. 9 <sup>th</sup> Army (Designate), with Palestine reduced to the status of an Army District. Major General (Acting) Douglas Fitzgerald McCONNEL, C.B.E., D.S.O., <i>p.s.c.</i> <sup>2</sup> assumes command as General Officer Commanding, British Troops in Palestine.
1 November	9 <sup>th</sup> Army formed as part of Middle East Forces, under the command of General H. W. WILSON. Assumes responsibility for northern Iraq, Trans-Jordan, and Syria to protect British interests and the Middle East oilfields from German attack from the Crimea or through the Caucasus mountains.
7 December	Japanese Forces attack Malaya and hostilities commence between Japan and the Allies.
<b>1942</b>	
January	Headquarters I Australian Corps, plus the 6 <sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Division and the 7 <sup>th</sup> Australian Infantry Division leave Palestine to return to Australia.
November	XIII Corps transferred to command of 9 <sup>th</sup> Army.
<b>1943</b>	
January	The 5 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Division arrives in Syria from Iraq. Comes under command of XIII Corps.
July	XIII Corps leave Syria to come under command of the 8 <sup>th</sup> Army for the forthcoming invasion of Sicily.
8 November	Lebanon becomes an independent state.

<sup>2</sup> Awarded the C.B. on 6 January 1944 for distinguished services in the Middle East.

**1944**

- 1 January Syria becomes an independent state.
- 1 November Field Marshal, The Viscount GORT is appointed British High Commissioner in Palestine, replacing Sir Harold MacMICHAEL.
- 8 December Major General (Temporary) Douglas Fitzgerald McCONNEL, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., *p.s.c.* is replaced by Major General John Conyers D'ARCY, D.S.O., M.C. as G.O.C. British Troops in Palestine.

**1945**

- 2 February Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division arrives in Palestine from Italy.
- 25 February Terrorists attack airfield at Lydda, Petah Tikvah, and Qastina, destroying seven aircraft and damaging eight others. This is the first major terrorist attack in Palestine since the outbreak of the Second World War.
- August 9<sup>th</sup> Army disbanded. Command reverted to Palestine and Trans-Jordan.
- World Zionist Congress in London resolves that Palestine should be established immediately as a Jewish state.
- 15 September Lead elements of 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division begin arriving in Palestine.
- October First of the unauthorised immigrant ships arrive in Palestine.
- 31 October Jewish groups perpetrate several acts of violence, cutting the main railway line in one-hundred and fifty-three places, sinking three Police launches, and attacking Haifa oil refinery and railway yards.
- 6 November British Troops in Palestine and Trans-Jordan elevated to a Lieutenant General's appointment. Major General John Conyers D'ARCY, D.S.O., M.C. is promoted in post as G.O.C.
- 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division now complete in Palestine.
- 21 November General Sir Alan CUNNINGHAM replaces GORT as British High Commissioner, as GORT has to retire through ill-health.
- 25/26 November British Troops commence first searches of Jewish settlements, under the codename of 'Operation Guy Fawkes'.

21 December British and French delegations meet with Syrian and Lebanese representatives to agree a timetable for withdrawal of British and French troops from the two countries.

## 1946

The land east of the River Jordan, formerly known as Trans-Jordan, gains independence as the state of Jordan, under the rule of the Hashemite family.

January 1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Queen's Royal Regiment arrives in Syria.

20 January Provisional government in Syria administered by the French dissolves.

25 April Members of the Stern Gang attack British troops stationed guarding a car park in Tel Aviv. Seven members of 5<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment die in the attack.

30 April The last French troops leave Syria.

1 May Lieutenant General Sir Evelyn Hugh BARKER, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., *p.s.c.* assumes command of British Troops in Palestine, vice Lt. Gen D'ARCY.

22 July Terrorist attack on the King David Hotel, Jerusalem. The hotel acts as an important social centre in Jerusalem, with one wing used by the Government Secretariat and the British Army Captain Alexander MACKINTOSH surprised the terrorists stacking milk churns containing explosives in the basement of the hotel. He is shot, and later dies from his wounds. The hotel is not evacuated, and the resulting explosion kills ninety-two people. The Secretariat wing collapses, and it takes three weeks to recover all the deceased. The dead comprised twenty-eight British subjects, forty-one Arabs, seventeen Jews, two Armenians, one Russian, one Greek and one Egyptian.

Police Sergeant 'Blackie' SMITH was awarded the George Cross for his conduct after the attack. He dug a tunnel into the rubble. It collapsed, but he managed to escape. He re-entered the tunnel, and after half an hour emerged followed by two wounded men.

August Last British forces (1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Queen's) and French forces leave Lebanon.

31 October British Embassy in Rome damaged severely by a bomb attack.



- 9 November Three British constables of the Palestine Police killed when responding to an anonymous call regarding a booby trapped house in Moshe Street, Jerusalem.
- 20 November Jerusalem Income Tax offices bombed. One Jewish worker killed, and several other people injured.
- 2 December Two British soldiers from the 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne Division and two from Air Formation Signals were killed when their Jeep was blown up by a road mine in Jaffa Road, Jerusalem.
- 5 December C.Q.M.S. ALLMAN, 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment, and Captain Le FERLA, R.A.M.C. killed when their military truck exploded as a result of a time bomb placed in vehicle while parked outside the Military Headquarters, Sarafand.

#### 1947

- 1 January Operation 'Lobster' conducted, a cordon and search operation of the Karton quarter of Tel Aviv by 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment. Two-thousand, two-hundred and forty-two people screened, forty-seven detained.
- 2 January Operation 'Mackerel', a cordon and search operation of the Yemenite quarter of Rehovoth by 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. The Parachute Regiment. Nine Jews detained.
- 8 January Twelve members of Jewish group 'Irgun' arrested by military and police.
- 12 January Vehicle borne bomb exploded in the compound of the Headquarters District, Haifa, killing two British constables of the Palestine Police, and injuring nine others.
- 26 January Kidnap of former Major, H. COLLINS, from his girlfriend's house in Mamillah Road, Jerusalem. He was beaten badly, and incapacitated using chloroform. He was released on 29 January, but died from the effects of the chloroform.
- 27 January Kidnap of Judge Ralph WINDHAM from his courtroom. He was not ill-treated, and was released the next day.
- 2 – 7 January Operation 'Polly' undertaken, involving the evacuation of all families and non-essential British staff from Palestine in light of the deteriorating security situation and increased violence.

- 10 February Lieutenant General Gordon Holmes Alexander MacMILLAN, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., M.C.\*\* replaces Lt. Gen BARKER as G.O.C., British Troops in Palestine. Official handover on 13 February.
- 1 March Terrorists attack the Goldsmith's Club in Jerusalem. Twelve people died, including the Jewish telephone operator and a British Clerical Officer with the Palestine Police.
- 22 April A Cairo to Haifa train was attacked. The track was mined, and after the explosion, the survivors were subject to machine gun fire. Five British troops killed.
- 4 May Terrorist attack on Acra Goal. Two-hundred and fifty one Jewish and Arab prisoners escape.
- 31 May Attack on Haifa oil refinery. Some oil tanks set on fire, covering the city in dark cloud for one week.
- 18 June Five British officers kidnapped in Jerusalem. Later released. Usually kidnapped British personnel were flogged, not known if this occurred in this case.
- 29 June British officers dining in the Astoria Restaurant were attacked by terrorists using sub-machine guns. One officer, Captain Matthew KISSANE killed, two other wounded.
- 30 July Kidnap, torture and murder of Sgt Clifford MARTIN and Sgt Mervyn PAICE (20 yrs), of 252 Field Security Section, Intelligence Corps.
- August Last British forces (1<sup>st</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> Queen's) and French forces leave Lebanon.
- 3 September Letter bomb exploded in a sorting office in London. Believed to have been sent by Jewish terrorists.
- 12 December The Arab village of Al-Tira was attacked by Jewish terrorists. Thirteen villagers killed and many others wounded. British troops arrive and evacuate the remaining villagers.
- 18 December In the Arab village of Al-Khisas, twelve villagers killed by Jewish terrorists driving through the village firing machine guns.
- 20 December A bomb explodes at Haifa refinery. Six Arabs killed, several more wounded.

30 December Grenades thrown at Arab labourers at Haifa oil refinery, killing six and wounding many more. Arab workers retaliate by killing Jewish refinery workers, resulting in a further thirty-nine deaths. The Haganah retaliate later (on 31 December) by attacking two Arab villages, killing about sixty men, women and children.

## 1948

4 January Jews, dressed in British army uniforms, enter Jaffa and attack the H.Q. of the Arab National Committee based in the old Turkish Government House. A bomb explodes killing more than forty persons, and wounding about one-hundred.

5 January The Christian owned Semiramis Hotel in Jerusalem is blown up by a bomb planted by Jewish terrorists. About twenty-five people are killed, including the Spanish Consul.

10 January The Arab village of Beit Affa attacked, the village being destroyed and the villagers expelled.

16 January A convoy of Jewish lorries attempting to resupply a blockaded kibbutz is ambushed by Arabs, with many dead.

20 January Jewish settlement of Yechiam attacked by Arabs. British troops go to the aid of the settlers, and restore the situation, but there are twenty-five Jewish dead as a result of the attack.

1 February Palestine Post Offices bombed by Arabs, supported by two British deserters. Three killed.

10 February Twelve Arabs are taken off a truck by terrorist, led to a nearby orange grove, and shot. Seven Arabs are killed, and five wounded.

15 February The Jewish Haganah attack the Arab village of Sasa, blowing up houses with people inside, resulting in many deaths.

19 February Jewish convoy attacked by Arabs, but driven off by British troops, however, a number are killed on both sides.

22 February Sixty Jews are killed by a terrorist car bomb, with one-hundred and twenty-three injured. Arabs and two British deserters, Police Captain Eddie BROWN (who claims his brother was killed by the Irgun), and Cpl Peter MADISON, are found to be responsible.

- 23 February Two Palestine Police officers executed in their beds in Wallach Hospital by Jewish terrorists, and one killed in similar circumstances in Hadassah Hospital, Jerusalem.
- 27 February U.N. Emissary, Pole Witold HULANICKI, the former Polish Consul and now employed by the British Mandate Authorities, is murdered by the Jewish Stern Gang. Also murdered is Stefan ARNOLD, a Polish journalist working in Palestine.
- 28/29 February Twenty-eight British soldiers killed and thirty-three injured when a train is blown up by a mine at Rehovoth.
- Eight Jews killed in an attack on the Hayotzek Iron Foundary.
- 3 March The Arab owned Salameh building in Haifa is subject of a lorry bomb attack, demolishing the building and killing eleven Arabs, and three Armenians.
- 6 March Two Arab villages attacked, with inhabitants killed or expelled. Jewish settlements built on the land seized by these attacks.
- 21/22 March A housing block in Iraq Street, Haifa, blown up by truck bombs left by the Stern Gang. Seventeen dead, and about one-hundred injured.
- 31 March The Cairo to Haifa passenger train is mined near Benyamina, killing forty persons and injuring about sixty others.
- April Palestinian Arabs evacuated from Haifa.
- 6 April As the 12<sup>th</sup> Anti-Tank Regiment were withdrawing from a large camp near Hadera, they were attacked by members of the Irgun. Four British soldiers were held, placed up against the wall of the guardhouse, and shot in the back. All died. Shots were fired into the camp, killing the commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey HILDEBRAND, D.S.O., and one other soldier.
- 6 – 12 April The Haganah launch an offensive against the Arabs besieging Jerusalem, which they succeed in doing after much heavy fighting. The Arab village of Al Qastal is seized, and a Jewish settlement constructed in its place.

- 9 April Arab village of Deir Yassin attacked by Jewish fighters. About one-hundred villagers killed, many apparently in cold blood, with girls and women raped. This event led to an exodus of Palestinian Arabs to refugee camps.
- 3 April A convoy of medical staff en-route to Hadassah Hospital is ambushed by Arabs, killing seventy-nine people. It is stated that this is in revenge for the Jewish attack on Deir Yassin, and because the convoy was carrying weapons.
- 23 April Haifa occupied by about 5,000 Jewish fighters. All Arabs leave the city. British troops remain.
- 5 May Six members of R.E.M.E. are murdered by the Irgun after they refuse to accept a bribe not to destroy British Army equipment and hand it over to Jewish fighters.
- 8 May The Knesset (Jewish Parliament) creates a law that any Arab who is not present in his property on this date, forfeits it and is forbidden to return to it.
- 13 May British troops withdraw from the Old Quarter of Jerusalem, which is occupied by Jewish fighters.
- Jaffa occupied by Jewish fighters after fierce fighting.
- 14 May The British High Commissioner (CUNNINGHAM) leaves Palestine.
- The State of Israel is proclaimed at midnight.
- 15 May Stand-down of Palestine Police. All officers are evacuated.
- Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, Trans-Jordan, and other Arab forces attack the new state of Israel. The first Arab – Israeli war commences.
- June Headquarters, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division closes in Palestine. The division travelled overland to the Canal Zone in Egypt.
- 30 June Official closure of Headquarters, British Troops in Palestine.