11 Israelis Slain in Ambush Of Bus Along a Negev Road
By HARRY GILROYSpecial to THE NEW YORK TIMES.
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11 Israelis Slain in Ambush Of Bus Along a Negev Road

Machine Gun Volley Halts Vehicle on Hill—Blow Is Laid to Arabs

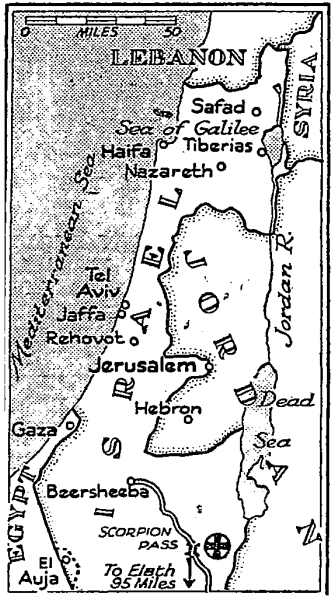
By HARRY GILROY
Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

TEL AVIV, Israel, March 17—Eleven persons were machine-gunned to death today in an ambush of a bus near Beersheba, and Israel called on the Jordanian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission to investigate the incident immediately.

The Government issued a statement in Jerusalem tonight branding the attack a "warlike act" and putting the responsibility "squarely upon the government from whose territory this unit of murderers was sent forth across the border into Israeli territory to carry out this dastardly deed." [No government was named in the statement. The borders of Jordan and Egypt run close to the Beersheba area.]

Stating that today's outrage brought the series of wanton acts of hostility by the Arab states to a new climax, the Government declared it would take "all necessary measures within its power to assure that the blood of Israeli

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Scene of incident (cross).

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Machine-Gunners Kill 11 Israelis In Bus Ambush on a Negev Road

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citizens will not be shed with impunity."

"All steps will be taken to safeguard the security of travelers along roads of the Negev so that movement will continue without hindrance," the statement said.

The attack occurred as the bus was grinding its way up the twists and turns of Scorpion Pass, north of Elath on the road to Beersheba.

The Israeli army spokesman who gave out the story of the incident called it "the most serious happening in the Negev since the end of the war with the Arab nations."

Either four riders or five on the bus, including two of the four soldiers assigned to guard it, survived the shooting. According to the army spokesman, the survivors agreed that the bus had been brought to a halt by shots from an adjacent hillside that hit the driver. Then two men in khaki and of Arabian appearance entered the front door of the bus and turned loose sub-machine guns on its occupants.

The first knowledge that the attack had occurred came to the army at 5 P. M., when a command car arrived in Beersheba with the survivors.

The Israeli Army immediately sent out patrols on the main Negev roads, but no trace of the attackers had been reported by tonight.

[The Israeli radio said "a band of Jordanians" had attacked an Israeli Army unit at the foot of the Hebron Hills, north of the site of the bus ambush, but was driven off by the Israelis, Reuters said.]

The bus left Elath, Israel's five-year-old port on the Gulf of Aqaba, in mid-morning. A bus makes this trip daily, carrying residents of Elath and tourists of the more adventurous type. The road is of clay. It leads through the Araba, a stony cleft between the mountains of Moab in Jordan and the old yellow-red hills of the Negev.

Survivor Describes Attack

An account of the attack was given in the Beersheba Hospital by Miss Miriam Lasser, a waitress from Elath. She said the passengers had asked the driver to halt on Scorpion Pass to permit them to take pictures. They then resumed the journey and, as the bus climbed the final hairpin bend and approached the plateau, shots were heard.

"First we thought the bus was backfiring," she said. "Then we thought one of the soldiers had accidentally discharged a gun. Then we no longer thought, because most of the passengers were dead and others were buried under the bodies."

The witness said she had thrown herself to the floor.

"Two men in khaki overalls and armed with rifles came through the front door," she continued. "They examined each body, and if they saw signs of life they shot the victims at close range.

"I played dead and did not move even when one man pulled me by the hair and searched me for arms. A shot was fired at me as I lay on the floor, but the bullet just grazed my thigh."

Miss Lasser said a 5-year-old girl had been saved by a soldier who threw himself over her and shielded the child with his body. The soldier's body was riddled with bullets. The girl escaped unscathed.

Miss Lasser said she had heard sounds as though the Arabs were digging under the bus, and then everything was quiet.

The army reported that weapons had been taken but that there had been no other theft of valuables.

The bus driver was identified tonight as Kalman Esroni, 35 years old, of Tel Aviv. His wife, 11-year-old son and mother-in-law were killed, and his 8-year-old daughter was wounded. The only other survivor of the family is a 3-month-old baby who was left in Tel Aviv.

Seven other bus drivers and members of their families were in the bus. They were returning from the celebration of Elath's fifth anniversary.

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