GAZA'S HISTORY: ARMIES, MISERY
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Strip Is Barren and Dreary —Provides Home for Arab Palestine Refugees

The Gaza Strip, a creation of the United Nations in 1949, is a barren and dreary tract twenty-eight miles long. It has an average width of five miles, and is located in an area with a long history of misery.

The Strip is named after the city of Gaza on its northern tip. This is a bleak and empty place with a population of 38,000. It was one of the principal cities of the Pharisees in Biblical times.

The remainder of the 325-square-mile Strip—with the exception of small pockets of rich earth in the north—is an arid and dusty region of sand and rock.

The history of the place has been governed by the fact that it is part of the route betwen Africa and the Middle East. The armies of the Pharoahs, Babylon, Persia, Assyria, Alexander the Great, the Crusaders, Turks and the English have marched through the land.

In 1947 the United Nations hoped that the area eventually would be given to the Arab state that was to share divided Palestine with the newly created State of Israel. The Arab state never came into being, however, and under the Egyptian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement of 1949, the area was turned over to Egypt for administration.

At first the Egyptians ruled the Strip under the old British Palestinian regulations, but they have since implemented Egyptian law. Last year the Strip received a "constitution" under which the inhabitants received a partial voice in the affairs of the Strip.

The main reason for the existence of the Strip is that it provides a home for Arabs displaced from the part of Palestine that became Israel. There are 312,000 people jammed into the area today, but only 95,000 are natives. The refugees, virtually all unemployed have been living on grants from the United Nations and Egypt.

Eight huge camps of corrugated iron and concrete block buildings house the refugees. They receive free medical care and education as well as kerosene, blankets and food from the United Nations Relief and Work Agency. The United Nations puts $6,000,000 a year into the Gaza Strip and Egypt $4,300,000. The area earns about $1,000,000 a year from the sale of citrus fruit.

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