

ISRAELI ARMY WRECKS REBEL MUNITION SHIP

Uneasy Quiet Restored to Tel Aviv After Civil Strife

Tel Aviv, June 23—(AP)—Israeli mortar fire blasted a munitions ship beached by Irgun Zvai Leumi rebels last night as civil strife shook the new Jewish state of Israel.

The ammo-laden vessel burst into flames, throwing a four-hour battle between Irgun and the Army into confusion. Thousands of Tel Aviv residents fled the central water front, scene of the fighting.

Violation of Truce

The ship—an LST—was carrying 600 tons of munitions in violation of the terms of the four-weeks United Nations truce which forbids the importation of arms during that period.

Later, persons watching from distant rooftops, said they heard 12 or 15 explosions. Clouds of smoke arose, obscuring the whole area. Soon afterward an Irgun truck with a loudspeaker toured the city while an announcer proclaimed sarcastically:

"Haganah has achieved a great victory in blowing up our ship."

The Irgun announcer said Menachem Beigin, commander of the former underground organization, had a "narrow escape" from the burning ship.

There were no further reports of Irgun-Israeli fighting on Tel Aviv Beach after both sides fled the battle ground in fear of explosions.

A little later, truckloads of unarmed Irgun fighters appeared on the city's main streets. Some interpreted this to mean that a deal had been made with the government to end the strife.

Refused to Surrender

The battle began early yesterday when Irgun gun runners beached their munitions ship within a block of the hotel occupied by United Nations truce observers. Irgun refused to surrender the ship to government custody, and the Israeli army rushed platoons of infantry to the waterfront.

Some 40 persons were reported killed or injured in the fighting.

About mid-afternoon, as Israeli guns shelled the vessel, an American-accented voice issued an order over the ship's loud speakers to "cease fire." A few minutes later four shells hit the deck and port side of the craft in rapid succession. Smoke poured up from the deck.

The flag of Israel was hauled down from the jackstaff and crew members began leaping into the water.

In a couple of minutes there were two dozen heads bobbing around the ship's stern.

Wave White Flag

Machinegun fire from the shore popped little spurts of white foam among the swimmers. A white flag began waving violently from the bridge of the flaming vessel.

"Cease fire, cease fire!" the voice shouted in English through the loudspeakers. After a few minutes the shooting stopped.

Soon after several Red Cross ambulances sped through Tel Aviv from the water front area.

The general feeling of jitters was increased late last night when air raid sirens sounded in Tel Aviv. It was the first night in six weeks the city's blackout had been relaxed.

Some Israel leaders said they were not surprised at the outbreak of civil strife. They regarded it as the long-expected showdown between Irgun and the Regular Army, composed chiefly of Haganah the former Jewish underground defense force.

Irgun itself had warned of a "blood battle between Jews."