

**The Diary of a
doctor in Tel Al-
Zaatar, a Palestinian
refugee camp, in
Lebanon**



Written by	: Dr. Youssif Iraki
Translated by	: Majda Sabha
Edited by	: Raafa Paylor
Coordinated and Revised by	: Ihmayed Ali

Diary of a doctor in Tel Al-Zaatar (Palestinian refugee camp, Lebanon)

I returned to Lebanon from Moscow after my graduation with a degree in medicine. That took place during the short period of tranquility after the clashes between Palestinians and right wing militia that killed 27 Palestinians and wounded many in a bus ambush, known as the Ain Al-Remmaneh massacre.

My choice was Tel Al-Zaatar camp hospital. Why? I did not know... I only knew well that the way to Tel Al-Zaatar was not an easy or a safe one, but the hospital was there.

August 11th 1975 was my first day of work at the camp's hospital, where I met Dr. Abdel Aziz. As a new graduate physician, I had many theories and ideas for projects in my mind to implement and realize, trying to build my ideal world. Abdel Aziz and I sat down to discuss our thoughts and set future plans together. We found many things in common, since we had similar backgrounds this made things go easier.

The camp was densely populated, with its narrow alleys and open sewers. There was trash and garbage everywhere. The alleys and sewers were the playgrounds and rest areas for the camp's children.

Construction of the hospital was completed at that time and it consisted of 3 floors: basement, ground floor, and the first floor which was used as a mosque. The camp's inhabitants and the general union of Palestinian workers' union contributed to the building of the hospital under the Palestinian Red Crescent's supervision. The hospital had an artesian well and a generator.

I began my work in the outpatient clinic where most of the patients were children. There was a lot of movement in and out of the crowded clinic. We would usually begin work at 9:00 am and finish by 3:00 pm. (We were three doctors until Dr. Salah moved to west-Beirut and then we became only two through the whole period) However, in reality, we would receive patients day and night. The location of the hospital was in the middle of the camp, and people were not bound to our set clinic schedule.

Most of the people who came to the clinic, considered their medical conditions as emergency cases. The diseases afflicting children typically ranged between diarrhea, respiratory infections, and worms-related illnesses. Most of these diseases were seasonal.

One day, a woman came in carrying a skinny child, whom she had already taken to many doctors. The child was suffering from chronic diarrhea and vomiting. I examined the child and prescribed him meds together with a diet to follow. I placed him under my direct medical observation, and after some time the child began to improve and gain weight. Thus, I became more familiar with the camp inhabitant's daily routines. I felt confident in my work and people began to feel more comfortable with the way I examined and treated them. An obsession with preventive medicine was all I thought of for those patients, but I couldn't pursue this at that time. The camp's inhabitants did not believe in theories or in ideas. They were into more tangible and immediate results.

In the beginning, I used to go to Beirut every day, and stay with my brother in the eastern part of Beirut, where most of the population were right wing Christians. It was the beginning of September ... I remember when the events and turmoil of Zahlé, (a city in the mid-east of Lebanon) began; and the wedding of my sister it was a tense night... People stayed in their homes that day for safety precautions. That was the last night that I spent in Beirut; after I returned to the camp which was a long ordeal.

I was on a journey with the Tel Al-Zaatar camp and it was certainly not a journey to the unknown. In those days, our work in the outpatient clinic was mostly restricted to patients of the clinic and some of the cases were from home injuries.

The situation became tense in the areas of Al-Maslakh and Al-Nabaa, (areas outside the camp, in the eastern part of Beirut where a minority of Palestinians and poor Lebanese from south Lebanon, lived and we began to receive some casualties from those places. We began to think about cleaning the underground floor. I remember when it was quickly decided to rearrange the hospital and there was huge assistance. We were able to clean the floor and set the beds. Characteristics of a typical hospital began to appear bit by bit. I did not know if this was an intuition or what because there was a rush of casualties after that.

The hospital played the role of an evacuation center for the injured, and the ambulances after providing the necessary first aid, and eventually referring certain cases to hospitals in the western part of Beirut. The transport of the injured from the area of Sin Al-Feel or Al-Nabaa, areas outside the camp, was accomplished by means of a liaison committee (a joint committee of officers of the Lebanese army and Palestinian officers). Accordingly, the liaison committee was the only connector between the camp and west-Beirut.

We were promised to be provided with some medical equipment for the hospital. The next day, Dr. Nabil Nassar (who worked before in the camp) brought an X-Ray device and a laboratory technician with him. It was as if we had planned for everything that was occurring.

The casualties began to come to us; we received twelve injuries from the areas of Sin Al-Feel and Al-Nabaa. I would never forget Fatima's injury due to a shot by a sniper in her back. She came in a state of shock. Luckily, we were able to save her life at the right time. That was the first time I saw an injured person. Luckily, Dr. Nabil was there too that day. He had worked in the camp before us and experienced the events of 1973 in which there were clashes between the Lebanese army and the Palestinian resistance in Tel Al-Zaatar.

After that, an elderly Kurdish woman was brought in with a severe chest injury. That day, I remembered losing all hope to save her life, though she kept struggling for the little chance of survival, but fortunately, the operation gave good results. At that point, I felt that I entered a new stage in my surgical practice. I was able to undertake small surgical procedures when necessary. Basically, Abdel Aziz and I were not well trained with surgical matters. Abdel Aziz had finished his studies as a general physician and worked for the Palestinian Red Crescent as a general practitioner. Meanwhile my entire residency year was in surgical training though it did not give me enough confidence and courage to operate independently.

We lived in the room next to the mosque on the first floor of the hospital. For us, the sound of car horns meant injuries. When we heard sirens one night, Abdel Aziz and I suddenly rose from our beds and rushed down to the emergency room. We sometimes raced each other to be with the wounded first. There was a loud commotion about bringing the injured along the camp's road. Many people were coming to the hospital. A crowd occupied the door of the hospital and on the four steps of the entrance. People flocked to see who the wounded were and they were curious to know the types of injuries.

One night as Abdel Aziz and I were sleeping, at around four o'clock in the morning a mortar rocket fell very close to the hospital, which woke us up terrified. While we were getting dressed, another rocket fell down followed by a third one that shook the hospital building. As

we were quickly running down the stairs, a rocket fell a few meters away from the last one and pushed us onto the ground from its strong pressure. This was our first exposure to rockets. Usually, people of the camp would wait for a little while and then approach to inspect the site of each fallen rocket. Were there any casualties?

They brought a group of the injured that night. They were the Um -Anbar family. I examined Um Anbar; her leg was amputated at the highest point of her hip. Bones were all that remained from the other leg. She did not talk, as she was in a state of shock. Two of her children were killed. We transferred her to the Arab University Hospital in West-Beirut, but we were informed later that she had passed away. Of the entire family, only one little girl survived.

I was trying to concentrate on the emergency room and on the equipment and necessary preparations to work on, as the surgical theatre was not yet completely equipped. The injured would be brought in intermittently. After a while, we would return to our daily work in the outpatient clinic treating patients. After work, we would sort medicines and organize the pharmacy. Paying evening and night visits to patients at home were almost daily, as the family of an ill person would frequently come to the hospital to call for a home visit. They usually came with fear and panic, despite my prior knowledge of the condition as they described it to me. I would go to a patient's house with Haitham, the nurse. He would carry a night lantern and we would make our way across the narrow and dark alleys. One day, a 14-year-old girl came to me crying. She informed me that everyone in her house was suffering from severe symptoms of vomiting and diarrhea. A male nurse accompanied me carrying a bag of medicine and first aid. The girl carried the lantern and walked in front of me, crying, urging me to hurry up. After we crossed the streets and alleyways, we entered a dark house. In the corner of a room, there was a dim light from a lantern shining on six people. They were sprawled on a mattress on the ground in a state of fatigue from severe diarrhea and vomiting. Even the infant girl was in a poor state. From my inquiry with the mother, I learned that they had eaten some canned food and as a result, they were suffering from food poisoning. We gave them first aid and an injection to prevent vomiting together with IV. We stayed at their house that night until it was necessary for me to return to the hospital and receive other urgent cases. The nurse stayed with them that night. This was what we usually encountered especially in the summer season. The mothers would often get scared when we place intravenous needles in veins found on their heads; this happened when a child had lost lot of liquids resulting from vomiting and diarrhea.

After two months, I felt that I got more familiar with the way of life in the camp. Then the Fascists announced that they would impose the first blockade of the camp. They blocked convoys of food provisions from coming into the camp. This lasted for two months. We were using what we had previously stored in terms of food provisions and medical supplies, and life was normal inside the camp then.

The areas adjacent to the camp were mainly industrial. In fact, a quarter of Lebanon's factories were concentrated in that area. Cheap labor power from workers living in the neighborhood was in great supply. Among these factories, there was a big refrigerator to store food and fruit. The resistance fighters knew how to open it and would distribute large quantities of chilled apples to the people inside the camp as the blockade led to a lack of fresh fruit there.

One day I was in the patients' dressing room, for supervision and control, how their injuries were cleaned up and treated. I looked out through the window to see a man carrying a frozen lamb and another man was following him... behind that man was a long line of men and women carrying frozen sheep. I almost could not believe my eyes. I thought that I was

imagining things as a result of strong fatigue. Sami, the radiographer (x-ray technician), soon told me that frozen lambs were distributed among the people of the camp.

We truly did not feel that we were lacking food provisions at that time. We had a connection with the camp's local military leadership and they frequently visited us in the hospital. We often spent the night with the camp's military leaders discussing the camp's affairs.

December Black Saturday

Abdul Aziz and I decided to go to West- Beirut to get some medical equipment and supplies for the operation room; it was the first time we left together. When we arrived in West-Beirut , we heard about the massacre... and the many incidents of kidnaping and slaughtering of people. It was on the 6th of December when several several hundreds of people were murdered in a few hours, the majority were civilians. People were killed according to their ID cards. We decided to return to the Tal El- Zaatar camp as soon as possible, at any price.

We contacted the Headquarters of the PLO (Palestinian Liberation Organization), requesting a car to drive us to the camp (Transportation at that time had to be arranged through the Lebanese-Palestinian liaison committee). I remembered how the streets were empty. Lieutenant Ziyad promised to secure an armored vehicle to move us safely back to the camp. However, from Al-Mathaf (Museum zone which was in the green line dividing Beirut into two sectors in the main road to Damascus), bullets were pouring in all directions. The road from Al-Barbeer hospital towards the museum (Al-Mathaf) was completely empty. The scene was horrible. The ambulance could only reach Al-Barbeer Hospital and not Al-Mathaf as it was a high risk zone. We had to walk. Lieutenant Ziyad suddenly appeared in his jeep to transfer us to Al-Mathaf. Bullets poured like rain; it was also raining, but bullets were heavier.

We quickly got dropped off the jeep to the center of the liaison committee. Half an hour later, we mounted the armored vehicle with two escorts to protect us. On the way I peeked from the small window of the armored to see the heavy rain and the empty streets. Within fifteen minutes we arrived at Al-Qalaa liaison committee center where the guys were waiting for us and (Abu Alrus) a young man took us by a car to the camp. We were so happy to finally arrive there, and the people were much happier. Everyone in the camp was worried about our absence- the camp with no doctors- a statement was roaming around every house and every alleyway with a big question mark. However, everything dissipated when we arrived.

After three hours we received twelve injuries in the emergency room. Nurses were extremely excited and happy for our being back there with them; everyone was back in full enthusiasm to work. We knew that it was a big mistake to leave the camp both of us together. I was thinking what would've happened if we did not have the armored vehicle, or not been able to go with the link? The answer was we should reach the camp at any cost.... People were waiting for us there.

New Year's Eve

Abdel Aziz was tired and loved to spend the New Year in West- Beirut and to bring some medical supplies. I was left alone in the hospital. It was relatively calm. Every morning, I would see patients in the clinic as usual; check on the injured at the hospital and at night I used to visit Abu Ibrahim and Abu Nidal (2 officers) at their sites in the hills overlooking the camp from the east side.

So was the New Year's Eve which I would never forget.

After a long hard day, I received a pregnant woman in labor, which I usually hate to undertake. But, she was the wife of a resistance fighter. It was her first pregnancy and the delivery took a long time. The clock struck midnight during the delivery, and as soon as I was done, heavy bullets poured down? Celebrating the New Year which turned into a real fight afterwards. Casualties started to rush into the hospital, among these was a serious head injury; Sami an eighteen-year-old boy was shot in the head. There was bleeding inside his skull which I had to open. The surgery lasted till the morning. I could save Sami's life and had good news to tell his family who were crowded outside. The surgery was successful. Sami was back to normal after three days. I was extremely pleased to see the results. Although I previously performed four head surgeries with internal bleeding where I opened a hole in the skull to prevent the elevation of pressure on the brain which can lead to death, this one gave me a morale boost.

It was five in the morning when I tried to have some rest. Everyone went to celebrate the New Year in his/her own way. I started to recall memories of last year's celebration in Moscow on the Russian way. Mamdouh came to interrupt my flashbacks and shared the celebration with me. He was a nurse, previously a carpenter, a fighter and a typical believer in his cause. He proficiently did any task that was requested from him.

It was a special New Year in Tel Al-Zaatar camp except with no snow.

It was midnight when Subhi, a resistance fighter from the local military headquarters informed me to get the hospital ready. The fighters were planning to break the blockade and open the road through Horsh Thabet (lies to the west side of the camp). Nurses in the hospital started preparing bandages, splints and IV. No one left the hospital that night. 1:30 a.m. was the zero hour for the onset of the attack and the anti-aircraft machinegun announced the start from Abu Ibrahim Hill with a barrage of bullets. The attack began and was far away from us.

I spent that night in the administration room. Around 3:00 a.m. Salman, the military commander in the camp, came to inform us that the mission was completed. He was in contact with fighters giving further instructions. We knew that the resistance fighters took Saba Palace and El-Hayek Hospital, but they lost one resistance fighter and another was injured. Pretty soon the resistance fighters came with patients of El-Hayek hospital; among them were a newly born infant and a nurse who had her arm broken during the attack. I completed the surgery for her, while Abdul Aziz did one for another patient.

It was quiet in the morning but shelling became vigorous in the afternoon from all sites and from tanks and armored vehicles. We started to receive a huge number of casualties, mostly serious injuries. That day, I did not leave the emergency room, due to the flood of casualties. I left the emergency room for a few moments of rest then I heard the horn of a car. In the lounge I saw a number of injured together with a crowd of people trying to identify the injured.

We asked people to stay away from the casualties and requested some guys to help in doing that so we could examine them, sort them and give first aid to those who needed it. I was giving instructions to the nurses on what to do for the injured. Days passed without having some rest or sleep, night was a continuation of the day.

The hospital was crowded with casualties. We sent the staff nurse, Ahmad Orfali, to arrange the hall in the Al-Husainiyeh mosque in RasAl-Dikwaneh to transfer the injured after performing surgeries on them. The ambulance in the hospital transferred most cases to the new place. This decision had lessened the burden on us.

We started to suffer from a shortage of blood bags and eventually we lost some patients due to that. We decided to send four people from the medical staff to cross through the mountain

roads with the help of a guide to get some blood bags. Mamdouh, Khalid, Subhi, and Ayoub volunteered to go.

Next morning a group of the resistance fighters came with blood bags. They were sent purposefully upon receiving our signal on the wireless transmitter. But we had already lost some patients who were bleeding and went into a shock due to blood loss. Blood transfusion was vital for patients with heavy bleeding.

Abdel Aziz and I were not able to sleep in the upper room, where we used to hear the clashes between Ain Al-Remmaneh and El-Shayyah (two famous rival suburbs during the civil war in East and West- Beirut). We were in the second floor setting our beds in the corner to avoid the shells that haunted us like ghosts. Then we took our mattresses to the laboratory room in the first floor as it was safer.

The situation was unbearable at the hospital with such a number of injured. But after some days there was a period of ceasefire and tranquility and the road between the camp and West-Beirut was again clear and safe.

We transferred all the injured to the hospitals in West-Beirut. After that we cleaned and disinfected the hospital, took some rest and were prepared for another round.

By that time, the first blockade ended.

I went for a brief visit to my family in Beirut during the holidays and then returned to Tel Al-Zaatar within two days. There were frequent attacks by the Fascists to areas controlled by the Lebanese national movement and Palestinians on the eastern side side of Beirut. They took up Dbayeh camp (a Palestinian refugee camp, Al-Maslakh and El-Karantina (both areas were inhabited by poor Lebanese from south Lebanon and Palestinians....followed by the battle of Addamour, a Christian town on the main road from Beirut to south Lebanon inhabited by right wing militias, who used to block the main road and with active snipers who shot dead many civilian victims. What is left in the eastern side was the triad of Al-Nabaa (area inhabitants are Lebanese from south Lebanon), Jisr El-Basha (Palestinian refugee camp, neighboring Tal- El Zaatar camp from the south west side, and Tel Al-Zaatar.

We kept on with the hospital's construction every time we had a period of calmness and prepared the medical staff by improving their proficiencies through ongoing courses and practical training. We also went beyond the boundaries of the camp. Abdel Aziz started a course at Al-Qalaa (near Jisr El-Basha refugee camp) and I conducted another one on nursing and first aid for females in the neighborhood at Ras Al-Dikwaneh. Trainees were coming to the hospital for practical training.

For a couple of days, the situation was so quiet and roads were safe, and we were able to restore some energy after the food blockage and further improve the hospital construction. Our main concern was to complete and equip the operation room. We were able to do that painstakingly by ourselves; fixing the ceiling lamp in the operation room was difficult, because the ceiling was low. Abdel Aziz and I took shifts to train three nurses to work in the operation room.

The 4th of March was the last time we went to Beirut. Before that date and with the short periods of ceasefire and tranquility, Abdel Aziz and I were able to go in turns through the Link. I remember one night on my way back from Beirut it was raining and the driver was driving crazily in a zigzag way. He was crossing Ain Al-Remmaneh, the rightest wing in the deep darkness. There were only the lights of the jeep in the street at that night. Crossing these areas was so risky. On one occasion, the jeep of the liaison committee was ordered to stop at a checkpoint of rightwing militia fighters, they were furious and wanted to arrest me after they knew that I am a Palestinian doctor, but thanks to the Lebanese army officer who accompanied me, we resumed our journey to the camp. That was my last visit to Beirut before the final exodus from the camp.

Al- Qalaa, the neighborhood of Tel Al-Zaatar was inhabited by displaced Palestinians coming from Jisr El-Basha refugee camp.

Abdel Aziz and I were taking turns in visiting the clinic in Jisr El-Basha refugee camp three days/week. Next to the camp was a small church where Majeda, the nun, originally from Belgium, lived with two other nuns. After my clinic work in the camp, I used to pass by the church, visit the nuns, and continue to see some patients that they recommended. They were doing a great humanitarian job to the old people left in the camp. Most houses were destroyed after the fighting so people moved to Al-Qalaa which was a safer place to stay in. Majeda was guiding me to some patients who needed medical help at home.

Father Boulos was visiting the nuns very often. He was the shepherd. Together with the nuns we were discussing health and sanitary issues, and in particular the miserable conditions of the shelters in the camp, searching a way to improve them. Their main concern was the health of the children especially after discovering many cases of scabies among them when they were obliged to use those shelters.

Later, Majeda left to Belgium with the nuns, taking with her kids who were left alone after their mom became mentally ill. Father Boulos was left behind. He offered us a great help and saved many injuries by transporting them in his small car to the western side of Beirut. He was our sole communication man with West Beirut, in addition to the wireless.

Father Boulos was a Catholic monk and a close friend too. Our close relationship was built when I met him at the beginning of my work in Tel Al-Zaatar. This close relationship was fruitful when we went under strain. He helped us transfer seriously injured people in his own small car and replenish our hospital with medicine that started to deplete.

Whenever his car enters the camp, people come to ask if he had brought them medicine. I could guess his arrival from the noise created by the crowd in the hospital. He was bringing in his small car some vegetables, fruits and letters sent from their relatives in west- Beirut. Very often he exposed himself to risks and danger.

One day he told me with fear apparent in his eyes, that the Phalange Party, a Christian militia, warned him the day before that if he did not stop his frequent visits to the camp, they would accuse him of being a collaborator with the Palestinians. I advised him to stop these rounds of visits for a while. The Fascist had no respect to any cross or crescent sign in his car or even to green branch of olives or to his priestly gown.

With the increased risks on the roads between Jisr Al -Basha refugee camp and Tel Al-Zaatar, we managed with the help of Dr. George who was working on site to open a small clinic equipped with eight beds just in case we had casualties, and there are difficulties in transferring them to the hospital.

Sometimes we would visit the fighters at their sites in Al-Qalaa to see the fortifications installed by the resistance fighters. On one sunny day, we went walking through the pine forest between Tel Al-Zaatar and Jisr El-Basha. We also crossed the ditches dug by the resistance fighters. We spent a nice peaceful day. Upon our return to the hospital, and while making a phone call to Beirut, the mortar rockets started to fall like rain from Al-Mansouriyeh (Lebanese village in the mountains overlooking Tel Al Zaatar camp from the eastern side) that lied on the highest top of the camp. We had many casualties then. We could have been among them together with the nurses had we been few minutes late. All the rockets fell on the road we had just crossed.

Most of the injured were children. A rocket fell on a training camp for children and 16 of them were killed. Casualties were increasing and the hospital was full of them. Here again, we started our hard work. I would never forget in my whole life that man who came in his nightgown with his right lung out of his chest and his intestines out of his body. He lived for few minutes and then passed away.

The liaison committee had promised to transfer the casualties to western Beirut for further proper treatment. So we transported them in a truck, but they were denied access by the rightwing militia men. They came back to the hospital to try again. They did try more than once, but all was in vain. Three patients died during those attempts. Finally, we kept them in the hospital to do the best we could for them.

We faced always unexpected situations; we felt a bad need for an electric generator. We had two but they were out of order and a technician could not fix them. We tried to get one. The factories in the neighborhood were a source of such equipment. We equipped the hospital with air conditioning and one electric generator from one of the plants. We were in crucial need of that. The technician then succeeded to fix the generator of the hospital's main current.

Few days later, the big attack on the camp started on Tuesday June 22. That night we stayed up late. Sporadic night shelling was very normal and all the people were staying in the shelters.

I still remember one week earlier when Eva, a Swedish Nurse was injured by mortar shelling. she was married to Yusuf Hamad, a Palestinian militant from the camp; she was responsible for a medical clinic that belongs to the Popular Front for The Liberation of Palestine (PLO) in the camp. She decided to work for the Palestinians and share them their destiny.

in the camp they called her Samira. She visited us in the hospital, one day before the injury, to see the operation room, the wards and our preparedness. She was brought to the hospital, her face and hair was covered with dust, her right arm was hanging with little skin connecting it, with severe bleeding. She was trying with her left hand to stop the bleeding from her left leg. There was a deep wound and a broken leg bone . She was repeatedly inquiring about her husband. Eva was 16 weeks pregnant. She kept asking bitterly about him and requesting a morphine injection. I gave her a pain killer injection. Upon examining her, I found that her arm should be amputated above the elbow. We bared her down to the operation room; and I called for the Swedish doctor to help me to do the surgery on one hand and to know the real situation of Eva, since she is a Swedish citizen. We had a team from Sweden, a doctor and his wife in addition to Eva who came to work in the medical center of the Popular Front Organization, but it was hit and completely destroyed. It was situated at the entrance of the camp.

The surgery was successful; her big concern was to keep the pregnancy; this was Eva's only hope in life. She accepted the tragic news about her husband's death courageously. Her main concern was to keep her baby as a memory of her husband, whose body was brought to the hospital.

Eva was taken to the women's ward after surgery. The next day three men from the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) came to take her. When I asked them where she was taken, they said to Jounyeh (a port city, a stronghold of the right wing Christian militia to the north of Beirut) and then to Sweden. I was worried about her. I refused the idea, but I did not give a reply, I asked Eva, because she had to make the decision. She also preferred to stay with us. With all of what was happening, she decided to stay in the dark ward in the hospital and preferred to face her destiny with us.

That night we stayed up late till the first rays of the dawn, to hear bombardment as never before. Shelling continued together with rockets pouring like rain making the hospital

building shake many times. We counted the number of rockets per minute and came up to 24. The continuity of shelling was never like before. Luckily, the shelling was early before the day break; had it started later in the morning, we would have had many victims.

People usually leave their shelters in the morning to look for their daily needs and come back. That day they could not, as the shelling started in the night and continued till morning hours. We could not find any explanations to what is happening. Right after that, they started an intensive offensive on the camp from Al-Mansouriyeh village; heavy shelling was only to prepare for the attack. But the attackers were not able to make any progress on the ground. We could not believe that they would dare to do it. The first day ended without making progress and without casualties as well. However, the falling of eight thousand rockets on the camp were enough to destroy most of the houses.

In the evening, Salman, the military commander of the camp, informed us that we should get ready as more attacks were planned. Few days earlier, they failed to attack the camp from Al-Dikwaneh sector (north to the camp) and Deir Al-Raie Al-Saleh (west to the camp) as well. I also remembered that a group of resistance fighters under the leadership of Adham, the camp resistance military leader, crossed the mountains to arrive at 3:00 a.m. to the camp. The resistance fighters of the camp succeeded in stopping a big offensive. The arrival of new fighters to the camp, though they were few, raised the moral spirit of the camp fighters.

Following the rockets, the attack started on the Mkalles village from the Al-Mansouriyeh. It was a great failure. Many were killed and they also lost six military vehicles. This ended the first day; a calm night began, and was the calmness that preceded the storm.

June Wednesday 23rd

Shelling started so early at nearly 5:00 a.m....it was continuous which meant there was an attempt to advance towards the camp. The plan of the right wing militia was to attack from three axes the Al-Mansouriyeh from the west, Al-Hazmiyeh from the south and Horsh Thabet from the east to meet at a cross point in Mkalles, surrounding the camp from all directions and the camp is under complete siege. The attack was severe and casualties started to arrive repeatedly to the hospital. The intensity and force of the attackers were superior to the resistance fighters in numbers and weapons. That day Ali Khanjar, a brave resistance fighter and the clever anti- tank rocket launcher was brought to the hospital, because he had lost his sight in both eyes; just one day before he could destroy six military vehicles. After checking him up, everything was normal; losing his sight was probably due to a glare from a shell that fell in front of him. The hospital was full of casualties, mostly resistance fighters which had a negative impact on the morale. Later we knew that the resistance fighters were able to stop any advance towards the camp. By evening, the attack started to regress until night and it stopped completely, there after starts the sporadic and brutal shelling falling on the camp again.

June Thursday 24th

I was vigilantly watching the early hours of the day.... because it gave me a clear idea of what would happen. Continuous shelling indicated an attack was in progress that meant more casualties. People started to move from the destroyed houses to the neighboring area in Ras Al-Dikwaneh (an area near the camp with a group of many buildings, the inhabitants there were mostly Lebanese) because the camp was not any more suitable and not secure for living. All what was left were the shelters and the hospital, that couldn't accommodate them all.

That day one of the resistance fighters, Abu Jabaal, was brought in with a severe sniper shot on his chest with a big tissue damage. He was in a state of shock due to heavy bleeding. I did the surgery after necessary blood transfusion. I did not expect him to live due to the severity of the injury, but I was greatly pleased I could save his life.

A rocket fell near the emergency room leaving a big hole behind.... Then we received some casualties... while I was checking one of them up in the emergency room, another rocket fell next to the building. I could not see anything in front of me the whole room looked foggy, because of the surrounding dust that it caused. The wounded, relatives, and nurses were around me, suddenly I found myself alone with the injured. Just before the falling of another rocket in front of me one of the nurses pulled my arm with force to a safe place. The last was so close that we could not continue to work in the emergency room. The hospital was targeted by every fourth rocket. We moved the instruments and the medicine -depot to a safer place under the stairs to treat emergency cases. At night we transferred minor injuries to Al-Husaineyeh where we used the meeting room in the mosque as wards; the staff nurse Ahmad was responsible for the transfer and the follow up and care; he was a good qualified nurse.

No more cars were available in the camp to transfer the wounded. We carried them on stretchers walking for about one kilometer between the allies and difficult path ways. I preferred to work on the ground floor because all power cables were cut and the generator we brought was not ready yet. The underground was dim and suffocating. Many people who could not find a safe place to stay came to the hospital seeking for shelter. Even the stairs were crowded. We could hardly convince them to go to the nearest shelter. For them the hospital was considered as the safest place to stay, doctors, nurses and the medicine are there ...I said," leave them." It was better to keep them here, than receiving them later as injured...but we had to work. We needed the space.

We were waiting impatiently for the second part of the day because it meant the beginning of the regression, and for the resistance fighters to prepare for the anti-attack at night. But for us – both the day and night- were the same. I was informed that the right wing Christian militia had made some progress at the Mkhales axes .This area represents a real strategic threat to us; it is an open area with easy access to the camp from the east.

June Friday 25th

I had next to me a small radio all the time to follow the news. Suddenly I started thinking! But: What kind of news? Here in the camp the news was all made up.

This morning the attack and rockets started earlier than before. So far 32 attacks were forced back by the resistance fighters and today was another one. Down in the underground, the situation was dramatic , air-conditioning was not functioning, air quality was very bad, the wards were overcrowded with injured, many of them lay on the floor , as the beds were all full. Even the corridors were crowded; we had only candles, no lights because the generator was not yet fixed. Candles!!! Where from? Hamada, a 10-year- old boy with a group of his friends, made some candles themselves. When we asked how? He said they found in a nearby store big amount of paraffin which they poured in glass bottles after heating it up and inserting a string in it. Then they broke the bottle when it got cold to turn it into a candle. They found a good and a new task for them.

June Saturday 26th

The 32nd attack was also defeated and the three hills defending the camp stood undefeated, Almeer hill (the highest hill), Abu Ibrahim's Hill and, Abu Nadal's hill were still resisting. Nurses with high spirits were going down and up to the emergency room, actively with super energy. It was 3:00 p.m. when the nurse Ferial told me that they brought Bader (an officer in the Palestinian Liberation Army in the camp) with a bullet in his neck that penetrated his spinal cord. It was a desperate case. He was carried on wooden stretcher to the hospital; he got the necessary first aid measures. A few days later, he started to improve. All the time he was asking about his mother in Syria whom he hadn't seen for the last nine years. Two days later he passed away. Ferial the nurse woke up early in the morning to check on Bader who was breathing with difficulty. She went quickly to see him as he was dying; all my efforts failed to save him. Bader died and his mother wouldn't see him again. ...every day we lose a close friend; could tears help? We put Bader in a wooden coffin. There, next to the hospital, there was a wide hole piled with 30 coffins not only because we did not have time to bury them, but also we were thinking to transfer them to the Martyrs graveyard in western side of Beirut to bury them in an honorable and respectful ceremony.

June Sunday 27th

Abu Ibrahim

I was sitting in the doctor's room after a long day at work trying to get some rest when Abu Ibrahim pulled my arm and whispered that he'd gotten a bullet in his back. He was shot by a sniper, while watering some flowers -around his anti-aircraft machine gun.

Those flowers which one day decorated the tables at a party that was arranged between Tel Al-Zaatar and Jisr El-Basha; celebrating the women's international day on the 8th of March

I remembered that I'd cleaned his wound and kept him under my direct supervision for two hours to watch any signs of internal bleeding. He did not even want to admit that he was injured; soon he left. He wanted to keep what happened a secret. I gave him a bullet proof vest to protect him from the bullets. He knew that he meant too much to people; he symbolized security, steadfastness and assurance. He was the shield that was protecting the camp. He didn't want anyone to know about his injury in order not to affect the people's morale. People felt at peace and security when hearing the anti-aircraft gun sound.

This is Abu Ibrahim, who often came to visit the injured at the hospital. Very often I visited him in his military site on the green flowery hill. He was often busy, watering his flowers or grabbing the earth and saying, "I am a farmer and a son of a farmer." I remembered when he showed me a hole in the earth where a bomb fell. That day I promised to bring him a plant to grow it in the same place where the bomb hit the ground. I brought him one. Every time I visited him he used to say: the plant is growing and it's becoming a tree but it seemed that he would have a forest around him referring to how many bombs fell in the site.

One evening I went with Ferial and Fadia on a tour around the camp, visiting the first aid volunteers in different sites. On our way back we passed by Abu Ibrahim, he invited us for a cup of tea, on the hill overlooking the camp and Beirut; we watched how the rockets were falling on Beirut. We always wondered when this war would come to an end.

Abu Ibrahim told us about his family in Syria, and about was his last vacation there. He could not go now. That was the last time we went up to the hill. One day I saw Abu Ibrahim for the first time holding a Kalashnikov gun instead of his stick. I had a strange feeling, and felt that things were not good. I remembered he once told me that the hill area was in danger.

On that very day, while I was in the operation room preparing to start a surgery for a young boy who was shot in his abdomen while crossing the mountains.

His condition was critical and hopeless, and while we were happy about operating the generator, enjoying the AC, the X-ray and pumping water from the artisan well, we heard that Abu Ibrahim was killed. The sound of his anti-craft gun for the inhabitants of the camp was like a beautiful melody. After the sad news there was a deep silence. We could believe it. There were sounds of machine guns, bullets, and mortars; suddenly there was an overwhelming silence, this was a shock for all of us.

Nurses and workers collapsed; they left their work and started crying. I believed the news because anything could be true in such circumstances. Mourning, crying, tears and sadness dominated the staff in the hospital. It was 8 pm when I gave the orders for everybody to start cleaning the hospital.

That was to keep them busy and get them out of depression. At that time Amenha who came back from the hill to say -in agreement with Taha- that Abu Ibrahim was still alive and she saw him. That had totally changed the hospital environment from sadness into smiling faces.

I was donating blood to Jamilah, the laboratory technician, to give it to the young boy under the surgery because my blood was compatible to his. It was a difficult surgery. He was shot in the abdomen three days ago; with a very little hope to survive, I finished the surgery by the beginning of the first ray of day light. While I was sitting in the rest room, the nurse Bahaa came in with morning coffee and a cigarette announcing the beginning of a new day, but this time without Abu Ibrahim.

Later I knew that Abu Ibrahim, after destroying two cannons of the right wing Christian militia, was hit directly with a missile that scattered his body into pieces.

With the martyrdom of Abu Ibrahim, the strategic and psychological situation of the camp turned into a new stage full of surprises. Abu Ibrahim was a symbol; he was an icon that was still alive in the hearts of the people of the camp. That is why the camp resisted for 45 days after his death. He became a legend.

June Monday 28th

I was on bed rest in the doctors' room suffering from cold when Fadia, the nurse in the emergency room, came to inform me that they (the right wing militia) raised their flag on Al Meer Hill and this hill overlooks and controls every part in the camp. The battle was going on to take over and control that hill. I couldn't leave my bed; Dr. Abdel Aziz came up to watch from a window in the emergency room; the battle was like a movie film. We were watching to know how the battle would end. Half an hour passed thinking of strange and dramatic things.

Controlling the hill meant they would control with their fire all camp roads which will affect the movement inside the camp, the hospital in particular. However, after half an hour over the hill in a very close fighting, the resistance fighters succeeded in removing the flag. That had a great impact on the people of Tel Al-Zaatar. A nightmare had gone when the flag disappeared. After a while Abu Nidal, the mortar base commander, was brought to the hospital injured with shrapnel in his leg. He was proficient in using mortar canons, and his site was strategic. He planted vegetables and raised poultry for self-satisfaction in his base. With that the pillars of the camp defense started to fall down one after the other. It was around five p.m. when the defeated attackers started to withdraw.

June Tuesday 29th

We had conflicting news about the fall of Jisr El-Basha camp. This adjacent camp which was split from us at Tel El-Zaatar was the main road leading to the mountain and with three thousand inhabitants in it, was able to resist all the Fascist attacks.

We turned on the generator for few hours only to save the fuel, during which we operated the x-ray, the laboratory and the air conditioning. Its sound was like the ripple of a ship sailing in Swirl Sea at night and through that generator's noise we were located and targeted, they were often shelling and bombing the camp oriented by that noise.

We started to run out of IV solution; we needed to do something. I asked Mamdouh, Subhi and Khalid to make the physiological solution in our own way. They brought all the empty plasma bottles which were supposed to be sterile. Mamdouh measured the percentage of salt needed on a sensitive balance in the laboratory. They filled the salt solution in those bottles; by this we solved the shortage of IV. However, with the increasing need of this solution and the power being off together with the inability to sterilize, we were unable to make the solution. Khalid and Subhi were super active. They were men of challenges. They were only sixteen at that time. They were doing all what was requested from them. They were volunteers in the frontline. We called them to help in blood bank matters, after Ali joined them; they were the blood bank team; they learned how to identify the blood group, even succeeded to do blood cross- matching and blood transfusion procedure.

June Wednesday 30th

The Fascist concentrated their attack on Jisr El-Basha camp. At noon two cars arrived from Jisr El-Basha carrying two injured; one of them was Mostafa Eki.

Mostafa was a legend. He alone built the fortifications of 300 meters' length in Al-Qalaa with the ditches. I did not recognize him in the beginning, as he had changed a lot. He was pale and had four bullets in his thigh and waist. He said Doctor, "I have not ever slept and eaten for nine days." We gave him the last bottle of solution and Khalid donated him his blood. He insisted to donate him his blood irrespective of our objection for his young age. Mostafa lived only for two hours; we lost another hero.

Memories came back where I operated on him when he was shot in his head and face in Horsh Thabet battle. Since then we became friends. He told me how he left everything behind and came to Tel Al-Zaatar. He was a professional carpenter, a genius fighter and a good athlete. He was fond of football and created a generation of football players in the camp. I remember, after he was discharged, the situation was calm. He left for Qatar to visit his family. After seven days he was back because he loved Tel Al-Zaatar and could not stay away. He loved it so much that, he had lived and died for it.

By sunset Al Meer Hill was occupied by the Fascist. I saw their flag from the window in the emergency room. I kept looking to see the removal of the flag, but this time, it was staying though I waited for so long. At that moment I felt that the situation was getting worse and dangerous.

We were informed that Jisr El-Basha camp and Al-Qalaa area, were captured as well by the Fascist. We heard the news of the massacres and horrified killing that took place there. I started to remember the people I know there: Elias the patient that I had operated on him for a severe chest injury who had a long stay in the hospital; Dr. George, Zarifeh, Suhaila, and the folks who volunteered with us.

We were all psychologically affected by the falling of the camp and Al-Qalaa for the strategic protection they represented to the camp. Only the industrial zone was left and the siege of the camp would become completely tight.

That night someone said that Salman the Military commander and his assistant Adham were injured during their round along the military sites. Dr. Abdel Aziz went ahead to see what happened. Salman had a superficial cut wound in the chest not deep, while Adham's injury was more serious. He had a broken elbow and I operated on him and put it in a cast. He slept in the operation room under the hand wash basin where we were sleeping with the nurses. Our room was overcrowded with casualties. Abu Nidal, the commander of the mortar group was in the room too. He was shot in his leg. While under the anesthesia for operation, tears run from his eyes and said "Doctor I am afraid the guys in the base will be lost" he meant the juniors whom he had trained. He was like a father and brother to them. But after he was shot they behaved responsively.

Next to his bed lies lieutenant, Ziad the blond guy with green eyes from Fateh (PLO, Palestine Liberation Organization). He was a Liaison Officer that transferred the injured to Western Beirut. He got a fragment that damaged one of his testicles with serious bleeding; I was obliged to remove it to stop the bleeding.

Next to him was Al-Aeina, the brave fighter, he was a teacher shot in his eyes. He totally lost one and the second was injured.

There were more whom I tripped on in the deep darkness. Even the candles were limited and we couldn't light one everywhere.

July Thursday 1st

The bombardment was so severe since the morning. I was exhausted for staying up till six in the morning. I lay down on the spongy mattress covering my face with a white sheet to avoid the stings of mosquitos which persuaded us into the hospital.

While having a short nap, Fadia awakened me; one of her relatives was shot in the chest and was bleeding with breathing difficulty. She could hardly awaken me. I couldn't remember how I did the surgery for her as I was half asleep. I inserted a chest tube to drain the blood from the chest and we gave her blood to substitute what she had lost, back to sleep to have some rest, but that was impossible. More casualties were proceeding to the hospital; Abdel Aziz and I were working together in the operation room.

In the evening came Abdel Mohsen the political commander of the camp to visit Adham who was leaning on the wall, sighing from pain with his arm cast on a pillow. He informed us about an offer. Abdel Aziz who was exhausted fell in a deep sleep, and the nurses were sitting in the corner. The offer, which was rejected by Palestinian leadership, was that the camp must surrender to avoid a massacre in case the right wing Christian militia captured the camp. The local leadership in the camp also rejected any kind of surrender was also the answer. Surrender had never been an option for the people in the camp. Those people who made the offer had totally ignored the mentality of the Palestinians; this word did not exist in their minds.

It was around eleven before midnight when we all left the hospital, heading towards the wireless room to know the latest news. Salman was there alone; in front of him the small wireless device, he took his shirt off because of the hot summer and the bandage was obvious on his chest. We had some chat. He called the headquarters and talked to Abu Iyad (a PLO leadership) who in turn called for all local leaders of all political organizations in the camp. On the wall over the Racal wireless system there was a written notice ((All what is said and heard in this room remains a secret)). Therefore, I would not talk about what had been discussed in this room between Abu Iyad and the local leaders of the camp. All what I knew was that steadfastness and resistance was the only choice. Dr. Abdel Aziz and I returned to the hospital amid the sound of shelling and the sniper bullets which interrupted the night calmness.

July Friday 2nd

We had two attacks from two different sites: one from Al-Arabiyah Front sector and the second from Al-Democratic Front sector in Ras Al-Dikwaneh. The military leader from the Democratic Front was injured by fragments from a mortar projectile. He was carried to the hospital in his final breath. Fragments were in his whole body, his chest and abdomen. He was in deep shock. We tried to save his life, the nurse Ferial donated blood, but very soon Saleh passed away. It was around 2 pm we had another surgery in the operation room, when we heard that the Al- Arabiyah Front sector has been captured.

That site was about 250 meters away from the hospital. The situation was crucial and critical; at this moment, I realized that our role was more than being doctors. Abdel Aziz and I went out with our green surgical gowns carrying guns and girded with enough supplies to defend the injured in the hospital who were all resistance fighters. Before leaving, we went to check on them and we saw tears in their eyes, as they felt that the camp had no more resistance fighters or men to defend it, only doctors were left there. Ibrahim said, "Leave the weapons here. We can defend ourselves and you can withdraw to a safer place." Others said, "Move us to the frontlines with the weapons to continue with our fight." But they were all in casts and couldn't move even in their beds.

Our appearance as doctors with the guns in our hands affected all people; a group of resistance fighters followed us and forced us to stay back in the hospital while they continued their way, where the fighting took place.

They were able to regain the site after a fierce battle. We were at that time fortifying the hospital with fighters all around the hospital entrances. There was a period of calmness, this time of a different type.

The guys were waiting with alert at the windows with their guns. Abu Nidal and Lieutenant Ziad were kneeling on their knees at the entrance of the hospital with a pistol in one hand and a grenade in the other in a state of high alert, as if the fascists were around the corner. We felt that they were approaching us. We heard the sound of mortars and bullets coming closer and closer. Suddenly the resistance fighters came with great cheerfulness, carrying the fascist flag, some munitions and weapons. They restored the site.

After this terrifying episode, our main concern was how to defend the hospital and the injured by all means. This time the fighters had succeeded to stop the offensive and defended the hospital; now we must think what is next ?, it is likely that , they will try again and again; We would profit from the experience of three officers from Fateh (PLO) who were among

the injured; they organized a plan to defend the hospital. The guys started collecting empty bottles and Mamdouh to prepare the Molotov. Subhi and Khalid collected some land mines . We also benefitted from the experience of the wounded resistance fighters. This time we had to be prepared; we were expecting the next day would be the big attack. Only the playground which the boys used to play football in peace times separates us from attackers.

There was a plan to implant mines in this playground to prevent the advance of their military vehicles. I asked Abu Jabaal who partially recovered from his huge chest injury; he was expert in implanting mines:- “how can we defend the camp? Can you do something?” He answered“: You got it doctor, I will try to do my best, cover my wound good, wrap my chest and I need someone to carry the mines.” We had to wait for the dark to complete this task. Many ideas were occupied my mind. Access to the hospital became dangerous and not safe; the entrance is exposed to the fire of the fascist snipers and guns. The transfer of any injured during the day would result in additional injuries. The hospital was full of injured, what would happen if the number had doubled? In the underground floor the environment was suffocating and the darkness is terrible; in military terms, it is impossible to run a hospital in the frontline.

In the evening we were called to attend a meeting of the resistance leadership to take important decisions, and measures concerning the camp defense. The meeting was at the Democratic Front office. We left the hospital at night around 23:00 towards the wireless room that belongs to Fateh (PLO) accompanied by the camp military commander Salman. In our way that night, we watched the fortifications and barricades, which took me out of the rubbles and the ruins of the destructed camp and the bad mood, to feel more confident and safe. That day I told Abdel Aziz we could resist a year or two.

These installations, and the buildings, had raised my spirits, which were down seeing the camp around us totally destroyed. I gained my confidence back.

The meeting included the leaders of all the Joint Forces with the Central Command, the main issue was about tomorrow’s expectations. All of them anticipated that the attack would start tomorrow from the playground. They discussed how to organize the defense plan, in case that happened. But how to confront the military vehicles, tanks and canon machines with guns. We started thinking of mines; we waited for the darkness to fall down on us.

Unfortunately, bombing of Kneidir building, a four-storey- carpentry workshop resulted in a big fire that turned the dark night into a day light. Abu Jabaal could not implant the mines. Abu Al-Walid was so nervous and furious. We discussed with Salman the idea of evacuating and moving the hospital to a safer area at Ras Al-Dikwaneh where lots of buildings, and where most of the population were seeking a shelter there; this will be safer to work. But he refused for its negative impact on the people. So we had two options which worth to reconsider: either stay and build fortifications with all the risks it might result in, or move to a safer place, where we can fulfill our task.

Fadia was sitting next to me when I was discussing the matter with Abdel Aziz. Then I looked at my watch and said to Fadia, -with a deep feeling, that it is the end -;“ May be we will live only for few hours, so let us say goodbye to each other.” Then the record of my life went back swiftly, the school, the college, Moscow and my dream to become a medical doctor. My mother’s picture was around. I knew it was my inescapable destiny. After a period of silence, I looked to Abdel Aziz and said: “It is better to start moving the injured now.” It was 2:30 am and about two hours left for day break. we are in struggling against the time, every minute is countable; we had to move more than 80 injured 200 meters away on foot. It was a quiet night; we started before the sniper could see us. We took off the doors and used the ladders as stretchers, mattresses and chairs were also used. We did it without any noise. All the injured were secured in safe places among the people before the first ray of sun shine together with

all what we needed of surgical equipment and medical supplies, bandages and cotton. I began to feel safe. We were again amid a community; warmth of the humans created a sense of peace and security.

During that time the mother of Bahaa, the surgical nurse, had prepared for us the breakfast with tea. It was 6:00 am after breakfast; we hurried up through the area, searching for a suitable location to be our new emergency center. We found a ground floor in a four storey building in the street that separates the camp from Al-Dikwaneh area. It was a center for the Lebanese Socialist Progressive Party; the comrades offered us the place, which consists of four rooms. We started directly preparing the place with the equipment we brought with us. One of the rooms would be for surgery; another for intensive care; the third one for casualties, and the fourth as rest room for doctors and nurses. By this, the hospital had turned into 13 medical units distributed in the buildings among the people in addition to the emergency center.

And so, we started a new phase in our work.

Mahmoud who is a qualified and experienced nurse, stayed behind in the hospital to take care of difficult cases which need isolation : the gangrene patients and some tetanus patients, whom we lost hope in treating them.

July Saturday 3rd

We moved to the new place which was in a central position among the 13 medical units where the injured stayed. People helped us in evacuating the ground floors in favor of the injured; squeezed themselves in the underground overcrowded shelters. They almost forgot how a person can sleep properly spreading out in a bed.

The way to the emergency center was partially exposed to Al-Meer strategic hill. So we had to run each and every time we crossed the road to avoid the sniper, who was all the time waiting for the next victim.

We used the entrance of the building for dressing wounds. The surgical room was so dark even during the daytime. It was in the middle of the place, and no sun light could reach it. We erected the surgical table, and hanged a curtain to shield our surgical work behind. We used the flash light during surgeries as the only source of light. One of the nurse's roles was to hold the flash light. We were supplied with batteries by the wireless room.

Abu Said the school teacher, was leading the volunteer work, moreover he was a man with a sense of humor; who helped us in managing the beds and brought some mattresses and beddings. He was really a man for difficult tasks, a man for all seasons. He used to participate in community activities in the camp especially in the health domain. He was a prominent character in the camp with his tall slim graceful body and eyeglasses on his long nose.

Abu Saeed started to put sand bags around the emergency center near the entrance and around the windows for protection from shelling fragments.

There were no more cigarettes in the camp and smokers started to look around to get some. One cigarette would go around a group of smokers. I was not addicted though I was a smoker and I used to smoke a cigarette from time to time from one of the resistance fighters. They thought it would help me to do my work properly. Very often Abu- Saeed would come to ask for the cigarette which we used to share. He came with the latest news, shuttling between the emergency center, and the wireless room and the different sites. One day he told me that people were smoking dry grape leaves. They would roll it in papers and newspapers... today

they smoked tea... bird's seeds were the fashion then. Bird's seeds smoking became common till the end of the siege.

One of the nurses brought a small radio from which we heard the global news and all about Tel Al-Zaatar using the wireless battery when the news broadcasting started. We were thrilled with the news when we heard that our forces had taken Monte-Verdi village to break the siege and open the road to the camp. We waited for some time but nothing happened; something deactivated the plan!

July Sunday 4th

On that day we received too many casualties and we were transferring them to other underequipped medical units to leave a room for more casualties to be treated. Our main concern was to improve our capacity to receive new injuries; Abu- Saeed was a central figure in helping us to fulfill this process.

Dr. Abdel Aziz and I were taking rounds among the medical units which was scattered in a relative large area which were highly insecure. Nizar a young volunteer used to shadow me all through these visits to guide me on safe and secure pathways. Nizar was a 19 year old student whom we trained to do some laboratory tests.

During the daytime all the roads became unsafe from the shootings and shelling. In order to be able to move around safely and avoid outside shells, the guys made openings in the walls between the buildings. The nurse Mahmoud used to make daily visits to give us brief reports about the current situation of gangrene and tetanus patients, whom he was supervising because we could not have enough time to visit them. On his way back, he used to take the essential daily supplies with him for the patients.

Usually, in the evening, the intensity of the battles subsided and the bombing lessened; and at this time people went out looking for water. Few days earlier during their attack, the Right wing militia bombed and destroyed the main source that supplies the camp with drinking water. Only two other sources were left. The first was the artesian well and the second was near the frontline in Al-Dikwaneh. At night, we used to hear a noise, the cracking of utensils, while women trying to find their way under darkness to avoid snipers, looking for some water for their children. The water problem was on the rise. The food supply, especially the flour and canned foods that were dependent on for a year started to deplete. Lentils became the only source of food after discovering big amounts in one of the warehouses in the camp. People cooked it in different ways even they used lentils water for bottle feeding for babies instead of milk.

July Monday 5th

We heard the news about negotiations to evacuate the wounded by the International Committee of Red Cross (ICRC) through the wireless message from the Headquarters (HQ) in west-Beirut, but the fascist right wing militia prevented this to happen. We were looking forward for that, which means this can save the life of the wounded; in addition to that, we can spare more food, water and medical supplies.

During my daily rounds to different medical units, I used to go through what was one day a carpentry factory which was safe to cross; the site had completely lost its identity, turned into an open graveyard. Graves were growing very quickly like mushrooms, and here lied Amna, the nurse who was shot while she was moving from one medical unit to another to help the

wounded and she was buried on the spot. The yard was full of graves within a few days; it became a routine to dig and bury those who were killed without any ceremony; but what ceremony in that time? During my rounds through this place, I tripped many times over graves in the dark night.

July Tuesday 6th

We started to feel shortage in our medical supplies, as we received more and more casualties the big shortage was in dressing material. One day, one of the fighters brought a big dress cloth found in a textile store. Nurses and inhabitants started cutting it to solve the problem of bandages, there was no other choice.

Abu Khalaf, originally a Kurdish, used to bring us gauzes under the shelling from different places; he was not scared of shelling and snipers. He was injured in his right hand during the clashes which erupted in Amman between Palestinian resistance fighters and the Jordanian army in 1970; this accident did not hinder him from working as a messenger among different sites. He was like the wireless cable communication. With his funny Arabic accent, he was mocking those who were scared of shells, until one day he got a shot in his leg.

July Wednesday 7th

The attack on the camp was intensified from the side of the Al-Raei Al-Saleh Monastery that was taken by the fascist Militia. It was a highly strategic point to the west of the camp. The situation had become more difficult. Snipers controlled all the roads inside the camp. Any move during the day was extremely dangerous and insecure. The resistance succeeded to defend and stop more than 47 attacks so far. The intense bombing and the continuous shelling meant that they were advancing towards the camp. We were observing the increased reinforcements passing through, for the upcoming attack. It became usual to see a fighter with a bandage around his head, a cast in the arm and a gun in the other hand. Resistance fighters on changing shifts, used to tell us about the latest news of the fight. Abu Ali was a brave woman fighting in the front line” that’s why she had a man’s nick name Abu Ali”. She was tall and had an athletic body, short brown hair and large brown eyes with a keen glance, always with a gun hung on her shoulder, she used to pass by and give us a briefing on the situation about the fighting in the northern side of the camp and used to bring with her a gallon of water, as her military site was close to a water well. When she arrived, the first thing she would ask for was a cigarette, and I would insert my hand in my pocket without thinking and pick out one.

July Thursday 8th

Water had become our biggest burden. The only source of water was at the front line, risky, and was not sufficient for the whole population of the camp. The summer nights are short and the dark hours were few, not enough for the majority of women to reach the dangerous risky source due to snipers. We started to focus on the artesian well neighboring the hospital, but the pump works on electricity, and the generator needs fuel. People in the camp gathered some gallons from the houses in neighboring buildings, where they drained the central heating reservoirs; we have to turn on the generator at night, it was safer than day time to avoid any casualties, when people come to get water. We put some big barrels in the operation room and brought a wide hose to pump as much as we can of water in a shorter time, because of fuel shortages. Water quality was optimal, it was less important to the people, whether it had a weird taste, colored or mixed with mud; moreover, turning on the lights was a luxury. We would take advantage of turning on the generator to do at the same time: x-ray, laboratory analysis for the wounded, and pump water. It was a luxury to have light;

At the beginning, the logistic section used to supply the hospital with one tank of fuel daily, this was enough to run the generator for 3 hours every day. Later we found that there were two more wells in the camp in two different places not too far. We connected the pumps with the hospital's generator, and got more water for people who came at night and take their need of water.

July Friday 9th

Salman the military commander was inspecting the eastern front line, when he passed by and gave us an update about the military situation. It was a tough day. The fighting was severe and intense from Al Burj Al-Aali (the eastern area), suddenly came Abu khalaf to inform Salman that Abu Al-Walid was killed. He was a brave fighter, a young man, blonde-bearded, stubborn fighter who had lost his right hand in September 1970 during the clashes with the Jordanian arm. e was in the eastern site and was fighting like a battalion alone by himself. Some of his comrades told me, in his site he set up artillery, machine gun, anti- tank launcher and a sniper gun, And operated them with his left arm. He destroyed armored vehicles and prevented the land forces from making any progress towards the camp. He was shot by a direct projectile in his head that smashed his skull and he died on the spot. We were all sad for his death.

In loyalty to this heroism, Adham the deputy military commander asked me to embalm his body so that we can take him out of the camp whenever possible. That night I went to the hospital it was full darkness and Fadia lit the candle to start the embalming the body. I had to remember his face to try re-arranging his head and face to restore their features as if re-shaping his face again. It was so quiet that night, and Fadia was so scared. She left the room for a while and the nurse Mahmoud took over; after finishing the job we covered the body with a white bedsheet. The surroundings were dark and quiet except for the blubbering from pain of the gangrene patients in the next room. The hospital Attendant Abu Mohammad lit up my way down the stairs to our old room. I was in a bad need for a shower as it had been a long time since I had any; there was a possibility for that. Mahmoud started to heat up some water in a pot, using some firewood in the room which was one day a pharmacy. After taking a shower, I lay down on the bed for a nap. I was very tired and fell asleep for a short time. It was two o'clock in the morning when I had a shower, then Fadia and I returned to the emergency center finding our way through the rubble. Upon arrival, I went into a deep sleep, I was exhausted.

July Saturday 10th

Neighboring to the Emergency center and close to the room where we used to sleep there was Abu Wael the wireless man of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine -General Command, we hear him very often sending wireless messages so loudly that we can hear it clearly (Bulbul-Hud...hud ... divert), this was annoying especially at night. Sometimes he comes with a cable message and wanted to read it, but we were able to read the messages from the expressions on his face. Actually we were in need for some peace at night, after a hard and busy day, and from the continuous bombing during the day. On that day, Adham came and we sat together with Dr. Abdel Aziz to discuss the development of the situation in the camp; suddenly a missile (155) fell down a few meters away from us. The missile made a deep and huge hole in the ground, but fortunately did not explode. If it did, we would have all been killed. Since then we decided to move to the next room which was safer.

All of us slept in one room; doctors and nurses on blankets and few mattresses outspread on the floor. I got a place next to the toilet. Although it was not in use, I couldn't sleep of the stinky smell coming out of it in my first night. We cleaned the room and disinfected the toilet and so I was able to sleep, not bothering for any smell.

July Sunday 11th

Salman visited us today, before we started talking about the situation he started calling from his wireless: "5 ..7...5.. 7 ...do you hear me?" that was the code number of Tel Al-Zaatar to the artillery of the joint forces in the mountains requesting a fire coverage to the camp and giving information about the positions of the attackers. The artillery was very effective in stopping attacks on the camp. It gave us some feeling of safety when we hear the joint forces bombing the attacking forces; and very often they hit the required targets; thereafter dominates stillness.

Siham, an 18-year-old girl wanted to help in getting a wounded man into the emergency center. It was a very harsh day. A bomb fell nearby and she was injured, shrapnel hit her leg and she went into a shock. We gave her blood, but her leg was in a critical situation. All her leg arteries were cut, in our situation, there was no possibility but to amputate the leg as a lifesaving operation, but she refused. Her case was discussed with the man in charge of her from the Democratic Front who said that we had to wait. He was looking forward for the decision to evacuate the wounded through the ICRC. Her condition was deteriorating every day; she couldn't believe that if we did not amputate her leg, her life was threatened. We couldn't operate on her; when there was no consent from her and her family and the man in charge. Consequently, she died. We lost Siham who was only 18.

July Monday 12th

Water.... Water ... started to deplete sharply; a cup of water would move around for those who were sitting just to keep the mouth wet, and each one was willing to drink it all. We were pumping water according to availability of diesel. Water taste was bad, but it was still water that we needed.

I tried on that day to visit the wounded in the hospital. This time I crossed different paths not familiar to me. Mamdouh accompanied me, and suddenly, we found ourselves in an open space among the ruins of houses, exposed for the snipers, we succeeded to hide back a half falling wall. A rain of bullets came over us with one that was about 10 cm away from my head. We felt ourselves trapped, Mamdouh waved me to run towards his direction as he found a safer road, and we resumed our way to the old hospital which was full of people using it as a shelter. The basement was so overcrowded that people were sitting on the stairs which made it hard for us to go down to our room, because it was the safest place we used it as a store for medicines. We took some medicines on our way back, this time we took a different road. The hills surrounding and overlooking the camp seemed terrifying and horrible as they were covered with artilleries and tanks. We were all gathered in an area of one km long by 500-meter-wide; Al-Burj Al-Aali the east frontline was the hottest. The right wing militia was trying to advance from Ras Al-Dikwaneh in the north, which was strongly fortified with sand bags and barricades and was impregnable. Some snipers were deployed, taking positions in the surrounding building shooting at any moving target they could observe. That night our fighters bombed the first floor and the stairs to put an end to the sniper's activity.

July Tuesday 13th

Life in the camp became unusual. Some social concepts and traditions had changed; money had no value, but the spirit of companionship and sense of collectivism was high. People shared flour and canned foods and life started to look primitive. Cooking was done on firewood and when firewood depleted people used the doors and windows of the ruined houses, collecting them during the night to avoid the snipers. Water was our main concern, and especially when antiseptics were totally consumed, we started using salt and water to clean wounds.

We asked the injured to bring with them some salt and water for wound dressing. Relatives of the injured often brought with them a bottle of water with salt. Social and human relations and habits also had changed ...especially in our oriental community and in the camp with inherited traditions and habits...the siege had its impact on everything. People in the overcrowded shelters were sleeping close together men and women ... We, the doctors, with male and female nurses were sleeping together sharing the same blanket, without provoking any of those who come to awaken us in the night to treat an injured person.

Candles were the only source of light in that darkness. A seventeen-year-old fighter came around 23:00 extremely worried almost furious about his friend who was bleeding and in need of blood. Usually we asked relatives to donate blood. We were unable to keep blood stock for the lack of cold storage as well as electricity. It was hot in July. After a while, the fighter brought some women who were going to collect water, to donate blood but he didn't know what he was doing. We explained to him that was not possible, because among the women were nursing mothers. Later on some men came and donated blood and the young fighter calmed down as if there was no problem.

July Wednesday 14th

In this day the 54th attack on the camp started with intense shelling; this time from the Al-Raei Al-Saleh Monastery and George Matta Gallery which is a high building close to the western entrance of the camp. The attack was severe and supported by artilleries, armored vehicles and tanks. What can individual weapons do to face such huge offensive? The resistance fighters were obliged to retreat and withdraw from that site towards the camp; this had a negative impact on the morale of the people in the camp. I went to the wireless radio room to inquire about the situation, they confirmed the withdrawal; but they also said that, they were planning to get the site back during the night. There, I met three fighters I had never seen before. I learnt that a group of resistance fighters who crossed the mountains had infiltrated into the camp: they arrived at daybreak. Nader was delegated to lead the counter attack from the east to retrieve the Matta Gallery.

There was a huge shelter in this building full of children, women and old people. The military command gave orders to evacuate this shelter before the beginning of the attack, but it was difficult to get all the people out because any movement during the daytime was risky. The fascist militia advanced towards the shelter. All the defending fighters were killed after intensive fighting near the entrance of the shelter. They got inside and killed a large number of women and children; among them a two-month old baby, who was hit by an axe on his head.

The resistance fighters tried hard to get back the location, but it was in vain, due to the intensity of the attack supported by armored vehicles and heavy Artillery.

The military commander asked for support from the artilleries of the joined forces (composed of the PLO and the Lebanese national movement) located in the mountains to bomb the site to prevent the snipers from taking position in the roofs of the building and threaten the inhabitants of the camp. Few moments passed, thereafter we saw smoke and fire coming out from the building. The building was 500 meters away from us, and only 70 meters from the

entrance of the camp. It was bombed with rockets. We felt less anxious, because their presence in that high building overlooking the camp will make our movement inside the camp very dangerous or even impossible. At sunset, the battle started to diminish gradually until it stopped completely. But the sound of interment shells and bullets came back again to remind us that we were still under the siege.

July Thursday 15th

The right wing militia was launching a propaganda campaign through their media that the camp has no civilians and it was like a military fortified castle with underground tunnels to justify their failure to take over the camp, in spite of the huge forces they had mobilized for that attack. We all knew that if there is opportunity to capture the camp, they would not hesitate to liquidate all women, children and the elderly and commit a horrible massacre.

People's morale went high when they heard that another group of resistance fighters crossed the mountains and entered the camp. They were only 12, but people felt they were 12 thousand. At that people of the camp felt that the world had forgotten them, and that they were dying slowly. The fighters brought with them medicines, dressing material and bandages that we asked for, we were so pleased for that.

The shelling was so extensive and continuous, the number of the injured and dead was increasing, though the fighters were moving around cautiously, yet every day passes we lose friends and comrades; they were among us the day before or so, exchanging ideas, discussing the situation drinking tea without sugar, and telling us the latest news about the situation in the frontline; the news that somebody died was part of our daily life.

There were 19 artillery sites shelling the camp from all directions and with all kinds of weapons. The building we were using would shake shake many times during the day due to direct shelling. Extensive damage everywhere, the neighboring buildings were full of holes like a pieces of Swiss cheese...we were anxious and worried about what would happen if the surrounding buildings, that protect us would be completely damaged and knocked down. We would then be an easy and direct target, totally exposed to the direct heavy artilleries.

July Friday 16th

I was examining the wounded, Fadia and Ferial were assisting me, suddenly we heard a huge explosion; the whole atmosphere around us was dusty. We felt the explosion in the building like an earthquake. Fadia ran out towards the stairs crying and screaming as her little sisters were living in the fourth floor of the same building, she reached up the stairs and was so scared, she found them running down dusty and terrified but not injured. After a while Nizar, the laboratory assistant, told us that a rocket hit the fifth floor and he brought with him parts of it. Since then, it became a habit to collect pieces of rockets and projectiles that fell on us. It was an imposed habit.

July Saturday 17th

We had received several telegrams via the wireless from the HQ of the PLO that there was an agreement to evacuate the wounded by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC); we knew that they tried several times before, but were not able to reach the camp, because they were not allowed by the right wing militia. On this day, we sent through the wireless a telegram an appeal on behalf of the hospital staff addressing: "The public world opinion, the

international associations and International Red Cross to fulfill their humanitarian duties, and to reach the camp and save the lives of hundreds of wounded and children who were facing inevitable death ,if they were not provided the necessary medical care ; the only way to save their lives was either to supply us with medical supplies, fuel, and the necessary needs to run the hospital or transfer the wounded for qualified treatment” .

July Monday 18th

The camp had the 60th attack and the children in the camp were suffering from lack of water. We started to see cases of dehydration. We couldn't do anything for them.

All that they needed was water and milk for infants which we did not have.

That was so hard on the doctor when he knew what is needed for his patient but couldn't do anything. On that day we received many dying children all that they needed was water...water...and it was impossible to get it.

We knew the Red Cross was the only hope to save the children and the wounded. We knew that every bullet the defenders shoot would not be replaced, medicines and medical supplies were running out and the battle was defined: “Resistance till death no other way”.

At the beginning our estimation was that the camp would able to withstand for only 15 days and now 30 days had passed with continuous attacks to break into the camp and so far 60 attacks until now.

July Monday 19th

I woke up suddenly, there was a loud confused voice, crying and wailing; it was around four o'clock in the morning. The resistance fighters brought a group of injured women in serious conditions. A projectile was fired on them while they were struggling to collect some water from the only very dangerous source. The right wing militia were watching and waiting for them to gather around the water source and launched a mortar bomb towards them. On that night, we lost 12 women, victims of water. People in Tel Al-Zaatar were uncertain how to die: from starvation, thirst or with a bombs or bullets. Water collection became terrible and risky; every time we hear the noise and the cracking of water vessels, we realize that the women are in their way to collect some water ...or in their way to death; so we have to prepare ourselves for more casualties.

There were some ideas to divert the pipe of the water to a safer place; people tried that, but the water source lies in a lower place than the safer place and water pressure was so weak that it was impossible to transfer the source, in addition securing the site was also impossible.

On that night a woman came to the hospital holding a pail of water on her head, and she was holding tight her bleeding arm onto the pail. As she arrived, she rested, but we had difficulty to unfold her hand from the pail as if her whole life depended totally on this pail of water; with short breath, she sat down, self-assured as she'd gotten some water to her children; they will not die of thirst. I cleaned and covered her wound; while she is still holding tightly the pail of water with the other hand. She was in a hurry, couldn't wait any longer and wanted to leave as she brought a precious present to her children... water which means at that time life...few drops of blood had sprinkled into the water to give it a rosy color but still its water... her kids present.

It was a tough day by all means; we were subjected to four severe and intense attacks from all fronts around the camp, but the defending fighters and their heroic steadfastness made them fail and retreat. That night the camp slept moaning from pain and fatigue, suffering from chronic thirst and bleeding wounds.

July Tuesday 20th

The first hours of the day meant to us more injuries, the victims of water collection; people took the opportunity at night in full darkness for safety reasons to get some water. Those who could not catch up with collecting some water and were overtaken by day break they were the victims of the sniper, because they did not want to return home with empty containers. Any injury meant bleeding, but how much their skinny, exhausted, thirsty and hungry bodies could stand.

Medically, any bleeding could lead to shock, no matter how simple it is; that was the situation in most of the cases. Getting blood was almost impossible; most of the camp inhabitants who were still alive had donated blood, nurses donated two times, Doctor Abdel-Aziz and I donated two times too. To solve this problem, we started taking 250 ml ,a quarter of a liter from the donor instead of half liter . I was always under the obsession of running out of blood bags and that was why I was often asking Nizar how many bags were left. That was the only way to save lives.

As doctors, we felt ourselves helpless, we became unable to do any internal surgery due to the lack of IV infusions and of anesthesia medicines, we had only (Ketalar), and from antibiotics only penicillin. Instead of IV we were giving the patients fluids with small doses in a spoonful of water. We were looking forward for the Red Cross to save the injured. We were able to do some lifesaving operations, like to insert a tube in the chest (chest tube) for patients who had internal bleeding in the chest. We could treat fractures and head injuries, but as for internal surgeries we had to wait for the ICRC ; it's been too long to wait... meanwhile we lost many lives.

July Thursday 22nd

It was an unusual quiet morning, one hour.... two hours have passed; we were used to early bombing. It is 10:00 in the morning we heard only sporadic shooting.

We were waiting for the Red Cross, yesterday they tried to move towards the camp, but due to shooting on the convoy by the right wing militia, they were obliged to turn back. On this day we started sorting and preparing a priority list of the injured, in order to send the critical and dangerous cases in the first convoy; we waited until 12 o'clock noon, before we lost any hope, that the ICRC will come today, we realized that, when the right wing militia resumed the bombing of the camp .

It was so hot this high summer night and the sweat was running through my long beard and dripping further on my white gown, it's been a long time since I had a bath. From time to time I used to wipe my body with the remainder of a bottle of eau de cologne that might give me some refreshment.

So passed the hours and minutes in this night very slowly, while we are thinking of what will happen tomorrow? A messenger from the military commander Salman came that night to tell us that the ICRC would come in the next morning; again we have to prepare a new priority list which was changing every day; some of the injured had died and new were injured. I took rounds with Adham, the military supervisor and the nurse Fadia, checking up the number of casualties; Fadia was also there to register their names in the new list. We slept this night with hope that tomorrow would be another day, and the convoy of the ICRC will come.

July Friday 23rd

This morning we received cable message from the HQ of the PLO in west Beirut that the International Red Cross (ICRC) is really coming today, and they will enter the camp from the west side where the main entrance of the camp; it was agreed that in order to guide the delegates of the ICRC into the camp, we have to send one of our people, dressed in white gown, white helmet and lifting a white flag with Red crescent sign to the entrance from our side, this will happen under ceasefire truce. We started preparing ourselves; Mahmoud a young volunteer was selected for this mission, and I drew a crescent with a red tincture (used for disinfection of wounds) on a white bedding sheet and headed to the entrance which has completely changed there was many ditches, barriers and barricades. We went to the wireless room to follow up the and trace the movement of the ICRC mission through coordinating with the HQ in West Beirut and learned that they had crossed Almat-haf area (The partition line which divides Beirut into east and west) at 10:00 o'clock in the morning; we waited, we learned that there will be a 2 hours truce for the mission to reach the camp. In fact the shelling, and snipers were still active.

The mission finally reached the entrance of the camp. Around 2:00 o'clock the monitoring operations in the camp informed us that a blue car with Red Cross flag was heading into the camp. Doctor Abdel Aziz and I together with the military commander of the camp Salman left to the old hospital under the bullets of the snipers buzzing from the hills surrounding the camp. We were lowering our bodies, and crawling from time to time to avoid the bullets, until we reached the hospital. We decided to meet the Red Cross mission in the hospital administration office which was one day full of activity and life. The office was dusty as some mortars fell in the surroundings; it looked as if we were in a military museum there was a collection of a variety of projectiles, bombs and shrapnel that fell and exploded near the hospital. After waiting for a while, suddenly we saw three men, each carrying a flag of the ICRC coming towards the camp. What we saw on the way to the hospital was horrible; there were remains of human bodies, a leg here and an arm there; a rocket had fallen directly on the hole which we used to keep the wooden coffins with dead bodies that scattered the corpses everywhere.

They arrived with difficulty through this horrible road; after introducing themselves, Mr. Hoeffliger the chief delegate of the ICRC in Lebanon a high blond Swiss subject, with a little mustache, his two assistants: Dr Pascal and Edmond, they offered us cigarettes which we hadn't smoked for a long time. I talked with them in English describing the deteriorating situation of the camp in details: About the civilians, especially the children and about our medical work the shortage of food, water, fuel and medical supplies. Suddenly while we were talking a radio signal came on the mission's wireless. Worried with serious expression on his face Mr. Hoeffliger stood up suddenly, with an excuse that they must leave the camp immediately, the truce is over and the bombing would resume soon. Before leaving, he said that visit was very important for having a clear picture about the situation and the persons who should contact. As they left, we warned the people that the truce was over and that the bombing would start again at any time.

The moment the mission left the camp; rockets and shelling were falling on the camp from all sites. Meeting with the ICRC mission was our first contact with the outside world for more than a month. We were expecting that the mission would transfer some casualties on this day, but as they told us their mission to the camp today was restricted to estimating and assessing the situation.

We were thinking of two crucial issues to discuss with them: Evacuating the injured to the West Beirut for further qualified treatment and the second to supply our hospital with medicine and medical supplies, to be able to continue with our medical work, but they said the second request would be impossible, because a precondition for them to enter the camp was that they should not carry any food, water or medical supplies.

The right wing militia were displeased with the work of the ICRC, one of the most prominent Christian leaders accused The Chief Delegate Hoeffliger for being biased against the Palestinians and called him a communist.

Soon after that prompt and short contact with the outside world we were back to our world of siege, lack of water and shelling.

July Saturday 24th

The news coming from Al-Nabaa (an enclave in East Beirut where the majority of inhabitants were Shia Muslims from south of Lebanon) was not encouraging. Al-Nabaa continued to resist for a long time until rumors played a major role in evacuating the area, and then to fall in the hands of the right wing militia. There was a period of tranquility, when no shelling fell on the camp; this day they concentrated their offensive to capture Al-Nabaa. It was midnight when Dr. Abdel Aziz and I went to the wireless radio room; the bombing was intense on the camp. We heard some shelling and bombing a bit far away; we were told that it was coverage from the Joint Forces to allow some resistance fighters to reach into the camp. We sat on the stairs in the wireless room and talked to Dr. Fathi Arafat (The chairman of the Palestinian Red Crescent Society (PRCS) briefing him the current situation in the camp which was deteriorating, so that he can appeal and contact the relevant international humanitarian organizations. This night was terrible; with the fall of Al-Nabaa, only Tel Al-Zaatar camp was left in East Beirut. We heard about the atrocities, violations and killings that had happened there, which made us determined to resist and defend our camp. It was a full moon this night, when we were on our way back to the emergency center; hearing the sounds of bells, many churches were ringing celebrating the fall of Al-Nabaa and as a warning signal for the beginning of the big offensive against the camp. This night was so quiet, much like the dread that precedes the storm.

July Sunday 25th

The shelling on the camp started at day break. Around 13:00 Abu Said came to inform us that a building in Ras Al-Dikwaneh had collapsed over an underground shelter. There was no possibility for the people inside to go out all the exits were blocked, the risk that they might suffocate and die is very high. In spite of it was in the middle of the day and the area was exposed to the snipers, yet the resistance fighters succeeded to make a hole in one of the walls, and were able to rescue some of the people inside. They brought seven children to the emergency center. They were suffering from severe malnutrition, we saved their lives.

The rest of the people inside including whole families died under the rubble. The fascists intensified their direct shelling, targeting the cement pillars on the ground floor that support the building so that it lost its balance and collapsed completely over the shelter in the basement; it was a massive grave and a big tragedy where whole families died, we had no exact figures of how many people were inside the shelter.

July Monday 26th

Abu Said came early this morning puffing his pipe, the smoke has a bird-seeds smell, and he wanted to tell us that they pulled out 20 dead bodies from the collapsed shelter. They brought some to the emergency center, but all of them were dead; they were sure that many were left under the rubble and it was impossible to find someone alive. What would have happened if the Red Cross had been there with a rescue team? We could have saved their lives; various

causes shaped the form of death in the camp, from victims of water, to victims of the shelters and victims of shelling. By midday, the right wing militia intensified their bombing and shelling on the camp.

July Tuesday 27th

The nurse came at six o'clock in this morning to tell me that Eva is feeling pain and cramps in the lower part of the belly; she was 16 weeks pregnant. Two days before, a bomb hit Eva's room, thereafter, we moved her to a safer place with a family, I visited her once, after examining her, I found that there is complete abortion in the final phase, and she was on the way to lose the baby. She started crying as she never did before; the baby was the only memory left from her dead husband. She was trying hard to keep the pregnancy and not to lose the baby, but unfortunately their bombs chased even the baby in the womb. I gave Eva some necessary medicines. I was lucky to have a cup of coffee offered by the lady (who spared some coffee) where Eva was staying. Eva started crying when I informed her of what was going around, and about the children dying from thirst and dehydration.

Soon after, somebody came told me that I have to hurry up to see the new casualties in the emergency center. I ran quickly to avoid the sniper and at the entrance of the emergency center was overcrowded with injured people, among them was two little girls with critical wounds in their legs and their mother was wailing and screaming for her husband who was dead. We treated the girls; calmed down the mother and sent somebody to call the burial committee ;(there was a special committee in the camp).

Our medical efforts to treat the injured were drastically decreased due to a huge shortage in medicines and medical supplies, we are able only to put a sling, clean the wounds with salt and water; but water was rare.

July Wednesday 28th

This morning Mazen, the fighter, came to tell us that he found a tank full of fuel. Good news unbelievable!!! After we lost all hope to start the generator again. What a good luck! We could turn on the generator for six hours; we could pump water to drink and have showers; of course not in the real sense; a shower with the maximum austerity for each & every drop of water.

We headed to our old hospital at 11 o'clock at night, and turned on the generator. Many times we had difficulty in starting it, due to a weak battery or for other reasons, yet at the end of the day the maintenance man did the job.

This night was relatively quiet; the generator started creating a sound like a steam ship in the middle of the sea. The fascists started shelling on the direction of the sound of the generator. We filled the big barrels in a safe room next to the underground operation room. We also filled a tank next to Tel Al-Zaatar factory after connecting the generator with a well found there. People rushed to get some water. The noise of their containers was louder than the sound of the generator. There was anarchy, difficult to control, the women were afraid that water is not enough and each wanted to be first ; their children were thirsty; the fear of dying children due to dehydration could be seen in their eyes. After instructing them they realized that things can go quicker if they keep quiet in queue, they started organizing themselves; they became aware of the dangers of the day break and roads would become insecure and may become victims of the sniper. We kept some water for the hospital use and the wounded.

We left and pretty soon the hospital was back to normal quietness. On the four steps next to the main entrance of the hospital, Abu Mohammad, the hospital attendant, was sitting with his gun beside him. Only the cries of the groaning gangrene patients were challenging the

calmness of this night. We returned to the emergency center, waiting for another day ...and another attack.

July Thursday 29th

Taha, the x-ray technician, was requested to fulfill a mission; in fact it was a military one delegated by the military command in the camp, to blow up the stairs in the first floor of a building at the entrance of the camp and overlooking the whole area of the camp, so that no snipers could be deployed there in the upper stories of the building. Before he left in the evening, he told us about the mission, we wished him good luck. Basically, Taha was a carpenter by profession; in addition, he had completed training on explosives under military training in the PLO; before joined the volunteer work in the PRCs, he was clever to learn in a short time how to work in the x-Ray section, when the x-ray technician left the hospital before the last siege, Taha was impressively able to replace him. He became the hospital x-ray man. It was around 10:00 o'clock in the night when he left; after a while we heard huge explosions. Taha was back carried by his comrades; he was badly injured in his hand and forearm after completing the mission; the wound was contaminated with a lot of earth and straw; before I did the surgery I cleaned the wound carefully, and gave him some analgesics and transferred him to one of the medical units. He was the only older brother in his family among four daughters; his father was killed in the famous bus incident in Ein Al-Rummaneh which the spark that triggered off the civil war in Lebanon. He was screaming and moaning of severe pain and was very scared of losing his hand. I calmed him down, and assured him that the arteries and nerves were intact and the pulse is good, and that we had to fight any possible infection. In spite of the fact he was injured in this mission he put an end to the snipers, and saved the lives of many possible victims.

August Monday 2nd

We received a wireless cable from the HQ in west Beirut that all parties agreed to evacuate the injured. We had to make all the arrangements and select 50 injured in the first convoy. These were the instructions of the Red Cross. Priority was given to dehydrated children, abdominal injuries, severe infected injuries, and potential gangrene cases which needed immediate, qualified surgical intervention. The choice was extremely difficult. We have to go through the different medical units to sort out the cases according to our priority list. We were in doubt that the ICRC convoy would come as in the previous trials, but let us hope this time that they will do it.

August Tuesday 3rd

This morning at 10.00 o'clock, and after several wireless calls with the HQ in West Beirut, the monitoring system in the camp informed us that a convoy of cars and trucks with the International Red Cross flags are on their way heading towards the camp from the south side, from the Al Mkallis round about on the main road to the mountains (Beit Mery road). The yard which was previously the playground where the Camp guys used to play football, was identified to be the place where the evacuation of the injured should take place. We went to the old hospital to supervise the evacuation of the injured. After a while the three ICRC persons whom we met before arrived. There was a warm welcome with hugs as if we'd known each other for a long time. Once more they offered us cigarettes because they knew we did not have any and we offered them a glass of water in a symbolic way, it was a very hot day, but they refused to drink it. They realized it was the most precious thing we had. We started bringing the wounded from various locations to the hospital. They were carried on doors, mattresses and on wooden stretchers. The Red Cross had to transfer them to the cars.

We organized the process so that Dr. Abdel Aziz had to register the names of the selected wounded, to avoid any confusion, and sent them to me to supervise together with Dr. Pascal from the ICRC to take the final decision and transfer them to the ICRC cars. I had to be with Dr. Pascal near the cars in the playground, which is an open and exposed area to the right wing militia men, the area was surrounded by many ICRC flags.

The mission was accomplished very smoothly and well organized, in the first day with all the potential risks. Our previous experience with the right wing militia casts shadow on their reliability in respecting the agreements in spite of the truce. We evacuated 91 wounded (included children) instead of 50. Our main concern was to evacuate as much as we can of the wounded to insure them necessary and qualified medical treatment on one hand, and to reduce the number of wounded on the other hand, and to spare as much as we can of medicines, food and water to the rest of the wounded. We sent Eva with this convoy, together with the dehydrated children. Before their departure there was a warm farewell. The mission waited for some minutes to cover my return out of the exposed area, during this time I could reach the hospital before they start shelling and shooting. Then they removed the flags and the convoy moved. We followed their departure with certain worry from one of the buildings, with field glasses; we don't know what will happen; as soon as the convoy left; they started shelling and shooting on the camp. The convoy was stopped by the right wing militia at Al-Qalaa (some kilometers from the camp) for about 45 minutes. We were able to watch in spite of the shelling. We couldn't recognize what is going on, it was a stressful moment, until we finally could relax, when we saw the convoy moving, resuming its way. After a while we received a message from the HQ: "we received 91 wounded". This was a response to our message.

The people in the camp were extremely rejoiced that some people were saved and could tell the outside world what is happening inside the camp. The world had seen the children suffering from dehydration and the wounded civilians.

The camp was not a terrorist camp and with no civilians inside as right wing militia was claiming through their media: Spirits went so high. The humanitarian issue had finally prevailed, the right wing militia had from now on, no claims or justifications to hinder the humanitarian help of the civilians to reach the sieged camp; this drew and gained international attention. The international media started talking about and sympathizing with the inhabitants of the sieged camp.

We were asked to prepare for the evacuation of other wounded, unfortunately 200 wounded on the next day. The first convoy was a trial. As doctors, to choose the wounded was the most difficult task both professionally and morally, we have to sort out and write a priority list from thousands of injuries; most of the cases were critical due to lack of medication.

ICRC mission told us that the right wing militia confiscated water and medicines they have with them. We were hoping that the ICRC would come with what we need so that we can resume our work in the hospital, if we get the necessary aid, like fuel, and medical supplies;

August Wednesday 4th

The ICRC mission arrived at the agreed time, we have to follow the same arrangement as on the first time Dr. Pascal and I went to select the most critical injuries, but were surprised of the huge numbers of injured, hundreds of them have gathered there with their relatives. They carried them on ladders, doors and beddings; all of them wanted to be in this convoy. Dr. Abdel Aziz should write the name of the selected wounded on a paper and send it to us with his signature. Dr. Pascal and I should take the final assessment and decision. We had to control the evacuation process in such a tense environment and state of chaos. The wounded and their relatives have different assessment of the causality than ours; they were pushing to be in this convoy. We had to face them with reality and convince them. Soon after transferring the 241 wounded and children into the big trucks, in spite of the Truce agreement the right wing militia men started shooting towards us in that open place. At this moment, the ICRC members tried to protect me, they surrounded me all over while lifting their white flags. They escorted me to the entrance of the camp and waited for about 10 minutes, till I

reached the emergency center. The shelling started again right after the convoy had left. ICRC members told us that they were not allowed to bring in any medicines or medical supplies; even the bottles of water they had were taken.

The evacuation of the wounded was a tough job; the medical staff was utterly exhausted from the continuous recourse of people, day and night asking about the third convoy to send their relatives. The situation in the camp was deteriorating, with the big shortage of fuel and consequently shortage in water supply. We evacuated some wounded, but at the same time, we received more and more new casualties, especially those who got injured at the dangerous water source, mostly women.

August Thursday 5th

Today the ICRC did not show up, as expected; but the dehydrated skinny skeleton children did. In this day, I had more than 15 dehydrated cases. Mothers came crying, please doctor help me. Her son has sunken eyes and difficulty in breathing, insisting that I should do something to save the children, but water was all what they need at this moment. She would ask again “Shall I start digging his grave in advance since nothing you can do?” It was the utter most questions I have ever heard; it is very hard to answer when I heard the same question from all mothers over & over again.

I was proud of them and of their heroism struggling to save the lives of their children by all means taking the risk to get water and many of them were victims. They did not ask for anything else. They deleted the word surrender from their dictionary.

In the evening we were listening to the news from the voice of Palestine in West Beirut, to learn about our evacuated wounded comrades in the hospitals of West Beirut, we heard them on air. And in solidarity with their comrades in Tel Al Zaatar they went on a food strike. They wanted to share with relatives, friends and loved ones in Tel Al Zaatar their suffering of thirst and hunger.

The siege was getting tighter day after day, hour after hour at the resistance camp. At night we heard the rattling of the utensils. Women marching like a silent demonstration for water and again we were on alert, maybe we will receive injuries. The night hours passed was also like day time full of tension. Abu Said was trying hard to get some water for his family and for us as well, because he wanted us to keep up our work. Sometimes he would come so happy to get us a bottle of water, a big victory. I am trying to sleep that night, but the disastrous siege, the faces of the passing children and their sinking eyes, were chasing me all the time, like a nightmare. The hope is still there maybe they would be able to cross the way towards us and save the remaining children.

Salman woke me up from my roaming thoughts, I was absentminded he told me that he had received a cable telegram about a third convoy of the ICRC would come tomorrow morning and we have to be ready to manage the evacuation.

August Friday 6th

The shelling started so early this day and many mortar bombs fell around the emergency center. They woke me up early this morning in a hurry to treat the injured, there were a lot of them.

At 10:00 am the shelling ceased and the ICRC cars arrived. The psychological situation of the inhabitants was deteriorating; their hope was retreating, they have limited and inevitable options; either they will be killed or be lucky and be among those wounded who will be transferred with ICRC to West Beirut.

We started the evacuation of the wounded; this day was an exceptional day, thousands of injured and their relatives who brought them to the hospital in the early hours near the hospital as they have heard that the ICRC will come this morning. It was a huge irritated and confused crowd. We evacuated 74 injured, before the process had to stop promptly. The right wing militia opened fire on us; again they violated the truce. They shot one of the injured on the stretcher and killed him on the spot. They also shot one of the help workers in the chest and killed him too.

We couldn't continue our work, we have to stop at once to save the lives of terrified people who started leaving the place and running to the shelters because of the random shelling taking their wounded with them. The right wing militia attacked the school that was located at the entrance of the camp and took it up after preliminary shelling.

The fighters at the frontlines defending the entrance of the camp have to retreat to new positions inside the camp, utterly exhausted and with very limited munitions, preparing to stop a new attack.

I was looking in my suit case, inserting my hand in my coat pocket to find an old forgotten pack of cigarettes. It was really a relaxing occasion in such terrifying and horrible circumstances around us, as everyone who was there, I enjoyed smoking a whole cigarette that day.

With all the buzzing of bullets, sporadic explosions and shelling this night, I was trying to have a nap, my mind don't know any more what real sleep looks like; we were used to short sleep; sometimes one hour sleep would be enough.

August Saturday 7th

The eastern frontline was an arena for attack and retreat; there was a group of young fighters aged 18-20 performing heroic operations attacking the right wing militia positions at night and defending the camp courageously and with firmness during the day. Some armed vehicles tried to advance towards the camp, but the resistance fighters destroyed six of them, and stopped the attack supported by the artillery of joined forces in the mountains. It was a special night; the morale went so high to the extent that resistance fighters started to dance celebrating victory and for smashing the attack. We were informed that the ICRC would come the next day to continue the evacuation of the wounded.

August Sunday 8th

People started gathering since early morning at the emergency center, inquiring about the arrival of the ICRC to bring their injured. We did not know exactly where all the injured were staying; they would come for their dressing on their wounds and return back to the shelters where they used to stay with their relatives.

I started early in this morning, writing a list of names of the wounded that we agreed upon for evacuation. Then another day full of tension, the selection of the priority list of the wounded was extremely difficult, we went to the hospital again for the practical arrangements; after the nurse Mahmoud at 10.00 a.m. informed us that the ICRC convoy is proceeding towards the camp, It was a real dilemma , again the huge number of wounded and their relatives bearing them with recourse of being taken with this convoy. The majority of them were real candidates for evacuation, due to their serious injuries and the absence of any possibility to treat them properly.

We moved some wounded and many children to the ICRC trucks. Suddenly the right wing militia opened fire on us and start shooting. A huge crowd of relatives gathered around to say goodbye to their relatives and it was a catastrophic and wretched moment; we had to stop the evacuation and ask the inhabitants to abandon the area and hurry up to the shelters. This day we talked to the ICRC chief delegate. Frankly, the situation was not anymore a matter of evacuation; it was more than that. All the inhabitants of the camp would be injured. Women and children are dying of dehydration; they have to take this into consideration.

All the civilians left in the camp are victims of the siege, if they are not among the injured, they are children and women and old people; our main concern as doctors and medical staff was to give priority to save their lives. We were not defending the houses, windows, doors or the allies in the camp, but we were defending the people of the camp. We couldn't trust the right wing militia; no way!. The whole issue of steadfastness was to defend the inhabitants of the camp; this steadfastness became a living symbol for the Palestinians and the Lebanese national movement.

We met with Salman and the local military leaders of both the Lebanese Communist Party and the Democratic Front, in the room which was previously the medical staff rest room in the operation section; we started discussing the deteriorating situation and to find a way to save the disastrous situation of the dehydrated children where we lose every day between 12-15 children, in addition to those mothers who risk their life to get some water for their dehydrating children.

We passed by the main wireless radio room. They were packing and ready to move to the logistic center which was more fortified and like a bunker surrounded by sand bags reinforcements; this would be the new center of the local leadership. From now on the wireless radio room will be far away from the emergency center. We were not able to get the news as we used to do before; more over the road between the emergency and the logistic center was risky.

It was a quiet night, but can the people feel safe and sleep? The buzzing of bullets and sporadic and random shelling break the night tranquility from time to time, reminding us, that we are under siege. I found some water that Fadia had spared for me; it has been long time before I took a mouthful of water.

August Monday 9th

The fighting is going on in the buildings near the sole water source and the right wing militia wanted to kill any hope of reaching the source of water so that they tighten the siege more and to spread despair among the inhabitants to crush their morale.

Abu Ali, the brave female resistance fighter, just came back from the frontline to tell us that there is a big attack on the camp from the side where her group was stationed. But it was fortified; the resistance fighters are courageously defending the last drop of water in the camp. Reinforcements and munitions were sent to the frontline and they withstood again the attack.

In the evening Abu Ali came and was utterly exhausted; her face was covered with dust she was carrying her gun and said: “ where is the cigarette? We defeated the aggressors & I need a cigarette.” I gave her one which I had saved for me. She sat in front of me, leaning on her gun inhaling the cigarette covetously and breathing heavily while describing the intensity of the offensive and how the artillery from the mountain supported them and forced the attackers to retreat. Bullets were still heard from time to time and rockets as well to shape the features of this crucial and extremely tense day.

This evening Ahmad Orfali informed us that the situation in the Al-Husayniyeh (Ras Al-Dikwaneh) area was not encouraging. There were rumors that two of the resistance fighters morally collapsed. The right wing militia was launching psychological war through loudspeakers talking to the fighters encouraging them to give up and surrender. The two fighters could not help it, and they surrendered to the other side side, this had bad implications on the inhabitants. Thereafter, the leadership sent more reinforcements and more resistance fighters to restore the confidence among the fighters and the inhabitants; but the “loud speakers” war from both sides continued more even more intensely.

August Tuesday 10th

The right wing militia was insisting to break into the area to control the last water source in the camp. Heavy shelling started early this morning. All the medical units were overcrowded with injured, among this huge destruction we couldn't find new places for the increasing number of casualties. Moaning of the injured was mixed with the smell of candles we are using to light the place, and the blackened walls from the candles smoke, altogether created a terrible and miserable atmosphere. I was trying to get some sleep on a sofa behind the curtain when I jumped on the sound of screams of many injuries. I was sitting in the corner of the room taking a short break when I heard screaming and moaning of a new group of injured. I hurried to receive them, the nurses have already cleaned the wounds with cooked salted water, and fixed the splints and casts. But what can we do with their pain, we do not have any more painkiller drugs, beside me was the young man Khalil who was shot in the belly, crying of pain, waiting this wretched struggle between death and the arrival of the convoy of the ICRC, how painful and difficult for a doctor to stand helpless watching your injured patient looking in your eyes asking for help, and you are not able to give the necessary help to save his life.

The fight became tenser with the sun rise. Rockets were falling and the resistance fighters were rushing towards the western frontline on the hill. It was a big attack with armors and tanks, the exhausted resistance fighters were defending and counting their bullets. The end was close. Why not when this was the sixty eighth consecutive attack and the camp was still resisting. I was waiting for the news with anxiety. By mid-day the hill was taken by the right wing militia after a fierce battle and the tanks were proceeding. Abu Ali came back with tears in her eyes, as many comrades were killed and only she together with one resistant fighter was able to withdraw. Thus, the water legend was over; no more water is available in the camp. The last source of water had fallen and mothers did not have any reason to be killed while getting water; it was time to die of thirst and dehydration this time. People were looking at each other as if it was their inevitable destiny coming to its final phase. Though the right wing militia was in progress, they were still outside the camp and could not get in.

Death and dehydration started to chase children in groups. That night I was thinking of how one could survive without water. What we could do, try to get the water source back? Or resist more; or they might reach an agreement on cease fire, many thoughts and ideas roamed in my mind all this night.

Nobody could sleep this night; the machine guns were breaking the calm night with bad expectations of what would happen tomorrow. No more news about the convoys of the ICRC. After what had happened, the ICRC had stopped evacuation after that last episode of violations of the truce we are in a dead lock. We felt we will all die of thirst and hunger, while the whole world was watching and not reacting, we were left to our own destiny. This is the feeling of the inhabitants of the camp. We believed that we were defending the ideals of the Palestinian revolution through our steadfastness, and our resistance. There was room for sentimental emotions; usually every one of us lives it in the difficult moments.

My thoughts went beyond the right wing militia barricades and check points to my parents in West Beirut. I left my family to Moscow for seven years and when I was back I stayed with them only for one week and thereafter to Tel Al Zaatar camp. But the people here are my relatives too, through this sentimental relation that had developed with time; I became a part of them.

Abu Saeed came; unusually this time, with a broken heart as a sniper shot his son in the head and killed him on the spot. He was brought to the emergency center thinking we might save him. He did not shed any tears; his son was young; only eighteen years old and was a brave fighter. He died as a hero and this was the wish and the pride of all resistance fighters to die while defending their folk.

The resistance fighters were afraid to run out of munitions. That was the reason why many of them kept the last bullet in their pocket for them to fight until victory or death.

That was how this day had passed burdensome; this night was calm with sporadic and interrupted shelling falling, no more women going to get water, no more rattling of utensils. The right wing militia was waiting for us as the wolf waits for his victim; to die of thirst and the children of dehydration.

This night is so calm, that we had never had such a calm night since the start of the offensive. The sky was so clear, full of shining stars and the moon was full. We sat with the nurses at the emergency center entrance, talking about what would happen tomorrow. The nurse Mahmoud came to inform me that 5 of the gangrene and tetanus

cases had died in the hospital. He was urging me to do something, as if he forgot what he had learned in the nursing school and with his long experience, due to his emotional reaction of seeing his patients were dying one after the other. The cases were hopeless, we have no chance to help them, no medicines no pain killers. In these wretched and miserable circumstances, the issue now is not only the injured, it is also how to save the children, and it is the thirst epidemic. Mahmoud was convinced with what I was telling him, more over to think of the fascists who are only some hundreds of meters away.

In this hapless atmosphere the wireless man from the “General command organization” came to tell us that an agreement had been achieved to evacuate the civilians tomorrow. We could not believe the news an agreement? on what?

We did not have casualties this night; it was quiet. They were counting on us dying of thirst or surrender that means being slaughtered like sheep. We talked about different things apart from the main topic, until we ended with jokes; as if in this unusual calm night, we had forgotten that we were under disastrous siege. Morning sun rays started to shine, the night abandoned us to announce the beginning of a new day... a day which we do not know what will happen!!.....

August Wednesday 11th

This morning they resumed shelling on the camp and the sound of mortar rockets became usual and a part of the daily life; morning rockets were like the crow of the cock in the morning announcing the beginning of the day.

Adham, the vice military commander in the camp, had left the camp with the third convoy of the wounded, although he had a fractured right arm in a cast. He left the camp to give leadership in West Beirut for briefing about the real situation inside the camp in details. At the same time another group of four combatants left the camp, breaking the siege, across the mountains, to inform the leadership located there of the humanitarian, military and logistic situation inside the camp.

Two days passed with absolutely no water in the camp, and more children were dying, leaving to the other world, without knowing anything about this world except misery, hunger, siege and thirst.

At mid-day the political commander (Abdel Mohsen) visited us in the emergency center. We discussed the last and all possible coming developments, informed us that we had to attend a crucial meeting at 4:00 p.m in the new leadership center. Abdel Aziz and I have left together accompanied by Nizar to guide us to the place, for the second time, the inhabitants were worried and anxious to see us leaving the emergency center to somewhere! There was a huge crowd of people outside the emergency center, whispering and looking with confused glances towards us, may be reading something unusual on our faces, not caring for the mortar shelling rockets. It was the first time we were heading to the east where the new location of the local leadership was. We were crossing the buildings and the openings in the walls and shelters to avoid snipers. All the way we were hearing whispering of women asking themselves: “where are the doctors going? Maybe there is a serious matter?” People

were looking at us anxiously and confused. We reached the location which was once the logistics center, in Ras Al-Dikwaneh that was totally fortified like a bunker under the ground surrounded by sand bags.

We asked about Salman. One of the fighters led us to his office. We had a meeting with him for a while, after talking on the radio with an Italian Journalist in Western Beirut inquiring about the children, dehydration and the morale in the camp. Thereafter, Salman had a talk with the leadership via the wireless; we heard coded message orders from the HQ in West Beirut to the combatants, to organize their withdrawal through the mountains. Commander Salman informed us that there is an agreement to evacuate women and children on the next day at 9:00 a.m. by the ICRC and this will take place under the supervision of the Arab Security Forces of the Arab league. This agreement did not include the combatants and the military.

There was a discussion about the situation in the camp could be different, if there were only fighters in the camp. But with this huge number of civilians, and many children it was different and they had to save their lives, which was the first priority. We returned to the emergency center through the same road, bored walls, and demolished buildings. People and nurses were waiting, gathered near the emergency center to know the latest news; first we said nothing, and then slowly we told them what we had heard.

This night there is an unusual movement inside the camp, as people heard about the agreement, they started preparing themselves for the next day. A group of combatants passed by and asked us if we will withdraw through the mountains; it was strange for us to be asked such a question, we are not fighters our main task as doctors and medical staff is to take care of the wounded and to be with the civilians, until the last civilian was evacuated. Our main concern was how to evacuate the injured; that was our foremost responsibility.

This night the hours passed very slowly. The Swedish Dr. Lars and his wife Agneta, came to the emergency center, they wanted to be with us next day.

Nobody could sleep in this night. We were preparing for the evacuation of the injured without knowing when and where this would take place. It was a calm night the sky was clear with a full moon. I went out under the moonlight for a walk as if I was saying goodbye to what was before a camp full of life with the people, houses and narrow allies, children everywhere , now what remains of that : The martyrs in the graves among them were also beloved people, women who sacrificed their lives to get water for their children, and those who were defending the people in the last night, and the rubbles everywhere .It is a very touching moment in this last night in the camp ,full of emotions at the same time , at last rejoiced that many children and civilians can step out alive from the atrocities of this terrifying siege.

August Thursday 12 th

This morning, I was planning to go to the hospital to collect my books and private things. Suddenly, I heard mortar shelling not far from us. On my way I met the nurses Mahmoud and Ahmad, , came to tell me that they could not reach the hospital because the right wing militia broke in the hospital and killed all the people inside; both the wounded and the civilians who sought shelter in some parts of the hospital. On our

way back to the emergency center we heard the shooting of machineguns and the buzzing of bullets nearer and nearer; we realized, now that it was a deception not an agreement.

Fierce fighting erupted between some defenders of the camp and the attackers in the road about 20 meters from the emergency center, we witnessed this, with our own eyes as we reached the emergency center which was over crowded with scared women and children who came to the emergency center seeking for shelter. While Abdel Aziz and I with the nurses were trying to move the injured from the center to a safer place in a nearby building, a number of the right wing militia fighters surprised us from the north side, coming from the Al-Dikwaneh frontline. They ordered us to move forward. We carried the injured with what was available of wood boards, stretchers and chairs. They claimed that the Red Cross was waiting for us, but it was the way out to death. There was one obligatory road out; women and children started to move following the orders. The Swedish doctor, his wife, and I walked out; nurses were following me with the wounded; two of the right wing militia stopped us to the wall after ordering all the nurses to take the same position. I felt it was our last moment and they would open fire on us. I thought it was the end; but while they were busy talking to each other, I asked the nurses to move quickly, penetrate and hide in the crowds of people who were marching in hundreds. I also asked them to take off their white gowns and the Red Crescent badges, because I suspected that they were planning something terrible against the medical staff. We couldn't avoid the multiple check points in this horrible road. It was getting worse and worse as we were moving forward as the fascists were shooting over our heads and between our feet. They were searching us and confiscating anything we had whether it was watches or money. We arrived to another checkpoint where many of them were waiting for us. Knowing we were the medical staff they wanted to shoot us all on the spot. Suddenly, I saw one of the militia men coming closer towards me and calling Dr. Youssif Youssif; he recognized me; introduced himself, while I couldn't move my lips to say anything. He reminded me that one day for several months ago, I saved his life and operated on him due to a severe chest injury; at that time, he had been brought to the hospital this was before the last siege of the camp. He wanted to save my life, but the other militia man refused and they started arguing sharply, suddenly a familiar face appeared; he was lieutenant Rajeh from the Palestinian Liberation Army who was previously in the camp, whom also I operated on his hand. He rushed towards me, embraced me and put an end to the dispute. He introduced himself to the militia men as a Syrian officer.

I tried hard to save the nurses and the wounded; it was useless. They took me to the entrance of a nearby building together with the two Swedish doctors and the Syrian officer. Then, I heard cries, screaming and the shooting from machine guns behind the building. Later, I saw the nurses standing in a queue and they ordered them to march forward two by two. I still could never forget the glances of Khalid, the volunteering nurse, his eyes were telling me: do something! But I was not able to do anything . Then they brought the Swedish doctors inside... after a while one of the Fascist went out with his big gun; I heard shooting with cries and screams followed by terrifying silence. I was sure Mamdouh, Khalid, Subhi and the rest of nurses were all assassinated.

The scenes of the massacre unfolded horrifyingly before me. They were taking the inhabitants in batches and gunning them down. One of the Fascist was massively

built. He spoke slurringly from drunkenness. He carried a large knife, stained with blood ... Every few minutes he would come in to wipe his knife, stained with the blood of inhabitants, on the shirt of one of those sitting by the door. He was slaughtering people and afterwards would start searching for things in the pockets of the victims.

He was a horrifying and repulsive sight at a moment in which emotions were frozen. They were taking everything from the people. I noticed the wounded man, injured in his leg, who came out on crutches with his leg in plaster. How they fell upon him, kicking him with their feet, and then threw him on the ground, from their five files planted bullets in his body.

At that moment I was thinking of Dr. Abdel Aziz and the remaining nurses. Since I did not know their fate: After 45 minutes later a right wing security official came with one of his men to take us (the Swedish, the Syrian officer and myself). It was a horrifying exit, we walked along the road leading out of the camp about 300 meters long, but it was the longest road in my whole life. I saw the bodies of innocent inhabitants were scattered along the road. There were bodies of the old people, bodies of children and women on the road. The body of a pregnant woman who was shot in the stomach and the blood was pouring from her. The bodies lay one after another in front of me and the road was long, so long. And at the end of there were their armored cars and the Fascists enjoying the spectacle of the dead bodies. They took me in a car to the headquarters and there I was taken into the office of Amin Al Gemayel who looked at me shaking his head and saying after I had been introduced to him as the refugee camp doctor, said: "Look they say I am a Fascist and my hands are stained with blood... but you see are clean".

After they had greeted me, they washed their hands with spirit; staring at me all the while. It was as if I had come from another planet. They didn't believe that there were human beings in the refugee camp. They thought they had been fighting ghosts. The camp had been totally destroyed where were the combatants? They were asking naïve questions. Then I saw the ICRC representative and I told him that Dr. Abdel Aziz with a group of nurses, had been following me, but I no longer knew their fate. Immediately he made a contact by wireless and a car moved off to the Dekwaneh area to rescue Abdel Aziz and the nurses. There was a crowd of Journalists and news agency correspondents waiting, who interviewed me, after strenuous effort since the fascists did not want anyone to know anything about me and others. They wanted complete silence regarding us, so our fate would not be unknown

They began interrogating me, one of them came forward:

"I am Dr. Risha, the local medical officer of the Phalangist party"
"Welcome".

"Dr. Youssif you're accused of discrimination in treating Palestinians and Lebanese Christians and Muslims. You didn't help Lebanese and drew out blood from them til they died to give it to the Palestinians".

I smiled at this allegation, I answered quietly: my nerves at that moment were not at all tense, I spoke calmly, and I had already settled the question of life and death. I told him, "You know the reason for my being here; one of your people rescued me,

because one day I performed a surgical operation on him and saved his life. This is enough proof that I don't discriminate against people.
.”

He said: “There is a person who knows you. He is here in the next room, and he testifies that you used to discriminate, and one day you didn't treat his relative and let him die.”

I was completely self-confident, and so I felt that they were waging a losing psychological war against me. “I am willing to confront him” I answered. “But I have some things to confront with you”. I listed him a number of those whom they would classify according to religion and nationality- their dictionary is full of such terminology – and how I had given them surgical operations, saved their lives and restored them safely to their families and relatives with liaison committee. I confronted him with a list of names, I told him the story of a wounded man, who had been hit in the head with a bullet that had pierced his eye and almost proved fatal- and how I had operated on him, and how our fighting men in the refugee camp had donated blood for him.

I kept on asking about the fate of Dr. Abdel Aziz and the nurses; I would interrupt them as they were speaking to ask about him and the nurses and they would reply: “ Don't be afraid, he will come”. At about 2:00 p.m. they brought him, and they asked him the same questions as he told me later.

I thought about the fate of the remaining nurses all the time. I thought about Bahaa who had been beside me, whom they had pursued, and Ferial who carried my medical bag, and Fadia whom I had not seen since we left the emergency center. Apprehensions flashed through me, and I imagined that they had all been killed, as well as Dr. Abdel Aziz.

At about 4 o'clock p.m. and after I had insisted, they brought Dr. Abdel Aziz and disclosed their thoughts and allegations. Several people came to ask for my release, but they still considered us prisoners of war.

It was 2:00 p.m. when I saw the Arab Security Forces, we had who been waiting for them since 9:00 a.m.

At about 3:00 p.m. and after they had finished their interrogations, they allowed me to go out to the balcony of the room ; from there I saw the scenes of celebrations and rejoice , but not victory , it was with sadistic feeling, that they were enjoying the sight of mutilation and slaughter and the dead bodies.

The Arab League Representative Dr. Hasan Sabri Al-Khouli came and negotiated for a long time with Amin Al-Gemayel, for our release. At 6:00 p.m we rode in the car of Dr.Hasan Sabri Al-Khouli car with Amin Al-Gemayel himself driving through the Eastern sector of Beirut, where there were many barricades, 12 altogether.

Whoever had been spared from slaughter at the entrances to the camp was killed and mutilated at one of these 12 barricades.

We arrived at Museum (Al Mathaf) area, which was the green line dividing the two sectors of Beirut. There Amin Al-Gemayel got out and left us. The scene of the bodies

and the check points were horrible. Those barricades were a gruesome sight with scattered corpses. I don't know what would have happened to me if Amin Al-Gemayel was not with us. Perhaps I would have been a victim of the knives which had mutilated so many, whose corpses had been thrown down on both sides of the roads.

We continued on our way into West Beirut, not believing that we escaped death by the The Fascist. The Red Cross representative John Hoeffliger had gone ahead of us. Suddenly he stopped his car, got out of it and ran towards us, and we exchanged a long embrace. "I didn't believe you would be saved." He said: I was in the impression that they would kill you all. The car continued on its way with us to the Coral Beach on Beirut Western seafront. Along the way I saw cars and people and many places which pretty knew. The sign of civilization began to return to us little by little.

It was a warm reunion with the headquarters to end the longest day in my life. The news that we had been killed had gone ahead of us to the western sector, through statements by camp inhabitants who had witnessed the massacre.

Two days after, we left Dr. Fathi Arafat and Dr. Abdel Aziz and I to Al-Damour (a town about 20 kilometers south for Beirut) which was chosen as a temporary place for the inhabitants of Tel Al Zaatar to choose a temporary site for the Red Crescent continuing on our course with people who remained from Tel Al Zaatar. Those people who had made such a humanitarian and revolutionary impression in our hearts that I will never forget all my life. Tel Al Zaatar remained, with its fighting men, struggling... struggling until its martyrdom. It was killed in action and did not fall. In it were left some 3000 martyrs who had given their lives to the heroic battle of steadfastness and resistance till martyrdom became a symbol of resistance for both the Palestinian and the Lebanese.

Two days later, the combatants defending the refugee camp of Tel Al Zaatar forced their way across the mountains, through fierce battles with the Fascist to join up with the bases of the PLO and the Lebanese National movement in the mountains.

So ends the legendary battle, the battle of 53 days of fierce combat, and 70 continuous attacks, that were repulsed at the boundaries of the capital of the poor and the commune of the working people.