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By Alfred Friendly Washington Post Foreign Service

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THE GAZA FRONTIER,
June 5—In a swift initial mili-
tary success in a secondary

theater of war, Israeli troops
cut off the Gaza Strip from
Egypt by capturing its south-
ern highway connection, the
village of Khan Yunis.

I was among reporters who
watched from a vantage point
less than two miles away what
was apparently the beginning
of the second stage: the as-

sault on the Strip's main
urban center, Gaza City.

Light and not very intense
mortar fire from Israeli posi-
tions on border kibbutzim (co-
operative farm settlements)
was directed from the east
against the hill of Ali Muntar,
a spot made famous by two
British assaults, both repulsed,
in 1917. The hill is a com-
manding position above Gaza
City.

Frequent Bursts

Apparently from Israeli fore-
ces working northward from
Khan Yuns, heavier mortar
bursts were to be seen on Ali
Muntar. Bursts hit every min-
ute or two during the after-
noon, kicking up clouds of
dust and seemingly starting
fires.

The area behind the border
settlements was stiff with
troops and armor, tucked
away under the double and
triple rows of eucalyptus trees
that line most Israeli roads—
long since planted for the pur-
pose of concealment.

At the kibbutz of Nahal Oz,
barely a mile from the border,
the officer commanding that
sector, a young lieutenant col-
onel who carried himself as if
the day's events were routine,
took us to a high spot from
which a clear view at the soft-
ening-up operation was to be
had across fields of ripened
grain.

Tells of Start

He said that at about 8 a.m.
Monday, Egyptian mortar fire,
apparently trying to get the

range, began to fall on the kib-
butz. The alert was sounded
and non-fighting personnel of
the settlement took to their
shelters.

The bombardment, he said,
came from light and heavy
mortars and artillery. A few
hours later, the Israeli re-
sponse began and the Egyptian
firing ceased.

As reporters arrived, a bull-
dozer was hauling out the car-
cass of the last of 20 cows
killed by shots into one of the
settlement's barns. There were
no human casualties, the offi-
cer said.

Mortar Fire Heard

His recitation of the events
was punctuated by the sound
of mortar fire nearby—first a
sharp crack at the launching
and, a few seconds later, the
dull thud of the landing as it
echoed from Ali Muntar across
the gentle valley. The only
features on the landscape that
intervened were the square
blockhouses of the erstwhile
U.N. Emergency Force, now
evacuated on orders of Egyp-
tian President Nasser.

There was no air action and
there had been none. Clearly,
both sides had better use for
their planes far to the south,
on the Sinai border cutting
through the Negev Desert,
where the heavy and doubt-
less decisive battles of this
war are taking place.

Nahal Oz was the scene of
an Egyptian terrorist attack
last week, when mortar fire

from the Egyptian side was
also laid down at the kibbutz
of Kefar Aza. Overshooting,
the missiles set fire to several
acres of ripe grain fields a
few hundred yards beyond the
center of the settlement. The
smell of fresh smoke still
hung in the air as reporters
arrived about midday.

Conflicting Reports

There were conflicting re-
ports about the time of the
first Egyptian shooting. The
director of the kibbutz was re-
ported to have given it as 8
a.m. However, three farmers
to whom I spoke indicated
that the firing began about 4
a.m., paused, and resumed at 8.

Language difficulties, plus
the insistence of escort offi-
cers to get reporters quickly
out of an area where con-
tinued military action had not
been expected, prevented rec-
onciling the divergent reports.

At about the same time
Monday the sector reported
that there had been Egyptian
firing on two other kibbutzim
to the south, Kissusfim and
En Hashelousha. It was from
about that area that the suc-
cessful Israeli thrusts at the
key village of Khan Yunis
must have been launched.

No reports of casualties
were given for the two farm
collectives, which lie about on
the level of the bottom, or
southern boundary of the
Gaza Strip.

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Israeli troops prepare artillery position near the Gaza Strip.