

Giannou, Chris. Interviewed by Helena Cobban, June 1982.¹

Cobban: Dr. Giannou, when the Israeli attack started on June 4, you were in Beirut. What happened to you during the next few days?

Giannou: It's a coincidence that I was in Beirut at the time. I was on my way to the airport at seven o'clock that morning, and in the early afternoon the air raid began. Once I realized they were bombing areas of the city, I tried to rush over to Gaza hospital, the main Red Crescent hospital in Beirut. It was difficult getting there because no cars wanted to go into the area. I finally walked half the distance and got up close enough to get an ambulance over to the hospital. There were already 60 or 70 cases. I worked there for several hours on children-very, very small infants including one several months old. There were no other surgeons in the hospital, and even to set up an intravenous transfusion in a child that small requires a surgical operation.

After the bombing raid was over the other surgeons started coming in, so I got in an ambulance and went to Sidon. I wanted to continue on to Nabatiyeh, where I was medical director of the hospital, but there was a great deal of shelling along the road. So, I worked at the Sidon Red Crescent hospital until five o'clock in the morning and then I got in another ambulance and set off for Nabatiyeh, where I spent June 5 and 6. On June 5 there was still a very, very heavy bombardment by artillery and aircraft especially in the region of Nabatiyeh, and on the morning of the sixth the land invasion began.

In Nabatiyeh, one Israeli jet was shot down during an air raid that began about 6:30 am. On such occasions, most of the population simply goes out onto their balconies to watch the airplanes. When the airplane was shot down in full view of everyone, the entire population simply burst out in a cry of joy. They were jumping up and down in the streets, very, very happy that this airplane had been shot down.

Cobban: Did your hospital receive any direct hits?

Giannou: Not in Nabatiyeh.

Cobban: Was the hospital clearly marked as a hospital?

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Giannou: Yes. There was a red cross on the roof as well as the side facing the main thoroughfare. There was a great deal of shelling around the hospital, especially in the afternoon of June 6. This is when we had to evacuate. There was so much shelling around the hospital that it was impossible for ambulances to arrive.

Cobban: What kind of casualties were you getting, and can you describe some of the people who were coming in, and how you were able to treat them?

Giannou: There was one large group of casualties that came in from the village of Shakeem. These were civilians. The village had been bombed and strafed by aircraft and there were about 20 casualties; ambulances brought in a few and the others were simply put into private cars by their relatives. Most were shrapnel or "crush" injuries – the sort that occurs when a building collapses and someone is stuck under large blocks of concrete.

Cobban: What proportion of your patients could be classified as military?

Giannou: We registered and treated 36 patients: 30 civilians and 6 military. The 6 military were from the Lebanese Arab Army, stationed in Nabatiyeh, whose barracks had been bombed and totally destroyed on June 5.

Cobban: And what caused you to move on June 6?

Giannou: Two things: first, the shelling around the hospital became very intense making it impossible to get new casualties to the hospital because the ambulances could not run. Second, the military situation had developed: Israeli troops were just about to enter Nabatiyeh .

Cobban: And where did you evacuate to?

Giannou: To the Red Crescent hospital in Sidon . During the evacuation, the road was being shelled and we had to take secondary roads in order to avoid the shelling. We got down to Sidon and started working in the Red Crescent hospital there. That evening the first Israeli troops disembarked north of Sidon, effectively cutting the road to Beirut . The Israelis were apparently planning new disembarkations along the waterfront . Since the hospital is on the main thoroughfare, not too far from the waterfront, it also was coming under very heavy shelling.

On the morning of June 7, because of the intensive shelling around the hospital, we had to evacuate it. Most of the staff went to a private hospital,

Ghassan Hamoud, which is nearby. Part of the staff went to Hamshari hospital, which was under construction near Ain el-Hilweh refugee camp. I took a couple of staff members and half the patients and went to the government hospital at Ain el-Hilweh, just across the road from the refugee camp. I had three general practitioners with me and six nurses and there were four already in the hospital, so there were ten nurses and several paramedical technicians, ambulance drivers.

Cobban: How many patients did you end up with there?

Giannou: By June 10, we had between 250 and 300 patients.

Cobban: What were you able to do for the patients?

Giannou: The majority of cases were wounds in the legs, arms and other superficial wounds. I had to give the anesthesia myself and then operate. The operating theater was on the fourth floor-the government hospital is a very large building-but it was impossible to use the operating theater because it was too exposed. Shells were falling around and shrapnel was coming in through the window so we closed the wooden shutters and kept the windows open so that they wouldn't break from the pressure effects. I had to set up working facilities on the first floor. The ground floor and basement shelters had been taken over by the civilian population fleeing the camp and the surrounding area. They came