

Squatters a thorn in Israel's side

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JERUSALEM — On a barren hilltop north of Jerusalem in occupied Jordan, there's a small settlement of 230 Israelis that was put up 2½ years ago over the objection of the Israeli Government.

The squatters have been called fanatics and hotheads by mean Israelis, but they have not been dislodged. Their persistence helps explain why Israel will not easily give up the occupied territory on the West Bank of the Jordan River.

"Nobody can challenge my right to this land because I myself live in this land," said Shimon Ansbacher, a lean, 46-year-old grandfather with a graying goatee who has become a sort of guru of the village. "My forefathers told me from one generation to another to keep faith and you will one day return to Israel. I have kept

faith. I have been a fanatic about Jewish survival."

The settlement is called Ma'ale Adummim—the Red Ascent. It takes its name from a Biblical description of the bronze and clay-colored Jordan hills of the 20 miles of deserted road between Jerusalem and Jericho.

Ma'ale Adummim is one of several sites mentioned in the Bible that caught the attention of Gush Emunim, a group of largely Orthodox Jewish Israelis who believe that it is Israel's biblical destiny to rule the land between the Mediterranean and Jordan Rivers.

Although Israel captured the west bank of the Jordan River in the 1967 war, the Government felt that settling the area with Israelis would be provocative and it put the matter in limbo expecting an eventual peace arrangement with the Arabs.

But the war of October 1973, strengthened the resolve of the Gush Emunim—the band of faithful—that the only way to protect the safety of an area was to settle it.

There were months of protests and sit-ins. The labor party government, yielding partly to the pressure, promised that it would put up an industrial complex in the area—a project that could be more easily dismantled in the event of a treaty.

But according to Ansbacher, "We called their bluff." At dawn, on March 3, 1975, a band of 40 people drove a crane, and trucks filled with building materials up the Ma'ale Adummim Hill. By 8 a. m., Ansbacher said, the squatters had put up a pre-cast concrete bungalow and a water tower, planted several dozen saplings and hoisted the Israeli flag.

While the government of Yitzhak Rabin moved ineffectively to hamper the settle-

ment, the squatters out of their own funds, put up 60 more concrete bungalows, a playground complete with a slide shaped in the head of Donald Duck, a grocery, a library, a nursery and a yeshiva for Orthodox Jewish soldiers.

The persistent controversy, Ansbacher says, contributed to the downfall of the Rabin government and helped install Menachem Begin, who is more sympathetic to their cause.

Ansbacher, whose family fled Nazi Germany when he was a boy, says he does not care what political scheme Begin chooses to solve the Palestinian homeland dilemma as long as Jews are permitted to live in the land the Bible calls Judea and Samaria.

"If I had to choose to live in Borough Park in Brooklyn or here under the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, I would choose to live here because this is the Holy Land."