

Disaster of the Gladden Fields

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“My King, Ciryon is dead and Aratan is dying. Your last counselor must advise you, nay command you, as you commanded Ohtar. Go! Take your burden, and at all costs bring it to the Keepers: even at the cost of abandoning your men and me! ”

— Elendur in Unfinished Tales, "The Disaster of the Gladden Fields"

The **Disaster of the Gladden Fields**, also referred to as the **Battle of the Gladden Fields**, was an ambush on Isildur and his personal guard at the beginning of the Third Age.

Background

After the defeat of Sauron by the Last Alliance, Isildur, son and heir of Elendil, returned to Gondor. There he assumed the Elendilmir as King of Arnor. He stayed for a year, restoring its order and defining its bounds, but the greater part of the army of Arnor returned to Eriador by the Númenórean road from the fords of Isen to Fornost. When at last he decided to return to his own realm he was in haste, for he wished to go first to Rivendell and find his wife and youngest son Valandil. Therefore he took the shortest route, making his way north from Osgiliath up the Vales of Anduin to Cirith Forn en Andrath, the high-climbing pass that led down to Imladris. With him were his three sons, Elendur, Aratan and Ciryon, and his guard of two hundred knights and

soldiers, stern, war-hardened men of Arnor.^[2]

On the twentieth day of their journey, under heavy rain, they came within sight of the distant forest crowning the highlands. Anduin had swollen with swift water and they sought the ancient paths of the Silvan Elves that ran near the eaves of the forest by the entrance of the vales between Lothlórien and Amon Lanc.^[2]

Prelude

Late in the afternoon of the thirtieth day of their journey (4 October^{[3][4][note 1]} of T.A. 2^[5]), they were passing the north borders of the Gladden Fields, with the forest looming on their right, and clouds gathering above the distant mountains. They were singing, because their day's march was near its end. As the sun plunged into a cloud, they saw Orcs issuing from the forest and moving down the slopes yelling their war-cries.^[2]

The Dúnedain saw the Orcs but in the dim light their number could not be guessed, but it was clear the Orcs outnumbered them, and were possibly as many as ten times their number. Isildur realized that they were on their own: Moria and Lothlórien were far behind and Thranduil was four days' march ahead.^[2]

The Battle

Since the land was not flat enough, and the slope was not in his favour, Isildur was unable to form his company into a Dirnaith. He commanded a Thangail to be drawn up, hoping to cleave a way through them and scatter them in dismay.^[2]

Isildur ordered Ohtar his esquire to take the Shards of Narsil and flee, and to save the Shards from capture at all costs.^[2]



T.A. 2

Disaster of the Gladden Fields

Conflict	Post- <u>Alliance War</u>
Place	<u>Gladden Fields</u>
Outcome	Death of Isildur, loss of <u>the One Ring</u>
Combatants	
*Isildur's Guard	* <u>Orcs</u>
Commanders	
* <u>Isildur</u>	*Unknown
Strength	
* <u>Isildur</u>	*Up to ten times the number of the
• Isildur's three sons, <u>Elendur</u> , <u>Aratan</u> and <u>Ciryon</u>	Númenóreans
• 200 Knights and Soldiers	

The Orcs let fly a hail of arrows, then hurled a great mass of their chief warriors down the slope against the Dúnedain, hoping to break the shield-wall, but it stood firm. The arrows had little effect on the Númenórean armour. After the initial attack the Orcs faltered, and it seemed that they were withdrawing. The Dúnedain had slain many of them. Isildur ordered the men to resume the march at once, believing his enemies had been shaken enough by their losses, but he was mistaken.^[2]

- No more than 20 Archers^[1]

Casualties

*Isildur

*Unknown

- Entire escort save three

The Dúnedain had gone scarcely a mile when the Orcs attacked again. This time they attacked on a wide front, which bent into a crescent and soon closed into an unbroken ring about the Dúnedain, who had too few archers, and even their dreaded Númenorean steel-bows could not reach at the distance the Orcs stood.^[2]

The Orcs closed in on all sides, flinging themselves on the Dúnedain with reckless ferocity. Some of the greater Orcs leaped two at a time, and with their weight, dead or alive, bore down a Dúnadan so that others might drag him out and slay him. The Orcs may have paid five to one in this exchange, but for them it was cheap. Ciryon was slain in this way, and Aratan was mortally wounded while trying to save him.^[2]

Isildur's Fall

As the battle progressed, it became clear that defeat was imminent. Isildur was rallying men on the east side where the assault was heaviest. He considered attempting to escape with the help of the One Ring, but he delayed because of the pain it caused, and because he would not leave his son. But Elendur sought out Isildur, and commanded him to take the Ring and flee. Asking Elendur to forgive him, Isildur put on the Ring, and although he was turned invisible, the Elendilmir of the West he bore on his brow, which could not be quenched, blazed forth. Men and Orcs gave way in fear. Isildur, pulling his cloak over his head, vanished into the night and was never seen again.^[2]

He fled a great distance, and upon reaching the Anduin he tried in despair to swim across it. Despite his strength, the current swept him down toward the Gladden Fields again, and the Ring betrayed him and slipped off his finger as he swam. In his dismay he nearly gave up and drowned, but the mood passed and he found himself free from his long burden. He reached an islet near the western bank, but as he rose out of the water in the moonlight, prowling Orcs spotted him. Fearing his great height and the piercing light of the Elendilmir, they shot him with arrows. His corpse was never found, believed to have been lost to the river's current.^[2]

Aftermath

Of the two hundred Númenórean knights, only three survived. Two of them were Ohtar and his companion, who brought the Shards of Narsil to Rivendell. The third was Estelmo, Elendur's esquire, one of the last to fall. He had been stunned by a club and not slain, and was later found alive beneath Elendur's body.^[2]

The disaster marked the death of High King Isildur, and a change in the *status quo* of the two Realms in Exile. It also marked the loss of the Ring for almost two and a half thousand years.

Order of battle

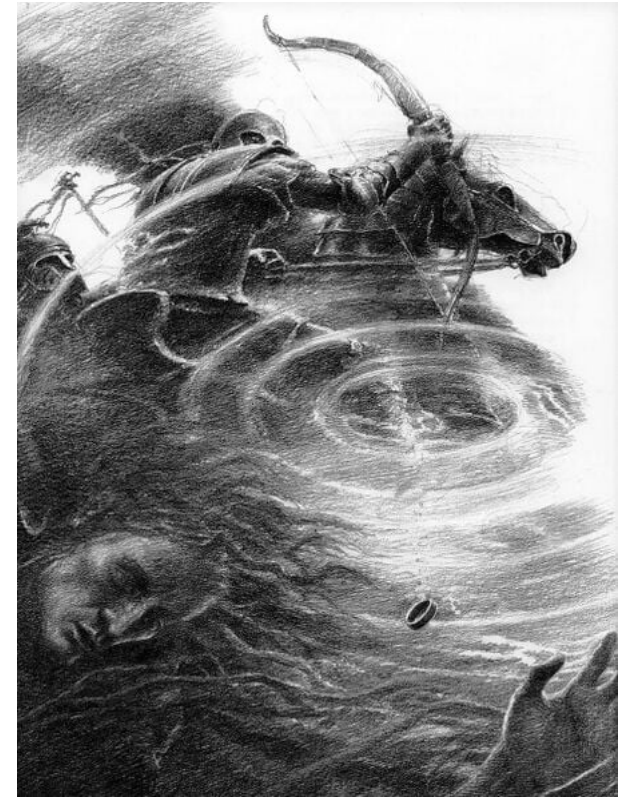
The Dúnedain were outnumbered by as many as ten to one. The great Men of Númenor towered above the tallest Orcs, and their swords and spears far outreached the weapons of their enemies, but they were stiffened and commanded by grim servants of Barad-dûr and there was cunning and a relentless hatred in their attacks. Slowly but steadily the Orcs achieved the upper hand.^[2]

Isildur was a man of such strength and endurance as few even of the Dúnedain of that age could equal, and he was protected by the Elendilmir that he bore on his brow, as the Orcs feared it.^[2]

Other versions of the legendarium

In the essay Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age, Isildur and his troops had already set up their camp between the Greenwood and the river Anduin close to the Gladden Fields, and were surprised in their camp by the attack of the Orcs, because Isildur had not ordered soldiers to guard the camp, since he thought that all their enemies had been overthrown.^[6]

1. The attack occurred on the thirtieth day of their journey from Osgiliath from which they departed on 5 September. Every month in the Númenórean 'King's Reckoning' consisted of thirty days.



The Disaster of the Gladden Fields by Alan Lee

References

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), *Unfinished Tales*, "The Disaster of the Gladden Fields", "Notes", note 22
2. J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), *Unfinished Tales*, "The Disaster of the Gladden Fields"
3. J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), *Unfinished Tales*, "The Disaster of the Gladden Fields", "Notes", note 9
4. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Appendix D, "The Calendars", p. 1107
5. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*, Appendix B, "The Third Age", entry for the year 2, p. 1085
6. J.R.R. Tolkien, Christopher Tolkien (ed.), *The Silmarillion*, "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age"

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