

= Battles of Fort Budapest =

The Battles of Fort Budapest (Hebrew : ????? ?????) refer to two attempts by the Egyptian Army to capture Fort Budapest , part of the Bar Lev Line during the Yom Kippur War . The first attempt took place at noon on October 6 , 1973 with the start of Operation Badr , but failed due to Israeli Air Force intervention . The second attempt took place on October 15 , at the onset of Operation Stouthearted Men , the Israeli military operation to cross the Suez Canal . Despite significant setbacks caused by poor sea conditions , the second attack was on the verge of success when the Israeli Air Force once again intervened , and this , coupled with Israeli reinforcements , repelled the Egyptian attack .

= = Background = =

Fort Budapest was the northernmost fort of the Israeli Bar Lev Line . Unlike all other Bar Lev Line fortifications , Budapest was not located on or immediately east of the Suez Canal . Rather , it was located on the Mediterranean Sea , 16 @.@ 5 kilometres (10 @.@ 3 mi) south @-@ east of Port Fouad . Fort Budapest was the strongest of all the Bar Lev positions due to its strategic location ; the fort had control over the coastal road connecting Port Fouad to el @-@ Arish to the east . The fort had exceptional engineering preparations and a considerable amount of weaponry . The fort incorporated nine bunkers , and was surrounded by barbed wire and minefields to a depth of 600 metres (660 yd) . On October 6 , the fort was garrisoned by an infantry company and two tank platoons , under the command of Captain Motti Ashkenazi .

The Budapest garrison also had the advantage of terrain . Located on a narrow strip of land bounded to the north by the Mediterranean , and to the south by salt marshes , the main route of approach for an attacker was by land over the strip , which spanned 170 metres (190 yd) at its widest . Alternatively , the fort could be attacked via the salt marshes , or by a naval landing . However the marshes could only be traversed on foot and then only very slowly , while a naval landing was subject to sea conditions .

= = = Prelude to first attack = = =

Capturing Fort Budapest fell within the responsibility of the Port Said Sector , an Egyptian military command independent of the Second Field Army to the south . The commander of the sector , Major General Omar Khalid , assigned the task of capturing the fort to the 135th Independent Infantry Brigade , commanded by Brigadier General Salah ' Abd el @-@ Halim . The 135th was also tasked with capturing another position , Fort Orkal , so Salah committed one battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ali al @-@ Mezahi to capture Budapest . However , Salah had the following reinforcements : six obsolete T @-@ 34 tanks equipped with mine flails to breach the Israeli minefield , eight amphibious armored vehicles , a 120 mm mortar company , and a company of the 128th Sa 'iqa Group (Sa 'iqa , meaning lightning , were Egyptian commando forces) . The Sa 'iqa company would join the attack via a naval landing and would be separated into two groups . One group would land four kilometers east of Budapest to isolate it and prevent Israeli reinforcements from reaching the fort . The other group would land one kilometer east of Budapest , and then attack the fort . The main assault would come from the west , to be carried out by the battalion and the six tanks . The battalion would attack from Port Fouad , the only part of the Sinai under Egyptian control .

To allow the Sa 'iqa company to perform its landing , the Port Said Sector was to be supplied 24 assault dinghies . Only ten were received however , and on October 3 , Second Army informed Khalid that there were no more dinghies available , and that he would have to improvise . Khalid resorted to renting two fishing boats . Consequently , the Sa 'iqa company was tasked with simply isolating the fort ; no attack from the east would be carried out .

= = First Battle = =

On October 6 , at 14 : 00 , as part of Operation Badr , over 200 Egyptian aircraft participated in an air strike against various Israeli targets in the Sinai . As part of the strike , IL @-@ 28 tactical bombers attacked Fort Budapest . The bombers were moderately accurate , some of the bombs finding their targets and others landing outside the fort 's perimeter . Budapest was also targeted by an artillery barrage , beginning at 14 : 05 . While the fire preparation was underway , the Sa 'iqa company moved out of Port Said to conduct its landing east of the fort . At the same time the main attacking force began moving from its positions east of Port Fouad . In the lead were three T @-@ 34s with mine flails to breach the minefield , closely followed by combat engineers , and then the advance fireteams . Behind these , forming the first echelon of the battalion , was a platoon in amphibious vehicles supported by the three remaining T @-@ 34s .

As soon as the lead T @-@ 34s reached the minefield , they came under heavy fire from the fort 's garrison . Soon all three tanks were either destroyed or damaged , so the combat engineers proceeded to breach the minefield on their own . Israeli aircraft began strafing and bombing the Egyptian forces for over two and a half hours while encountering no resistance , leading to the destruction of all six tanks and five vehicles . The Israelis bombed Egyptian forces at the minefield and on an area of the strip stretching two kilometers towards Port Fouad . Under fire from the air and from the fort , the attack bogged down to a complete halt before the Egyptians began to retreat . Salah ordered his battalion to assume defensive positions east of Port Fouad to repel any Israeli counterattack and to regroup .

The Sa 'iqa company achieved the only discernible success of the attack . It managed to land four kilometers east of the fort without facing any aerial resistance (as the company was sailing in civilian fishing boats) . The company managed to prevent Israeli reinforcements from reaching the fort , destroying a number of tanks and vehicles . It also captured six Israeli soldiers .

Salah planned to attempt another attack against Budapest on October 8 , and al @-@ Mezahi , whose battalion would carry out the second attempt , took the necessary preparations . The attack was canceled however , due to heavy Israeli aerial attacks against Port Said throughout the night of October 7 / 8 . The Sa 'iqa company continued to hold its positions east of Budapest for four days , until Salah decided to withdraw it due to the casualties it had sustained .

= = Second Battle = =

= = = Prelude = = =

On October 11 , the Port Said Sector was reinforced with the 103rd Sa 'iqa battalion of the 139th Sa 'iqa Group . The battalion had arrived from Cairo , and three days later the sector received ten new fiberglass boats from Alexandria . The boats however had been sent without necessary maintenance of the boats themselves or their engines . With the arrival of these reinforcements and equipment , Salah began to lay a plan of attack .

As in the first attempt , a Sa 'iqa company from the 103rd Battalion would occupy positions four kilometers east of Budapest to isolate the fort . It would be supported by an AT @-@ 3 Sagger ATGM platoon . The main attack would be launched from the east by a Sa 'iqa company and a company from al @-@ Mezahi 's battalion as the first echelon . Other units of al @-@ Mezahi 's battalion would conduct a secondary attack from the west , while one company remained in reserve near Port Fouad along with a Sa 'iqa company . A reinforced company (less one platoon) of al @-@ Mezahi 's battalion would land by sea directly upon the Israeli fort . The attack would be preceded by a 30 @-@ minute long fire preparation .

Salah presented his plan to Maj. Gen. Khalid on the morning of October 13 . Khalid authorized the attack and informed Second Army . The 103rd Sa 'iqa Battalion spent the night of October 12 / 13 and October 14 preparing for the attack ; reconnoitering the area around the fort by means of patrol groups and aerial photographs , as well as studying routes of approach through the marshes . The attacking forces began moving to their positions at 19 : 00 on October 14 , taking advantage of the

darkness . The secondary attack force took up position east of Port Fouad while the main force reached its position east of the fort through the marshes in four waves . The march was extremely difficult to cross due to the nature of the terrain and the high concentration of salt , which meant the soldiers had to traverse the marshes barefoot . Towards midnight , the Egyptians began harassing the fort 's garrison with artillery fire using a range of calibers , along with Katyusha rockets launched from a naval vessel .

= = = Attack = = =

At 3 : 00 AM on October 15 , the reinforced company (less one platoon) began moving out of Port Said in preparation for its landing . At 3 : 30 , the fire preparation began against the fort . It was carried out by the 135th Brigade 's artillery and an additional artillery battalion . At 4 : 00 , the attack began . The secondary attack force approaching from the west opened fire to draw the garrison 's attention . The main force advanced towards the fort , spearheaded by the Sa 'iqa company . The Egyptians managed to reach the fort and surprise its garrison . Soon the company was on the verge of entering the fort . The naval force however , due to bad sea conditions (sea state 4) arrived at 4 : 30 , half an hour late , and then was forced to land one kilometer west of the fort . It joined the secondary attack group in its advance against the fortification . The mixed force came under heavy fire , and the battalion commander , Ali al @-@ Mezahi was killed . The Sa 'iqa company east of the fort finally succeeded in breaching the fort 's defenses under heavy fire ; the company commander was hit several times but continued to lead his men . The secondary force also managed to reach the fort 's northern sand embankment . The fighting became intense , and the Egyptians picked up a radio signal sent by the garrison commander in which he detailed his men 's precarious position and requested immediate assistance , especially air support . Despite the initial success achieved , Salah did not have his reserves on either side of the fort join the attack . With sunrise , Israeli aircraft began attacking Egyptian troops . Two F @-@ 4 Phantoms strafed the secondary force and made several bombing runs against it , while helicopters attacked the main force .

The Israelis reinforced the fort with two tank companies . They came up against the Sa 'iqa company isolating the fort . In the ensuing firefight , the company leader and every platoon commander were killed as the Egyptians were caught in open ground , bereft of any cover . There were also many casualties , but the Sa 'iqa destroyed twenty Israeli tanks and half @-@ tracks during the battle .

The Egyptians , under heavy and effective fire from the Israelis inside the bunkers , ceased entering the fort . The Sa 'iqa company to the east , under concentrated Israeli tank fire and aerial bombardment , was finally overwhelmed by the Israeli reinforcements , which proceeded towards the fort , opening fire on the main force . Consequently , all Egyptian forces east of the fort attempted to retreat through the marshes . The Israelis attempted to hamper the retreat by dropping smoke capsules over the area from four A @-@ 4 Skyhawks . The lack of visibility caused injuries as men tripped and were trampled during the retreat through the marshes .

The sector 's command contacted Saad El Shazly , the Egyptian Chief of Staff , and informed him of the failure of the attack , and requested that paratroopers ? who were supposedly promised in support of the attack but never arrived ? be sent to protect the retreating forces . Artillery fire was used to provide cover . Khalid instructed Salah to have his forces retreat to their original defensive positions east of Port Fouad to reorganize , and to defend against counterattacks at all costs . Throughout October 15 , troops that had retreated through the lake continued to arrive at the defensive positions , where Israeli counterattacks were repulsed with the help of artillery . At 8 : 00 that morning , two Egyptian Sukhoi Su @-@ 7 fighter @-@ bombers flew over the battlefield . On arriving over the fort , one was shot down by ground fire , and the other withdrew .

= = Aftermath = =

The second Egyptian attempt was the last ; the Port Said Sector did not launch another attack to capture the fort . Thus Budapest remained the only Israeli fortification of the Bar Lev Line to remain

under Israeli control . Four months after the Yom Kippur War , Captain Motti Ashkenazi , the commander of Fort Budapest , led the protests against the Israeli government 's handling of the war .