

= Battle of Arsuf =

The Battle of Arsuf was a battle of the Third Crusade in which Richard I of England (Richard the Lionheart) defeated Saladin (?al?? al @-@ D?n Y?suf ibn Ayy?b) , founder of the Ayyubid dynasty and Sultan of Egypt and Syria , at Arsuf in Palestine . The forces of the Third Crusade had taken the city of Acre after a prolonged siege . The next strategic target for the Christian army was to secure the city of Jaffa , which would facilitate their ultimate goal , the recapture of the city of Jerusalem .

Following a series of harassing attacks by Saladin 's forces , battle was joined on the morning of 7 September 1191 . Richard 's army successfully resisted attempts to disrupt its cohesion until the Hospitallers broke ranks and charged ; Richard then committed all his forces to the attack . He regrouped his army after its initial success , and led it to victory . The battle resulted in the coastal area of southern Palestine , including the port of Jaffa , returning to Christian control . This made the capture of Jerusalem feasible .

= = Prelude- South from Acre = =

Following the capture of Acre in 1191 , Richard was aware that he needed to capture the port of Jaffa before making an attempt on Jerusalem , Richard began to march down the coast from Acre towards Jaffa in August 1191 . Saladin , whose main objective was to prevent the recapture of Jerusalem , mobilised his army to attempt to stop the Crusaders ' advance . Richard organized the advance with attention to detail . A large part of the Egyptian fleet had been captured at the fall of Acre , and with no threat from this quarter he could march south along the coast with the sea always protecting his right flank .

Mindful of the lessons of the disaster at Hattin , Richard knew that his army 's greatest need was water and that heat exhaustion was its greatest danger . Although pressed for time he proceeded at a relatively slow pace . He marched his army only in the morning before the heat of the day , making frequent rest stops , always beside sources of water . The fleet sailed down the coast in close support , a source of supplies and a refuge for the wounded . Aware of the ever @-@ present danger of enemy raiders and the possibility of hit @-@ and @-@ run attacks , he kept the column in tight formation with a core of twelve mounted regiments , each with a hundred knights . The infantry marched on the landward flank , covering the flanks of the horsemen and affording them some protection from missiles . The outermost ranks of the infantry were composed of crossbowmen . On the seaward side was the baggage and also units of infantry being rested from the continuous harassment inflicted by Saladin 's forces . Richard wisely rotated his infantry units to keep them relatively fresh .

Though provoked and tormented by the skirmish tactics of Saladin 's archers , Richard 's generalship ensured that order and discipline were maintained under the most difficult of circumstances . Baha al @-@ Din ibn Shaddad , the Muslim chronicler and eyewitness , describes the march :

" The Moslems discharged arrows at them from all sides to annoy them , and force them to charge : but in this they were unsuccessful . These men exercised wonderful self @-@ control ; they went on their way without any hurry , whilst their ships followed their line of march along the coast , and in this manner they reached their halting @-@ place . "

Baha al @-@ Din also described the difference in power between the Crusader crossbow and the bows of his own army . He saw Frankish infantrymen with from one to ten arrows sticking from their armoured backs marching along with no apparent hurt , whilst the crossbows struck down both horse and man amongst the Muslims .

= = Saladin 's strategy = =

The Crusader army 's pace was dictated by the infantry and baggage train ; the Ayyubid army , being largely mounted , had the advantage of superior mobility . Efforts to burn crops and deny the countryside to the Frankish army were largely ineffective as it could be continuously provisioned

from the fleet , which moved south parallel with it . On 25 August the Crusader rearguard was crossing a defile when it was almost cut off . However , the Crusaders closed up so speedily that the Muslim soldiery was forced to flee . From 26 to 29 August Richard 's army had a respite from attack because while it hugged the coast and had gone round the shoulder of Mount Carmel , Saladin 's army had struck across country . Saladin arrived in the vicinity of Caesarea before the Crusaders , who were on a longer road . From 30 August to 7 September Saladin was always within striking distance , and waiting for an opportunity to attack if the Crusaders exposed themselves .

By early September , Saladin had realised that harassing the Frankish army with a limited portion of his troops was not going to stop its advance . In order to do this he needed to commit his entire army to a serious attack . Fortunately for Saladin , the Crusaders had to traverse one of the few forested regions of Palestine , the " Wood of Arsuf " , which ran parallel to the sea shore for more than 12 miles (19 km) . The woodland would mask the disposition of his army and allow a sudden attack to be launched .

The Crusaders traversed half of the forest with little incident , and they rested on 6 September with their camp protected by the marsh lying inland of the mouth of the river Nahr @-@ el @-@ Falaik (Rochetaillée) . To the south of the camp , in the 6 miles (9 @.@ 7 km) the Crusaders needed to march before gaining the ruins of Arsuf , the forest receded inland to create a narrow plain 1 ? 2 miles (1 @.@ 6 ? 3 @.@ 2 km) wide between wooded hills and the sea . This is where Saladin intended to make his decisive attack . While threatening and skirmishing along the whole length of the Crusader column , Saladin reserved his most sustained direct assault for its rear . His plan appears to have been to allow the Frankish van and centre to proceed , in the hope that a fatal gap might be created between them and the more heavily engaged rearmost units . Into such a gap Saladin would have thrown his reserves in order to defeat the Crusaders in detail .

= = Battle = =

= = = Organisation and deployment of the opposing armies = = =

At dawn on 7 September 1191 , as Richard 's forces began moving out of camp enemy scouts were visible in all directions , hinting that Saladin 's whole army lay hidden in the woodland . King Richard took especial pains over the disposition of his army . The probable posts of greatest danger , at the front and especially the rear of the column , were given to the military orders . They had the most experience of fighting in the East , were arguably the most disciplined , and were the only formations which included Turcopole cavalry who fought like the Turkish horse archers of the Ayyubid army .

The van of the Crusader army consisted of the Knights Templar under Robert de Sablé . They were followed by three units composed of Richard 's own subjects , the Angevins and Bretons , then the Poitevins including Guy of Lusignan , titular King of Jerusalem , and lastly the English and Normans who had charge of the great standard mounted on its waggon . The next seven corps were made up of the French , the barons of Outremer and small contingents of crusaders from other lands . Forming the rearguard were the Knights Hospitaller led by Fra ' Garnier de Nablus . The twelve corps were organised into five larger formations , though their precise distribution is unknown . Additionally , a small troop , under the leadership of Henry II of Champagne , was detached to scout towards the hills , and a squadron of picked knights under King Richard and Hugh of Burgundy , the leader of the French contingent , was detailed to ride up and down the column checking on Saladin 's movements and ensuring that their own ranks were kept in order .

The first Saracen attack did not come until all the crusaders had left their camp and were moving towards Arsuf . The Ayyubid army then burst out of the woodland . The front of the army was composed of dense swarms of skirmishers , both horse and foot , Bedouin , Sudanese archers and the lighter types of Turkish horse archers . Behind these were the ordered squadrons of armoured heavy cavalry : Saladin 's mamluks (also termed ghulams) , Kurdish troops , and the contingents of the emirs and princes of Egypt , Syria and Mesopotamia . The army was divided into three parts , left and right wings and centre . Saladin directed his army from beneath his banners , surrounded by

his bodyguard and accompanied by his kettle @-@ drummers .

The Itinerarium Regis Ricardi implies that the Ayyubid army outnumbered the Crusaders three @-@ to @-@ one . However , unrealistically inflated numbers , of 300 @,@ 000 and 100 @,@ 000 respectively , are described .

= = = Saladin 's attack = = =

In an attempt to destroy the cohesion of the Crusader army and unsettle their resolve , the Ayyubid onslaught was accompanied by the clashing of cymbals and gongs , trumpets blowing and men screaming war @-@ cries .

" In truth , our people , so few in number , were hemmed in by the multitudes of the Saracens , that they had no means of escape , if they tried ; neither did they seem to have valour sufficient to withstand so many foes , nay , they were shut in , like a flock of sheep in the jaws of wolves , with nothing but the sky above , and the enemy all around them . "

The repeated Ayyubid harrying attacks followed the same pattern : the Bedouin and Nubians on foot launched arrows and javelins into the enemy lines , before parting to allow the mounted archers to advance , attack and wheel off , a well @-@ practiced technique . Crusader crossbowmen responded , when this was possible , although the chief task among the Crusaders was simply to preserve their ranks in the face of sustained provocation . When the incessant attacks of skirmishers failed to have the desired effect , the weight of the attack was switched to the rear of the Crusader column , with the Hospitallers coming under the greatest pressure . Here the right wing of the Ayyubid army made a desperate attack on the squadron of Hospitaller knights and the infantry corps covering them . The Hospitallers could be attacked from both their rear and flank . Many of the Hospitaller infantry had to walk backwards in order to keep their faces , and shields , to the enemy . Saladin , eager to urge his soldiers into closer combat , personally entered the fray , accompanied by two pages leading spare horses . Sayf al @-@ Din (Saphadin) , Saladin 's brother , was also engaged in actively encouraging the troops ; both brothers were thus exposing themselves to considerable danger from crossbow fire .

= = = Hospitallers break ranks = = =

All Saladin 's best efforts could not dislocate the Crusader column , or halt its advance in the direction of Arsuf . Richard was determined to hold his army together , forcing the enemy to exhaust themselves in repeated charges , with the intention of holding his knights for a concentrated counter @-@ attack at just the right moment . There were risks in this , because the army was not only marching under severe enemy provocation , but the troops were suffering from heat and thirst . Just as serious , the Saracens were killing so many horses that some of Richard 's own knights began to wonder if a counter @-@ strike would be possible . Many of the unhorsed knights joined the infantry .

Just as the vanguard entered Arsuf in the middle of the afternoon , the Hospitaller crossbowmen to the rear were having to load and fire walking backwards . Inevitably they lost cohesion , and the enemy was quick to take advantage of this opportunity , moving into any gap wielding their swords and maces . For the Crusaders , the Battle of Arsuf had now entered a critical stage . Garnier de Nablus repeatedly pleaded with Richard to be allowed to attack . He was refused , the Master was ordered to maintain position and await the signal for a general assault , six clear trumpet blasts . Richard knew that the charge of his knights needed to be reserved until the Ayyubid army was fully committed , closely engaged , and the Saracens ' horses had begun to tire . Goaded beyond endurance , the Master and another knight , Baldwin de Carron , thrust their way through their own infantry and charged into the Saracen ranks with a cry of ? St. George ! ? ; they were then followed by the rest of the Hospitaller knights . Moved by this example , the French knights of the corps immediately preceding the Hospitallers also charged .

= = = Crusader counterattack = = =

The precipitate action of the Hospitallers could have caused Richard's whole strategy to unravel. However, he recognised that the counterattack, once started, had to be supported by all his army and ordered the signal for a general charge to be sounded. Unsupported, the Hospitallers and the other rear units involved in the initial breakout would have been overwhelmed by the superior numbers of the enemy. The Frankish infantry opened gaps in their ranks for the knights to pass through and the attack naturally developed in echelon from the rear to the van. To the soldiers of Saladin's army, as Baha al-Din noted, the sudden change from passivity to ferocious activity on the part of the Crusaders was disconcerting, and appeared to be the result of a preconceived plan.

Having already been engaged in close combat with the rear of the Crusader column, the right wing of the Ayyubid army was in compact formation and too close to their enemy to avoid the full impact of the charge. Indeed, some of the cavalry of this wing had dismounted in order to fire their bows more effectively. As a result, they suffered great numbers of casualties, the knights taking a bloody revenge for all they had had to endure earlier in the battle. Baha al-Din noted that "the rout was complete." He had been in the centre division of Saladin's army, when it turned in flight he looked to join the left wing, but found that it also was in rapid flight. Noting the disintegration of the right wing he finally sought Saladin's personal banners, but found only seventeen members of the bodyguard and a lone drummer still with them.

Being aware that an over-rash pursuit was the greatest danger when fighting armies trained in the fluid tactics of the Turks, Richard halted the charge after about 1 mile (1.6 km) had been covered. The right flank Crusader units, which had formed the van of the column, including the English and Normans had not yet been heavily engaged in close combat and they formed a reserve on which the rest regrouped. Freed from the pressure of being actively pursued, many of the Ayyubid troops turned to cut down those of the knights who had unwisely drawn ahead of the rest. James d'Avesnes, the commander of one of the French units, was the most prominent of those killed in this episode. Amongst the Ayyubid leaders who rallied quickly and returned to the fight was Taqi al-Din, Saladin's nephew. He led 700 men of the Sultan's own bodyguard against Richard's left flank. Once their squadrons were back in order, Richard led his knights in a second charge and the forces of Saladin broke once again.

Leading by example, Richard was in the heart of the fighting, as the Itinerarium describes:

"There the king, the fierce, the extraordinary king, cut down the Turks in every direction, and none could escape the force of his arm, for wherever he turned, brandishing his sword, he carved a wide path for himself: and as he advanced and gave repeated strokes with his sword, cutting them down like a reaper with his sickle, the rest, warned by the sight of the dying, gave him more ample space, for the corpses of the dead Turks which lay on the face of the earth extended over half a mile."

Alert to the danger presented to his scattered ranks, Richard, prudent as ever, halted and regrouped his forces once more after a further pursuit. The Ayyubid cavalry turned once again, showing they still had stomach to renew the fight. However, a third and final charge caused them to scatter into the woodland where they dispersed into the hills in all directions, showing no inclination to continue the conflict. Richard led his cavalry back to Arsuf where the infantry had pitched camp. During the night the Saracen dead were looted.

= = Aftermath = =

As always with medieval battles, losses are difficult to assess with any precision. The Christian chroniclers claim that Saladin's force lost 32 emirs and 7,000 men, but it is possible that the true number may have been fewer. Baha al-Din mentions only three deaths amongst the leaders of the Ayyubid army: Musek, Grand Emir of the Kurds, Kaimaz el Adeli and Lighush. Richard's own dead are said to have numbered no more than 700. The only Crusader leader of note to be killed was James d'Avesnes.

Arsuf was an important victory. The Ayyubid army was not destroyed, despite the considerable

casualties it suffered , but it did rout ; this was considered shameful by the Muslims and boosted the morale of the Crusaders . A contemporary opinion stated that , had Richard been able to choose the moment to unleash his knights , rather than having to react to the actions of an insubordinate unit commander , the Crusader victory might have been crushingly decisive . After the rout Saladin was able to regroup and attempted to resume his skirmishing method of warfare but to little effect ; shaken by the Crusaders ' sudden and devastatingly effective counterattack at Arsuf , he was no longer willing to risk a further full @-@ scale attack . Arsuf had dented Saladin 's reputation as an invincible warrior , and proved Richard 's courage as a soldier and his skill as a commander . Richard was able to take , defend and hold Jaffa ? a strategically crucial move toward securing Jerusalem . Also Saladin had to evacuate and demolish most of the fortresses of southern Palestine : Ascalon , Gaza , Blanche @-@ Garde , Lydda and Ramleh , as he realised he could not hold them . Richard took the fortress of Darum , the sole fortress that Saladin had garrisoned , with only his own household troops , so low had Saracen morale been reduced . By depriving Saladin of the coast , Richard seriously threatened Saladin 's hold on Jerusalem .

Although the Third Crusade , in the end , failed to retake Jerusalem , a three @-@ year truce was eventually negotiated with Saladin . The truce , known as the Treaty of Jaffa , ensured that Christian pilgrims from the west would once again be allowed to visit Jerusalem . Saladin also recognised the Crusaders ' control of the Levantine coast as far south as Jaffa . Both sides had become exhausted by the struggle , Richard needed to return to Europe in order to protect his patrimony from the aggression of Philip of France , and Palestine was in a ruinous state .

= = In fiction and film = =

The Battle of Arsuf is featured in the climax of the videogame Assassin 's Creed .