

= Battle of the Chinese Farm =

The Battle of the Chinese Farm took place during October 15 to October 17 , 1973 between the Egyptian Army and the Israel Defense Forces ( IDF ) , as part of the Yom Kippur War . It was fought in the Sinai Peninsula , north of the Great Bitter Lake and just east of the Suez Canal , near an Egyptian agricultural research station . The farm featured specialized Japanese @-@ made machinery ; Israeli soldiers mistook Japanese characters on this equipment for Chinese , leading to the area being labeled ' Chinese Farm ' on Israeli military maps . The battle began when the IDF launched Operation Abiray @-@ Lev ( " Stouthearted Men " ) , attempting to establish a corridor to the canal and allow bridges to be laid for a crossing . Accordingly , the Israelis attacked Egyptian forces in and around the Chinese Farm .

Determined Egyptian resistance made progress extremely slow for the Israelis , who suffered heavy losses . The Israelis were repeatedly reinforced with armor but were unable to make much headway , only managing to seize an important crossroad on the second day . Suffering from a lack of infantry , the Israelis brought up paratroopers during the night of October 16 / 17 . They were tasked with clearing anti @-@ tank defenses for the armor , but they became pinned down by heavy Egyptian fire . The paratroopers drew Egyptian attention long enough for the Israelis to move bridging equipment to the canal undetected . Armored forces later extricated the paratroopers .

The Egyptians attempted to restore their defenses to their initial dispositions with an armored attack on October 17 . It initially succeeded , but was pushed back by Israeli counterattacks in an armored battle lasting the entire day . Seriously depleted by the continuous fighting , the Egyptians relinquished control of the routes to the canal , opening them up to the Israelis . The battle is remembered as one of the most costly and brutal battles of the war .

= = Background = =

On October 6 , 1973 , Egypt launched Operation Badr , intending to cross the Suez Canal and establish bridgeheads on the opposite bank of the Sinai Peninsula , which had been occupied by Israel since 1967 . Coordinated with a Syrian assault on the Golan Heights , the crossing achieved tactical surprise and was a success . Thereafter , counterattacks by Israeli reserves were unsuccessful . By October 10 , fighting along the front had come to a lull . The Egyptians dug in and hoped to wear down the Israelis by attrition , while remaining within range of their ground surface @-@ to @-@ air missiles , which provided air cover from the west bank of the canal , while the Israelis focused on directing their main efforts against the Syrians in the Golan and reorganizing their battered forces . Israeli failures led to the replacement of the chief of the Israeli Southern Command , Major General Shmuel Gonen , with Chaim Bar @-@ Lev , although Gonen was retained as his aide .

The situation changed when Sadat , in the face of protests from his senior commanders , ordered an offensive to seize the strategic Sinai mountain passes , hoping to relieve Israeli pressure on the Syrians . The resulting offensive was ill @-@ planned and ill @-@ executed , culminating in heavy Egyptian losses without achieving any of its objectives . This gave the Israelis the initiative to launch a counteroffensive .

On October 14 , immediately following the Egyptian offensive , Israeli Chief of Staff David Elazar presented the general outlines of a crossing operation of the Suez Canal to the Israeli cabinet in a meeting in Tel Aviv . Elazar emphasized the military and political gains of the operation , and the expected collapse that would occur in the Egyptian forces on the east bank when their supply routes became threatened . Elazar received unanimous support from the cabinet . Later that day , Bar @-@ Lev headed a meeting attended by the senior and main division commanders in the Sinai theatre : Major Generals Abraham Adan , Ariel Sharon and Kalman Magen . Bar @-@ Lev informed the Israeli officers of the decision to begin the crossing operation on the night of October 15 / 16 , and assigned duties and responsibilities to the division commanders .

= = Operation Abirey @-@ Lev = =

According to the plan set for the Israeli crossing , Operation Abirey @-@ Halev ( Hebrew for " Stouthearted Men " ) , the designated crossing point lay near to Deversoir , at the northern end of the Great Bitter Lake on the Suez Canal . The Israelis had to open the principal route to Deversoir and secure a corridor stretching 5 kilometers ( 3 @. @ 1 mi ) north of the crossing site ( known as " The Yard " ) . Paratroopers and armor would then cross the canal to establish a 5 @-@ kilometer @-@ deep bridgehead ( 3 @. @ 1 mi ) , after which the bridges would be laid , with at least one to be operational by the morning of October 16 . The Israelis would then cross to the west bank and attack south and west , with the end goal of reaching Suez , thus encircling and cutting off two Egyptian divisions on the east bank . Southern Command allotted 24 hours for the setting up of the bridgehead and 24 hours for Israeli forces to reach Suez , with the latter expected to be under Israeli control by October 18 at the latest . It would soon be shown that the execution of Operation Stouthearted Men would deviate from planning and schedules and that the time @-@ frame had been highly optimistic and extremely unrealistic .

= = = Order of Battle = = =

Major General Ariel Sharon 's 143rd Armored Division was given the critical tasks of opening the corridors and laying the bridges . His division included Tuvia Raviv 's 600th Armored Brigade , Colonel Amnon Reshef 's 14th Armored Brigade , and the ' Haim ' Brigade commanded by Colonel Haim Erez . Major General Abraham Adan 's 162nd Armored Division was tasked with crossing the canal and achieving an encirclement with its 300 tanks . The division included Colonel Natke Nir 's 217th Armored Brigade , Colonel Gabi Amir 's 460th Armored Brigade and Aryeh Keren 's 500th Armored Brigade . A paratrooper brigade would be transferred to Adan 's division during the course of the battle . Kalman Magen 's 252nd Armored Division would initially launch diversionary attacks elsewhere to draw attention from Sharon 's operations at Deversoir . Thereafter the division would hold and secure the corridor and bridgehead .

Egyptian forces in the area formed the southern flank of the Second Field Army . These units were the 21st Armored Division , commanded by Brigadier General Ibrahim Oraby , and the 16th Infantry Division , commanded by Brigadier General Abd Rab el @-@ Nabi Hafez . In addition to being the division commander , Hafez also commanded forces within his division 's bridgehead , which included the 21st Division . Oraby 's unit included the 1st Armored Brigade , under Colonel Sayed Saleh ; the 14th Armored Brigade , under Colonel Othman Kamel ; and the 18th Mechanized Brigade , under Colonel Talaat Muslim . Hafez 's 16th Division included the 16th Infantry Brigade , commanded by Colonel Abd el @-@ Hamid Abd el @-@ Sami ' , as well as the 116th Infantry and the 3rd Mechanized Brigades .

= = = Location of battle and deployment of forces = = =

Two main roads led to Deversoir . The first was the Tasa @-@ Tel Salam Road , codenamed Akavish by the Israelis . This road connected Artillery Road ( running north to south 15 kilometers ( 9 @. @ 3 mi ) east of the canal ) to Lexicon Road ( running north to south directly east of the canal ) . The Lexicon @-@ Akavish junction fell on Tel Salaam , near the Great Bitter Lake and 6 kilometers ( 3 @. @ 7 mi ) south of Deversoir , where Fort Lakekan ( part of the Bar Lev Line ) was located . The second road , codenamed Tirtur , ran north of Akavish . It too connected Artillery Road to Lexicon , but provided a direct route to " the Yard " . The Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junction fell on Fort Matzmed . This fortification , which consisted of two strongpoints 500 meters ( 1 @, @ 600 ft ) apart , had been captured on October 9 by a small assault force , while Fort Lakekan had been evacuated without any combat on October 8 . The importance of both fortifications lay in their control of the Lexicon @-@ Akavish and Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junctions . Both forts , however , were in the designated buffer zone , 35 kilometers ( 22 mi ) long , between the Second and Third Armies . It was believed this area would not need defending , as it was both adjacent to the Great Bitter Lake , a natural obstacle , and most of it lay outside the range of the Egyptian SAMs . Thus they were left

unoccupied by the local Egyptian commander , who chose not to extend his defenses southwards . The Egyptian negligence to occupy and defend both forts would greatly assist the Israelis in Operation Stouthearted Men .

Just north of the Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junction was the village of al @-@ Galaa . Prior to the 1967 Six Day War , the village had been the site of an agricultural project . This agricultural station incorporated several irrigation ditches and specialized Japanese @-@ made machinery . When the Sinai came under Israeli occupation , Israeli soldiers unwittingly mistook the Japanese characters for Chinese ones , leading to the location being labeled ' Chinese Farm ' on military maps . Just north and north @-@ west of Chinese Farm was a hill mass known by its Israeli codename ' Missouri ' . During Operation Badr , al @-@ Galaa and the Chinese Farm fell within the designated bridgehead of the 16th Infantry Division . Abd el @-@ Hamid 's 16th Infantry Brigade occupied and defended these locations . After partaking in the initial canal @-@ crossing , the brigade , along with the rest of the division , faced an attack by Raviv 's brigade on October 9 . The Israelis achieved some initial gains , but were repelled by the end of the day . Also located within 16th Division 's bridgehead , as of October 13 , was the 21st Armored Division . Its units were positioned in the center and the north of the bridgehead . The 14th Brigade had been involved in the crossing and , along with the 1st Brigade , participated in the Egyptian offensive on October 14 ; as a result , it had lost half of its operational tank strength . In the aftermath , Oraby 's efforts to reorganize and replace armored losses were hampered by frequent artillery barrages and air strikes . On October 15 , there were 136 tanks in the Egyptian bridgehead , unevenly split among Oraby 's brigades : 66 with the 1st Armored Brigade , 39 with the 14th Armored Brigade , and 31 in the 18th Mechanized Brigade . Despite their heavy losses , the Egyptian forces in the bridgehead outnumbered Reshef 's force .

Early on the morning of October 15 , Adan moved his division from its positions in the north to a concentration area west of Tasa in preparation for the crossing . Sharon 's division had been in the central sector since its arrival at the Sinai Front , along with the crossing equipment and bridges since October 13 . Sharon had his headquarters in Tasa , 40 kilometers ( 25 mi ) east of the canal .

= = = Israeli plan and initial maneuvers = = =

After receiving his orders late on October 14 from Bar @-@ Lev , Sharon headed to his headquarters to prepare for the operation . His division incorporated Raviv 's Brigade , Colonel Amnon Reshef 's 14th Armored Brigade , and the ' Haim ' Brigade commanded by Colonel Haim Erez . Attached to his division was the 243rd Paratrooper Brigade commanded by Colonel Dani Matt .

Sharon planned for Raviv 's brigade to attack from the east , diverting Egyptian attention away from Deversoir . Erez was tasked with transporting a pre @-@ constructed roller bridge to the crossing area at Deversoir , while one of his tank battalions would be attached to the paratroopers . Colonel Reshef was given the most critical tasks of all . Accordingly , his brigade was heavily reinforced to incorporate four armored and three mechanized infantry battalions , in addition to the division 's reconnaissance battalion , commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Yaov Brom . His brigade would conduct a turning maneuver at 6 : 00 AM on October 15 south of Akavish Road , move through the sand dunes to reach Fort Lakekan , before heading north to occupy Fort Matzmed . Reshef 's brigade would then split up to clear the Akavish and Titur Roads and seize the Chinese Farm , while occupying the crossing area and awaiting Matt 's brigade . Matt 's paratrooper brigade , containing an additional tank company and the armored battalion , would move south @-@ west via Akavish to reach Fort Matzmed . From there , it would continue on to the Yard and cross the canal at 11 : 00 PM , using rubber dinghies and rafts for the tanks .

Matt 's brigade began moving to Tasa at 4 : 30 PM on October 15 , before turning eastwards on Akavish . Heavy congestion on the roads made the brigade 's progress very slow . A little after midnight , the brigade left Akavish and moved westward to the Yard , an area 700 meters long and 150 meters wide surrounded by protective sand walls . The site had been made long before the war .

Reshef maneuvered his brigade as planned , entering into the previously discovered gap without

any opposition . Leaving a combined recon and paratrooper force at the canal , he sent his tanks north and west to secure the flank of the projected crossing site and clear the Akavish and Tirtur roads from behind for the follow @-@ on bridging equipment . He seized the Lakekan and Matzmed fortifications without resistance . Reshef informed Sharon that the forts were under control and that Akavish was clear . Sharon in turn informed Southern Command of these successes , sending a wave of jubilation through the Israeli commanders , delighted that the operation had begun so smoothly .

= = Battle = =

Matt had been informed that the crossing area and its environs were clear of Egyptian forces , but out of caution , ordered his tank company to deploy at the Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junction to confront any Egyptian movements towards the crossing site , just 800 meters ( 2 @, @ 600 ft ) south of the crossroads . The entire company was wiped out after it was ambushed by Egyptian infantry of the 16th Brigade . The company commander was killed and most of his men were casualties , unbeknownst to Matt . Meanwhile , Israeli artillery batteries opened fire on the landing site on the west bank , delivering around 70 tons of shells and ordnance . In fact , the opposite bank was completely clear of Egyptian troops . The crossing finally got underway at 1 : 35 AM , over five hours behind schedule . By 9 : 00 AM , 2 @, @ 000 paratroopers had crossed , along with a battalion of thirty tanks . The Israelis sent raiding parties attacking Egyptian SAMs on the west bank , while securing a 4 @-@ kilometer @-@ deep bridgehead ( 2 @. @ 5 mi ) without facing resistance .

Tuvia Raviv 's armored brigade began its diversionary attack against the 16th Division 's bridgehead at 5 : 00 PM on October 15 , striking at the bridgehead 's center from the east , after a fire preparation . It was repulsed by the Egyptians , as had been expected , but succeeded in its purpose . When the 16th Division 's southern flank came under increasing Israeli attack , the Egyptians assumed that the Israeli objective was to roll up the Second Army 's right flank , not to open a corridor to the west bank for Israeli forces to cross the canal . For the next 24 hours , this remained the general impression among Egyptian commanders , and they reacted accordingly . Had they discovered the Israelis ' true intentions earlier , the Egyptians would almost certainly have been able to defeat the Israeli operation , in light of the greater strength of their forces and reserves near the Deversoir area , on the east and west banks of the Suez Canal .

= = = Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junction = = =

While the paratroopers prepared to cross , Reshef was informed that Akavish had been closed again by Egyptian infantry units soon after his passing . He sent one armored battalion to clear the road and committed his remaining three armored and three mechanized battalions to push northwards and secure Tirtur and the Chinese Farm .

An infantry battalion , forming the right flank of Abd el @-@ Hamid 's 16th Brigade , was in position to defend the Lexicon @-@ Tirtur crossroads . Initially , Reshef sent two armored battalions northward on Lexicon . As the Israeli tanks neared the infantry battalion , they were met by heavy fire from anti @-@ tank weapons . They lost 27 tanks during this engagement , although seven Israeli tanks managed to break through the battalion 's westernmost position on Lexicon and advance northwards to al @-@ Galaa ' . Thereafter , ' Abd el @-@ Hamid ordered tank @-@ hunting squads ? groups of ten equipped with RPG @-@ 7 rockets and RPG @-@ 43 grenades ? to deploy around al @-@ Galaa ' and destroy those tanks that broke through ; he also sent a tank company to reinforce the infantry battalion .

At night , Reshef moved with his remaining forces north along the canal bank . Bypassing the 16th Brigade 's positions , the Israelis soon found themselves in the center of a huge administrative area and vehicle park . Reshef 's brigade had stumbled into the command and supply bases of the Egyptian 16th and 21st Divisions . The base was located near the canal on the assumption that it was the safest location from Israeli attacks , which was expected to come from the east , where the defenses were the strongest , not from the south , where they were the weakest . Both sides

immediately opened fire , inadvertently leading to the destruction of supply trucks and SAM launchers . The Egyptians managed to organize a counterattack by units of the 21st Division ; a battalion of the 14th Brigade and a battalion ( less one company ) of the 18th Brigade . The tanks repelled the Israelis , who sustained significant losses from vastly overwhelming opposing forces .

Brigadier General Hafez , commanding the 16th Infantry Division , planned to contain the Israeli attack from the south by having the 18th Mechanized Brigade occupy defenses north of the Chinese Farm , directly behind the 16th Infantry Brigade , but without its organic tank battalion , which was designated as part of the division 's reserve . The 1st Armored Brigade moved southward to occupy positions between Lateral Road and the canal on the right flank of the 18th Brigade . Upon the brigade 's arrival , it engaged Israeli armor from Reshef 's brigade in al @-@ Galaa ' ; Egyptian armor destroyed around 15 tanks and several half @-@ tracks . At around 1 : 00 PM , sorties of Egyptian Su @-@ 7s destroyed many Israeli tanks in ground @-@ attack missions over al @-@ Galaa ' village . The 1st Brigade countered a flanking attempt on its left at 2 : 00 PM by a tank battalion , thwarting the attack and destroying ten tanks . During its engagements on October 16 , the 21st Division managed to destroy over 50 Israeli tanks and APCs , while subjected to frequent Israeli air strikes and artillery barrages . The 1st Brigade accounted for most of the kills , while suffering fewer losses .

Meanwhile , one of Reshef 's mechanized battalions , commanded by Major Nathan Shunari , was reinforced with company @-@ sized remnants of the 40th Tank Battalion , now commanded by Captain Gideon Giladi after the previous battalion commander had been wounded . Shunari was ordered to seize the Lexicon @-@ Tirtur junction . He sent the tank company ahead first , which initially reported no Egyptian units . Shunari dispatched an infantry unit in six half @-@ tracks to the junction . Upon reaching it , they discovered that the tank company had already been destroyed and Giladi killed . Soon the vehicles began came under heavy fire , stopping their advance . The unit commander reported casualties , and Shunari ordered the remainder of his battalion to aid the pinned @-@ down men . Attempts to rescue the infantry failed , and the Egyptian battalion defending the junction directed heavy firepower against the area , aided by the brigade 's artillery . The Egyptian defenders had managed to catch the Israelis in a prepared killing zone . Shunari , whose troops lacked cover and were threatened with annihilation , regrouped some of his forces and managed to escape the area in vehicles , but the infantry half @-@ track unit first sent to the crossroads remained pinned down .

Reshef sent another tank company to rescue the infantrymen . The tanks advanced towards the Chinese Farm from the south . As they neared the farm and the village , a downpour of anti @-@ tank and artillery fire forced the company to retreat . Nathan kept pleading with Reshef to send additional support , unaware he was facing superior Egyptian forces after entering the administrative bases of the Egyptian 16th and 21st Divisions . With no help coming , the unit commander had his men carry the wounded and attempted to leave the battlefield , tasking two sections of heavy machine guns with providing cover to the force . As the Israelis slowly made their way back to their lines , a group of Egyptian tanks intercepted and wiped out the Israeli force .

Despite the debacle , Reshef remained determined to seize the junction , giving the task to the division 's reconnaissance battalion attached to his brigade . To achieve surprise , the battalion maneuvered to attack at 3 : 00 AM from the west , as the Egyptians were preparing for further attacks from the south and east . As the Israelis attacked , Lieutenant Colonel Brom was killed barely thirty meters from Egyptian positions , disrupting his battalion 's assault . The Israelis sustained losses , but managed to retreat . Soon after , a tank company attacked the crossroads at 4 : 00 AM on October 16 , but also withdrew after losing three tanks .

By 4 : 00 AM on October 16 , Reshef 's brigade , which had begun the operation with 97 tanks , had lost 56 in just twelve hours of fighting , leaving only 41 remaining . Although seizing the crossing site had been accomplished easily , stiff resistance had prevented Reshef from achieving his remaining objectives , namely opening the routes to the canal and securing a corridor . Reshef 's force would further drop to just 27 tanks by noon . As a whole , Sharon 's division suffered some 300 killed and 1 @, @ 000 wounded that night . To help Reshef secure the corridor , Sharon supplied him with two tank battalions by 6 : 00 PM , propping his numbers up to 81 tanks .

Hearing reports of the heavy fighting taking place between the junction and the Chinese Farm , Dayan suggested withdrawing Matt 's brigade and canceling the operation . He voiced concerns that the paratroopers were threatened with annihilation and noted that all attempts to open a corridor for the bridges had failed . Gonen rejected the suggestion , stating that , " If we knew in advance this was going to happen we would not have started the crossing operation , but now that we have crossed then let us follow through to the bitter end . " Bar @-@ Lev concurred with Gonen , and Dayan decided not to press his suggestion . At around 6 : 00 AM , Golda Meir telephoned Dayan to inquire about the situation . Dayan informed her that the bridges had not yet been laid and that the Egyptians had closed the routes leading to Deveroir . He also stated there were high hopes that Egyptian resistance would be overcome and that the bridges would be laid during the morning . Dayan also told her that Matt 's paratrooper brigade had crossed to the west bank without encountering resistance and that Southern Command , as yet , had no intentions of withdrawing the brigade , even if the bridge @-@ laying was delayed .

Shortly after dawn , Reshef conducted a reconnaissance of the battlefield from a hilltop . He saw that the Egyptians had set up a strong blocking position defending the junction , composed of Egyptian tanks situated in hull @-@ down positions and infantrymen in foxholes and the now @-@ dry irrigation ditches of the Chinese Farm . The infantry were from the 16th Brigade 's right @-@ flank battalion and had the support of recoilless rifles , RPG @-@ 7s , and some manually guided AT @-@ 3 Sagger missiles . Reshef discovered that the Egyptians had mined both sides of Lexicon Road , to which he had lost several of his tanks .

Reshef decided to change tactics . He personally commanded the 40th Armored Battalions , after reinforcing it with tanks salvaged and repaired from the previous night 's fighting , and maneuvered to attack from the west ? from the direction of the canal ? hitting Egyptian positions in the flank , while a tank company and an infantry company attacked from south to north . Reshef 's forces engaged the Egyptians from long range , picking off defensive positions from afar , while using alternate fire and movement to advance to the crossroads . The defending infantry battalion , exhausted by continuous fighting and suffering from a severe lack of ammunition , soon withdrew allowing the Israelis to at last seize the junction .

In the meantime , other difficulties were surfacing . Sharon reported to Southern Command that one section of the roller bridge , being towed by Erez 's brigade , had been damaged and that the engineers needed a few hours to repair it . He also requested additional forces to help secure the corridor , noting the stiff resistance facing Reshef 's brigade . Sharon 's report prompted Bar @-@ Lev to alert Adan to prepare to open the corridor with his division . Sharon argued for Adan 's division to cross the canal on rafts and to proceed with Operation Abiray @-@ Lev without waiting for the bridges . Both Gonen and Bar @-@ Lev rejected Sharon 's suggestion since , without a secure corridor to the canal , Israeli forces on the west bank would be threatened with encirclement . Subsequently , Bar @-@ Lev ordered that no more Israeli forces or equipment would cross to the west bank until the bridges had been laid .

After receiving reinforcements , Reshef focused on clearing the Tirtur Road . He left a battalion of around 30 tanks between the junction and the western part of the Chinese Farm , and prepared to attack with two armored battalions provided by Sharon . He concentrated on the section of the Tirtur Road defended by an Egyptian battalion forming the left flank of the 16th Infantry Brigade . One of Reshef 's battalions attacked from the north @-@ east , the other from the west . The Egyptian battalion managed to halt the advance , aided by fire from tanks and anti @-@ tank weapons on the slopes of Missouri , a hill north @-@ west of the Chinese Farm , causing Reshef to break off his attack .

This last attempt left Reshef 's brigade in a desperate situation . He had 27 tanks remaining and was running short on ammunition and supplies . Reshef requested authorization from Sharon to withdraw his brigade to Fort Lakekan to regroup his forces and regain combat effectiveness .

= = = Israeli reinforcement = = =

The unexpected Egyptian resistance forced Israeli Southern Command to change its plans . Visiting

Adan 's advance command post , Gonen noted that " Sharon has disappointed us " and handed Adan the task of moving the pontoon bridge to the canal . Adan was to prepare to clear the Akavish and Tirtur Roads to deploy the bridges . Gonen informed Sharon of Adan 's new orders and tasked Sharon with capturing the Chinese Farm and Egyptian positions near the farm and the canal . Needing to regroup his forces , Sharon suggested that he capture the farm once Adan had cleared the routes to the canal , and Gonen consented . In a later meeting with Dayan and Bar @-@ Lev , Gonen reiterated the latter 's statement that no more forces would cross until the bridges had been laid , and added that , should the situation worsen , the paratroopers could be withdrawn .

The 162nd Division , concentrated south of Tasa , had been standing by to cross the canal since dawn on October 16 . The division advanced towards the canal , but movement was hampered by the massive traffic jams on the roads leading to the canal . When Adan realized that Akavish was closed , he ordered a tank battalion to make a turning maneuver through the desert to reach Deversoir . When it arrived , Sharon contacted Adan , explaining Reshef 's difficult situation , and requested that the battalion be placed under his command . Adan accepted , and Sharon in turn authorized Reshef 's request to pull back and regroup , replacing his brigade with the tank battalion .

After receiving his new orders , Adan moved his division to occupy a series of positions opposite ' Abd el @-@ Hamid 's 16th Brigade . One of Adan 's armored brigades had been placed as a reserve force under Southern Command . ' Abd el @-@ Hamid 's left @-@ flank infantry battalion , blocking Tirtur , repelled Israeli tanks attacking westwards and thwarted Adan 's efforts to clear the road . Adan realized that , without infantry support , breaking through the Egyptian positions would prove costly . However , at 2 : 00 PM , Southern Command notified Adan that he was soon receive the 35th Paratrooper Brigade , which had been transported by helicopters from Ras Sudar on the Gulf of Suez to Refidem 80 kilometers ( 50 mi ) east of the canal . The brigade made its way to the canal in buses and was greatly delayed by the traffic on Akavish road . Adan had expected the unit to arrive well before dusk , but the brigade commander , Colonel Uzi Ya 'iri , only arrived at 10 : 00 PM . The rest of his brigade soon arrived , transported by helicopters after the buses had come to a complete standstill .

= = = Paratrooper effort = = =

Adan met Ya 'iri at Adan 's former command post . Adan briefly explained the situation and , in a short discussion , Ya 'iri laid out his plan . He was tasked with clearing Akavish and Tirtur . At 11 : 30 PM , the paratroopers began moving , with a battalion under Lieutenant Colonel Yitzhak Mordechai spearheading the advance . Ya 'iri , acting with a sense of urgency , had decided to go into action without awaiting sufficient intelligence , or performing adequate reconnaissance on Egyptian defenses . His unit lacked artillery observers and , rather than wait for one to arrive , it was agreed the paratroopers would request fire support of the 162nd Division 's command net . The brigade was acting without armor support .

After some time , Mordechai 's battalion had reached an area where Tirtur and Akavish were closest , the distance between them no wider than 2 kilometers ( 1 @.@ 2 mi ) . At around 2 : 45 AM , they came into contact with Abd el @-@ Hamid 's left @-@ flank battalion , positioned around Tirtur . The battalion directed effective artillery fire against the paratroopers , who were also receiving heavy machine @-@ gun and small @-@ arms fire from entrenched Egyptian infantry . The paratroopers attempted to assault the machine @-@ gun positions , in places advancing to within a few meters of Egyptian lines . The paratrooper companies spread out , but repeatedly failed to reach the defenses . Israeli artillery fire was ineffective . Egyptian infantry were able to suppress the paratroopers ' movement and thwart flanking attempts . Most company and platoon commanders were killed or wounded . Adan ordered Ya 'iri to narrow his brigade 's front and focus on clearing Akavish instead , but the lead paratrooper battalion was under such heavy fire that it was impossible to maneuver .

With dawn nearing , Adan realized that if the pontoon bridge could not be brought to the canal during the few remaining hours of dark , an entire day would pass without a bridge being laid across

the canal , and in daylight , the paratroopers would sustain more casualties . He sent a half @-@ track company to reconnoiter Akavish at 3 : 00 . Half an hour later , the company reported it had reached the crossing site without encountering any resistance . The Egyptian battalion fighting the paratroopers had focused all their attention on the Israelis at Tirtur , ignoring activity on Akavish . Adan took a risky decision , sending the irreplaceable pontoons down Akavish to the canal . IDF bulldozers cleared the road of wreckage and debris , and the Israelis reached Fort Lakekan before turning northwards , finally reaching the crossing site . Bridge construction was started immediately by military engineers of the 143rd Division .

At dawn , Ya 'iri requested approval from Adan to withdraw his brigade , the paratroopers having thus far been unsuccessful in reaching Egyptian lines . Gonen denied the request , approving only medevac for the wounded . This was countermanded after Bar @-@ Lev visited Adan at his command post and realized the gravity of the paratroopers ' situation . An armored battalion was tasked with covering the paratroopers , but was unable to locate them . The paratroopers released red smoke to pinpoint their position , but this backfired as the Egyptians also spotted the smoke , directing accurate artillery fire against them and inflicting further casualties . The tanks assaulted the defenses , but suffered losses and fell back . It became evident that withdrawal could not be accomplished in the open ; APCs and half @-@ tracks were brought up to extract the paratroopers and the wounded ? all the while under fire . The Israelis finally withdrew under cover of friendly tanks . In 14 hours of almost uninterrupted combat , the paratroopers suffered heavy casualties , with some 40 ? 70 killed and 100 wounded . Ya 'iri would state that " We had suffered seventy casualties because we went into action too hastily , without proper intelligence on the enemy 's defenses . " Armored losses sustained during the withdrawal were also heavy .

= = = Egyptian withdrawal = = =

The Israeli armored brigades , principally those of Nir , Amir and Raviv , continued engaging the 16th Brigade after the paratroopers were withdrawn . The Israelis concentrated air and artillery attacks against 21st Division 's units from 5 : 00 AM . The Egyptians estimated there were upwards of 80 Israeli tanks attacking their positions . At around 7 : 00 AM on October 17 , the 21st Division received orders to evict Israeli armor from the vicinity of al @-@ Galaa ' village and capture Fort Matzmed , as part of a larger Egyptian effort to seal the Israeli penetration and destroy the bridgehead on the west bank . Since Oraby had the 18th Mechanized Brigade in defensive positions and stripped of its tank battalion , and the 14th Brigade defending other parts of the Egyptian bridgehead , he tasked the 1st Brigade to execute the attack with its remaining 53 tanks . At 8 : 00 AM , the Egyptians conducted an air and artillery strike on the area for some fifteen minutes , after which the attack commenced . Egyptian tanks managed to destroy Israeli armor near the village and reached the northern strongpoint of Fort Matzmed just after 9 : 00 AM in the face of heavy resistance . However , they were soon repelled by Israeli ground fire supported by air strikes . Israeli tanks then counterattacked and managed to advance significantly . The armored battle continued in a see @-@ saw fashion until 9 : 00 PM , by which time the 1st Brigade had restored its original lines . Meanwhile , an 5 : 00 PM attack by one of the 18th Brigade 's mechanized infantry battalions on al @-@ Galaa ' failed with heavy losses , and ten tanks were then allocated to the brigade . Israeli armor had occupied irrigation ditches around the farm and were entrenched in them , which significantly enhanced their defensive position . Egyptian attacks directed against the Israeli corridor or the bridgehead failed , with heavy losses .

The 1st Brigade had just 33 tanks remaining after losing 20 tanks . This prompted Second Army command to transfer a battalion of 21 tanks on October 18 from the 2nd Infantry Division to the north to reinforce the dwindling tank numbers in 16th Division 's bridgehead . As the battalion moved south , a large number of Israeli aircraft attacked the formation , forcing it to undertake evasive maneuvers , turning eastwards and fanning out in the desert terrain , thereby avoiding losses . The battalion was then attached to the 21st Division .

Abd el @-@ Hamid meanwhile reported the dire situation of his forces at 5 : 30 PM on October 17 . The 16th Brigade had been in heavy combat for three consecutive days ? ammunition was



becoming scarce , and the brigade was heavily outnumbered and outgunned due to its losses , including the destruction of its artillery units . Abd el @-@ Hamid received orders from 16th Division headquarters to retreat . His brigade abandoned its Chinese Farms positions and reinforced the lines of the 18th Mechanized Brigade to the north during the night of October 17 / 18 . This finally opened the Tirtur and Akavish roads to Israeli forces , ensuring Operation Abiray @-@ Lev would proceed . Missouri remained in Egyptian hands though , posing a threat to the Israeli corridor to the canal .

= = Aftermath = =

At around 4 : 00 PM on October 17 , the pontoon bridge had been fully assembled , opening the first Israeli bridge across the canal . The roller bridge was laid soon after at dawn on October 18 , and by afternoon , Adan 's division crossed to the west bank followed by Kalman Magen 's division . Adan , supported by Magen , would go on to reach Suez after the failure of a United Nations ceasefire , thereby cutting off two infantry divisions of the Egyptian Third Field Army . Sharon also crossed with part of his division , simultaneously trying to defend and expand the Israeli corridor to the Suez Canal ? as well attacking northwards on the west bank to Ismailia in an attempt to similarly cut off the Second Army . His efforts bogged down , and he was unable to reach Ismailia ( see Battle of Ismailia ) , while attempts to seize critical positions and expand the Israeli corridor on the east bank saw little to no success .

While ultimately an Israeli victory , the Battle of the Chinese Farm has an especially infamous legacy among Israeli participants , and it is remembered as one of the most brutal battles of the war ? and for the heavy losses incurred by both the Egyptians and Israelis . After the battle had ended , Dayan visited the area of the battlefield . Reshef , who accompanied him , said , " Look at this valley of death . " The minister , taken aback by the great destruction before him , muttered in an undertone , " What you people have done here ! " Later , Dayan would recount that : " I am no novice at war or battle scenes , but I have never seen such a sight , not in reality , or in paintings , or in the worst war movies . Here was a vast field of slaughter stretching as far as the eye could see . " Sharon would also provide his own poignant account of the aftermath : " It was as if a hand @-@ to @-@ hand battle of armor had taken place ... Coming close you could see the Egyptian and Jewish dead lying side @-@ by @-@ side , soldiers who had jumped from their burning tanks and died together . No picture could capture the horror of the scene , none could encompass what had happened there . "

The losses suffered by both the Egyptians and the Israelis in the battle were severe . Israeli units suffered heavy casualties in men and equipment ; Reshef 's armored losses during the first night of the battle alone were comparable to Egyptian armored losses on the disastrous October 14 offensive . For their part , the numbers of Egyptian armored forces within 16th Division 's bridgehead severely dwindled . As of 18 October the 21st Armored Division had no more than 40 tanks remaining of an original 136 tanks available at the start of the battle ( not counting 21 tanks received as reinforcements ) , while the 16th Infantry Division had just 20 tanks remaining in its organic tank battalion . This attrition served Egypt 's war strategy of inflicting maximum casualties on the Israelis , even though , from another perspective , the initiative had passed to the Israelis during the battle .

= = = Notable participants = = =

Among the participants of the battle were Mohamed Hussein Tantawi and Ehud Barak , then lieutenant colonels . Tantawi commanded an infantry battalion under the 16th Infantry Brigade . He engaged Reshef 's armor during October 16 and later Mordechai 's paratroopers during the night of October 16 / 17 , and was decorated for valor during the battle . Barak commanded an armored battalion during the battle and personally led the armored effort to extricate the Israeli paratroopers . Both men would later serve as Ministers of Defense in their respective nations and encounter each other again in that capacity .