

The Battle of Hattin, July 1187

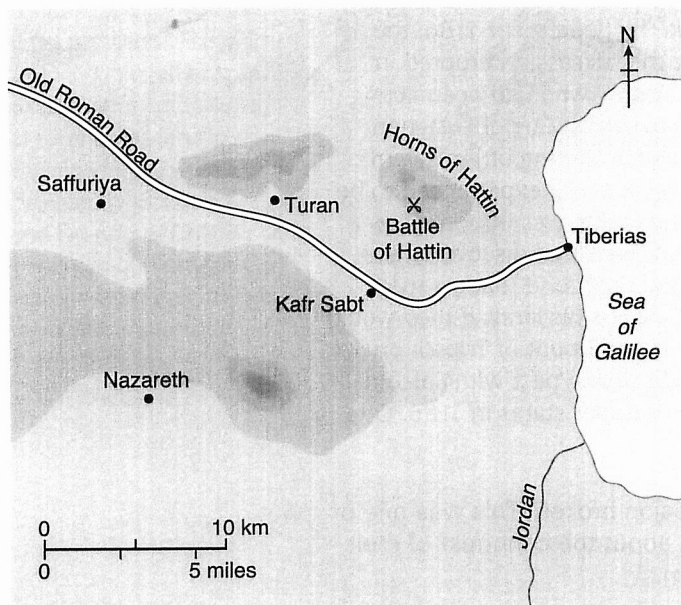
In the winter of 1186–87 Saladin began to prepare for a major offensive against the Franks. He was provoked by Reynald of Châtillon who raided a Muslim caravan that was crossing Transjordan on its way from Cairo to Damascus. Reynald's action contravened the truce with Saladin, but he refused to pay compensation. Saladin now had an excuse to fight. When the truce with the Franks expired in April 1187, he began to gather his forces for an invasion of Palestine. Saladin then launched a series of initial raids into crusader territory. On 1 May he easily overwhelmed a small force of Templar and Hospitaller knights at the Battle of Cresson. Saladin's forces withdrew carrying the heads of the slaughtered Christian soldiers on their spears. The loss of over 100 of the Franks' finest knights must have been a severe blow to their morale.

By June 1187, both sides had gathered their troops for battle. Saladin's aggression had persuaded Raymond of Tripoli to expel the Muslims from his territory and to support King Guy. The Christian army that assembled at Saffuriya probably numbered about 16,000 including around 1200 knights. They were heavily outnumbered by Saladin's forces which included at least 12,000 cavalry and probably totalled around 30,000. In the intense heat of the summer, the light armour of the Muslim warriors gave them an additional advantage over the heavily-armoured Franks. On 27 June 1187, Saladin led his men across the River Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee. The full-scale Muslim invasion of Palestine had begun.

Saladin's aim was to draw the Franks away from Saffuriya and to engage them in a battle at a place of his choosing. On 2 June, Saladin laid his trap for the Franks by attacking the town of Tiberias. Raymond of Tripoli's wife was besieged in the citadel, but Raymond advised King Guy to avoid a confrontation hoping that Saladin would retreat after capturing Tiberias

and that a ransom could be paid for his wife. Guy rejected Raymond's advice and, on the morning of 3 July, ordered his army to march out from Saffuriya. This decision would ultimately end the Franks' 90-year occupation of the holy city of Jerusalem.

Tiberias was a day's march from Saffuriya across a dry and barren plateau. By leaving Saffuriya the Franks were abandoning their only certain supply of water. Saladin understood that access to water would play a crucial role in the conflict. He ordered all the wells in the area to be filled in, ensuring a plentiful supply of water for his own troops from the springs at Kafr Sabt and from supplies carried by camels from the Jordan valley. As Guy's men began to dehydrate, Saladin used his superior number of cavalry to attack them.



△ The Battle of Hattin, July 1187.

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What led to the Muslim recapture of Jerusalem in 1187?

His mounted archers fired countless arrows into the Franks and claimed many lives. Guy realised that it was no longer possible to reach Tiberias that day and decided to make an overnight camp on the plateau.

As dawn broke over the hills of Galilee on 4 July, the thirsty and exhausted Christian soldiers set out along the old Roman road leading to Tiberias. Saladin waited until the blistering heat in the middle of the day before he made a move. Then he ordered his men to set fire to the dry scrub that lay ahead of the Franks. Guy's men were forced to make their way through clouds of hot and stifling smoke. Around noon, Saladin ordered his archers to unleash a torrent of arrows on the choking Franks. In desperation, Guy headed off the road and led his men to the crater of an ancient volcano known as the Horns of Hattin. Here the Franks found some temporary shelter from the Muslim bombardment.



The King pitched his tent and rallied his men around the relic of the True Cross that had been discovered in the days after the capture of Jerusalem in 1099. Their only hope was to charge down the hill and try to kill Saladin himself. They made two attempts and killed many of the soldiers surrounding Saladin, but, each time, the Muslims forced them back into the crater. When Saladin saw Guy's red tent crumple he knew that the battle had been won. His soldiers brought him the Christians' True Cross. Saladin dismounted from his horse, prostrated himself on the ground in thanks to God and wept for joy.

After the battle, Saladin ordered the captured King Guy and Reynald of Châtillon to be brought to his tent. Guy was dying of thirst and shaking with fear. Saladin gave Guy a refreshing cup of iced water. This was a sign that the King's life would be spared. But Saladin did not allow Guy to pass the cup to Reynald. The Sultan had not forgotten Reynald's attacks on Muslim pilgrims and his raid on the Muslim caravan. Saladin drew his scimitar sword and sliced off Reynald's head.

Jerusalem

The huge army that had been assembled to confront Saladin in the summer of 1187 had left very few soldiers to defend the crusader settlements. In the weeks after the Battle of Hattin it is not surprising that Saladin's armies swept through the crusader states. His forces quickly recaptured the crusader coastal settlements in Palestine, and, by late September, they began to besiege their ultimate goal – Jerusalem. The Holy City was recaptured by the Muslims on 29 September after a five-day siege. Saladin made his triumphant entry into the city on 2 October – the anniversary of the Prophet's Night Journey from Jerusalem to heaven.

△ The Horns of Hattin. This was the rocky outcrop in western Galilee where Saladin's forces defeated the Franks on 4 July 1187.

■ Make your notes for the final step. In your bullet point list above the step include all the factors that led to Saladin's success at Hattin. Below the step, make sure your bullet point list includes all the Frankish weaknesses that led to their defeat.

■ Concluding your enquiry

Now use your 'flight of steps' to consider the range of issues in the Enquiry Focus on page 91.