Battle of Khalde 1982: Four Days at Beirut's Southern Gate and the Martyrdom of Abdullah Siyam

The Battle of Khalde was the last of the great battles on the road to Beirut in June 1982. It was fought between 9 and 13 June at the Khalde triangle, the Lebanese capital’s southern gateway near the airport. There the joint Palestinian–Lebanese forces under Colonel Abdullah Siyam held out for four days against a full armoured division of the Israeli occupation army, backed by aircraft, artillery, warships and sea and air landings, and beat back its first assaults until their commander was killed in the forward trench. [1][2][3]

With the fall of the Khalde triangle the road lay open for the occupation to encircle Beirut and begin its siege. This article is part of a series on the Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the 1982 siege of Beirut. [1][4]

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The battle at a glance

Item	Details
Dates	9–13 June 1982
Place	The Khalde triangle, the Aramoun hills and the shore, south of Beirut near the airport
Commander	Colonel Abdullah Siyam (Abu Salem)
Defenders	The joint Palestinian–Lebanese forces, with reinforcements from Beirut on the surrounding hills
Attackers	A full armoured division of the occupation army under General Amos Yaron, with air, artillery and naval support and landings
Occupation losses (Palestinian account)	At least about 15 tanks and vehicles destroyed, 10 killed, and an M113 personnel carrier captured
Martyrs	Colonel Abdullah Siyam and his battalion’s cadres
Outcome	The triangle fell after four days, opening the road to the siege of Beirut

Sources: [1][2][5]

The commander: Abdullah Siyam

Abdullah Muhammad Younes Siyam was born in 1934 in the village of al-Jura near al-Majdal, which the occupation destroyed and emptied of its people in 1948; his family moved to Gaza, where he finished secondary school. He went on to study engineering at Cairo University and is regarded as the first Palestinian to specialise in aeronautical engineering; he worked for an airline and then in the Iraqi air force, where he was known as one of its ablest engineer officers. [2]

After the Palestine Liberation Army was founded he joined the Iraqi military college and graduated as an engineer lieutenant. He served with the army’s units in Iraq, then in Jordan and Syria after 1967, fought in the October 1973 war, commanded Battalion 423, and then led the Popular Liberation Forces in Lebanon until his

death. [2]

The Khalde triangle: Beirut’s southern gate

The Khalde triangle sits on the coastal road south of Beirut, some six kilometres from the capital near the airport, overlooked by the Aramoun hills. Whoever holds it opens the road into Beirut from the south. [6][1]

After overrunning Tyre and Sidon, occupation forces reached Damour on 8 June, where the occupation army’s deputy chief of staff, Major General Yekutiel Adam, was killed, and fighting flared at the Khalde triangle. On 9 June the occupation took Damour, and its navy landed troops between the airport and Beirut and set up a bridgehead near Khalde. [7][8][6]

Four days at Khalde

For the battle the occupation massed a full armoured division under General Amos Yaron, reinforced with every arm and with a triple bombardment from air, land and sea, along with air and naval landings. The defence was held by the joint Palestinian–Lebanese forces clinging to the coast, together with reinforcements sent by the Beirut command and posted on the surrounding hills. [1][2]

The first armoured assault: the “killing zone”

The occupation began with a surprise assault by an armoured battalion under heavy bombardment, firing on the move along both sides of the road to knock out anti-tank positions. But its first company was drawn into a “killing zone” the defenders had prepared, most of its tanks were destroyed, and the joint forces towed an intact M113 armoured personnel carrier back into Beirut. [1]

The landings and multi-axis attacks

The occupation then came back with heavier preparatory fire, attacks along several axes, air and naval landings on the beach near the Family Beach pool, and close-quarters fighting. According to the Al Jazeera Encyclopedia, the landing

attempt at Khalde failed in the face of resistance from fighters dug into the surrounding hills. The defence held in the first days thanks to close coordination between the reinforcements on the hills and the defenders on the coast. [1][3]

The counter-attack groups

After three days of fighting, Colonel Siyam planned small combat groups to launch counter-attacks and raids on occupation positions to wear its forces down, and he led the battle himself from the forward trench on the Aramoun hills, in direct contact with occupation troops. [1]

“They shall not pass”: the commander’s martyrdom

Colonel Abdullah Siyam was killed on 11 June 1982 in the forward trench on the Aramoun hills, leading his comrades in the first line of defence, and his battalion’s cadres fell with him. He was 48, and his comrades were never able to recover his body. [2][1]

The phrase “They shall not pass” has remained tied to his name in Palestinian memory, the symbol of a commander who chose to fight in the forward trench rather than from an operations room. [9]

Results

The Palestinian account says the occupation lost at least about 15 tanks and vehicles and 10 dead at Khalde, and some accounts link the death of its deputy chief of staff, Major General Yekutiel Adam, to the fighting on this axis. In the end the occupation took the Khalde triangle after four days, through heavy bombardment, the destruction of the defending forces and the death of their commander. [1][7]

The fall of the triangle marked the beginning of the siege of Beirut: on 13 June occupation forces reached the outskirts of Baabda and Burj al-Barajneh and cut the

Beirut–Damascus road, and on 14 June they closed the ring around West Beirut. But the four days at Khalde delayed the occupation's arrival at the capital and gave Beirut's defenders precious time to organise their defence. [3][4][10][1]

Differences between the accounts

The available sources on Khalde are few, mostly Palestinian accounts without independent figures. They differ on the battle's length, three days or four, and on where the occupation's deputy chief of staff was killed, Khalde or Damour, and one website wrongly dates the battle to September. The Al Jazeera Encyclopedia credits the fighters on the hills with foiling the landing, while the Palestine Chronology records the occupation setting up a bridgehead near Khalde on 9 June. [1][7][3][6]

Timeline

Date	Event
1934	Abdullah Siyam born in the village of al-Jura [2]
6 June 1982	The Israeli invasion of Lebanon begins [3]
8 June	Battles at Damour; fighting flares at the Khalde triangle [7]
9 June	Naval landing between the airport and Beirut; the Battle of Khalde begins [6]
10 June	Air strikes on Khalde, the airport and the camps [6]
11 June	Colonel Abdullah Siyam killed on the Aramoun hills [2]
13 June	The Khalde triangle falls; the occupation reaches Baabda [1]
14 June	The ring closes around West Beirut [10]

Frequently asked questions about the 1982 Battle of Khalde

When was the Battle of Khalde?

Between 9 and 13 June 1982. [1]

Where is the Khalde triangle?

On the coastal road south of Beirut near the airport, some six kilometres from the capital, overlooked by the Aramoun hills. [6][1]

Who led the Battle of Khalde?

Colonel Abdullah Siyam (Abu Salem), commander of the Popular Liberation Forces, who was killed in the forward trench on 11 June. [2][1]

Who was Abdullah Siyam?

A Palestinian officer from the depopulated village of al-Jura, born in 1934, regarded as the first Palestinian aeronautical engineer, who served in the Palestine Liberation Army. [2]

What was the outcome?

The defenders held out for four days and destroyed about 15 tanks and vehicles according to the Palestinian account; then the triangle fell and the siege of Beirut began. [1][3]

Why did Khalde matter?

Because it is Beirut’s southern gateway, opening the road to the capital to whoever holds it; its resistance delayed the occupation’s arrival in Beirut. [1]

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