

Khalifa Ali bin Abu Talib - The Battle of Siffin

The main battle

After the refusal of Muawiyah and Amr b Al 'Aas to accept the challenge of personal combat, the two armies drawn out in battle array fought for the whole day, but neither side got the better of the other. The following day the combat was renewed with greater vigor. Ali was in the center of his army with the flower of troops from Madina. Muawiyah had a pavilion pitched in the battlefield and there surrounded by his bodyguard. He watched the course of the battle. 'Amr b Al-'Aas with a great weight of horse charged the Kufa wing of the forces of Ali which gave way and exposed Ali to imminent peril. Ali and the men of the central wing fought bravely and repulsed the charge. Malik Ashtar the Commander-in-Chief of the forces of Ali then led a charge against Muawiyah. The pavilion of Muawiyah was surrounded by five columns of body guards ranged one after the other. Four of these five ranks were cut to pieces by Ashtar and his men. At this stage Muawiyah contemplated flight. 'Amr b Al-'Aas rushed to his side, and advised him not to lose heart. He said "Courage to day, victory tomorrow". With great effort, the forces of Muawiyah beat back the attack and thereafter the two forces fought on equal terms. Feats of bravery were performed by men from both the sides leading to heavy blood shed.

On the third day the battle began again with unprecedented vigor. The Syrians pressed against the ranks of the forces of Ali, but Ashtar drove them back with a good deal of slaughter. Then 'Ammar b Yasir with his contingent dashed forward from the ranks of the forces of Ali and attacked the forces of Muawiyah with the ferocity of a lion. He penetrated deep into the ranks of the enemy causing great havoc. Bent on seeking martyrdom 'Ammar fell after he had broken the ranks of the enemy. 'Ammar was a distinguished companion of the Holy Prophet. In the time of Umar he was the Governor of Kufa. He developed some differences with Othman. When Ali became the Caliph, Ammaar was his ardent supporter. He fought on the side of Ali in the Battle of the Camel. About him the Holy Prophet had prophesied that he would be killed by a group of godless and rebellious people. 'Ammar was ninety years old at the time of his martyrdom. When the people came to know of the martyrdom of Ammaar and recalled the prophecy of the Holy Prophet it demoralized the troops of Muawiyah. Muawiyah tried to keep up the morale of his people by saying that the responsibility for his death lay with Hadra1 Ali who had brought him to fight in spite of his old age. The death of 'Ammar was a great personal loss for Ali and he felt as if one of his hands had been cut off.

The following day the war was continued causing a good deal of slaughter. As the day wore on, the position of the army of Muawiyah began worsening. Their supply of arrows was exhausted, and they began pelting the forces of Ali with stones. The Syrians next took to javelins and lances. Finally they fell on the troops of Ali with swords. The battle continued during the night as well. In the nocturnal battle Ali played the role of a hero. He stood firm as a rock, and beat back the attacks of the Syrians killing according to chronicles as many as five hundred persons with his ponderous two edged sword.

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