



The Valiant Horsemen of the Merciful Part A

Dawn-Breakers Chapters 19-20

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Glimmerings notes are a companion to study of the Dawn-Breakers

Prologue

“This is not a Cause which may be made a plaything for your idle fancies,
nor is it a field for the foolish and faint of heart.

By God,

this is the arena of insight and detachment,
of vision and upliftment,

where none may spur on their chargers save
the valiant horsemen of the Merciful,

who have severed all attachment to the world of being.”¹

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¹ Bahá'u'lláh *Kitáb-i-Aqdas* paragraph 178. Text spacing shown here is for stylistic purposes only and not in the original text.

Section One: The First Wave of Attacks [November-December 1848]

The army, led by 'Abdu'lláh Khán-i-Turkamán ^{﴿﴾}, was camped on the hill overseeing Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. They set up barricades in front of the fort with orders to open fire on anyone leaving or entering the fort. The bread supply that was brought to the fort daily by some of the friendly neighboring villagers was the first thing that was cut-off. Next to be cut off was the water supply.

The prophecy of rain and snow

The companions in the fort would normally go and fetch water from near the fort. With the onset of the siege, Quddús forbade them to do so. Some of the companions who were worried about the low water supply expressed concern which was relayed to Quddús. It was the hour of sunset, and he was surveying the army of the enemy from the terrace of the fort. He turned to Mullá Husayn and said:

The scarcity of water has distressed our companions. God willing, this very night a downpour of rain will overtake our opponents, followed by a heavy snowfall, which will assist us to repulse their contemplated assault.¹

That very night, the army of 'Abdu'lláh Khán was surprised by a torrential rain which overwhelmed that section which lay close to the fort. Much of the ammunition was irretrievably ruined. There gathered within the walls of the fort an amount of water which, for a long period, was sufficient for the consumption of the companions. In the course of the following night, a snowfall such as the people of the neighbourhood even in the depth of winter had never experienced, added considerably to hampering the besieging army.

The next day the companions launched a surprise attack on the army that besieged them.

1 December 1848: 'Abdu'lláh Khán and his army fall

It was two hours after sunrise. Quddús, Mullá Husayn and three others of the companions on horses marched out of the fort gate with the rest of the

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, 361

companions on foot right behind. As soon as they emerged, they pealed out the cry: *Yá Sahibu'z-Zamán* and rushed headlong into the force besieging the fort. The roar of the Bábís and their fearlessness stunned the enemy. Within forty-five minutes the cry of victory was raised. The besiegers were routed, and most fled. Their leader 'Abdu'lláh Khán and his two main officers, together with four hundred and thirty of their men perished. None of the Bábís were killed in this encounter. No one, except for a man named Qulí, who rode in advance of Quddús, was badly wounded. As soon as the cry of victory was raised, Quddús returned to fort. When he saw that some had gone in pursuit of the enemy, he asked them to return:

We have repulsed the assailants, we need not carry further the punishment. Our purpose is to protect ourselves that we may be able to continue our labours for the regeneration of men. We have no intention whatever of causing unnecessary harm to anyone. What we have already achieved is sufficient testimony to God's invincible power. We, a little band of His followers, have been able, through His sustaining grace, to overcome the organised and trained army of our enemies.¹

The companions were further ordered not to take any of the property of their adversaries except their swords and horses.

Construction of a moat and life in the fort

In the days that followed, the dispersed forces of 'Abdu'lláh Khán began to reassemble. Seeing this, Quddús asked the companions to dig a moat around the fort to safeguard against a renewed attack. The work on the moat was completed in nineteen days.²

Life in the fort, in spite of the shortage of food and the constant firing on the fort of the reassembled forces, was surreal. Every morning and every afternoon, all the companions would gather in the square by the shrine, and Quddús would ask Mullá Husayn or one of the other distinguished companions to loudly chant passages from the Writings of the Báb. The bullets that kept raining down on the fort did not deter Quddús nor the companions from these times of devotion. Sometimes, after the recitations, Quddús would expound and explain the significance of the verses that were chanted.³ During other times in the day, the companions rejoiced in

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p362-363

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p363

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p355

reading the writings of Quddús himself. Shortly after his arrival, Quddús had composed three homilies: the first entirely devoted to the Báb, the second devoted to Bahá'u'lláh, and the third devoted to Táhirih.¹ To this was added the other writings of Quddús which he composed, in spite of all the hardships, during the period of the siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí right to the very end. This was all food for the soul of the companions during the siege. Nabíl records:

The rapidity and copiousness of his [Quddús'] composition, the inestimable treasures which his writings revealed, filled his companions with wonder and justified his leadership in their eyes. They read eagerly the pages of that commentary [on Sád of Samad]² which Mullá Husayn brought to them each day and to which he paid his share of tribute.^{3,4}

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p353: "Shortly after, Quddús entrusted to Mullá Husayn a number of homilies which he asked him to read aloud to his assembled companions. The first homily he read was entirely devoted to the Báb, the second concerned Bahá'u'lláh, and the third referred to Táhirih. We ventured to express to Mullá Husayn our doubts whether the references in the second homily were applicable to Bahá'u'lláh, who appeared clothed in the garb of nobility. The matter was reported to Quddús, who assured us that, God willing, its secret would be revealed to us in due time. Utterly unaware, in those days, of the character of the Mission of Bahá'u'lláh, we were unable to understand the meaning of those allusions, and idly conjectured as to what could be their probable significance."

² The first letter of the Arabic word *samad* is ص which is pronounced as *sád*. *Samad* means eternal and is one of the names of God. The word *samad* appears in the second line of the *súra al-Ikhlás* [*ikhlás* means purity/sincerity] *Qur'án súra* 112; also called *súra al-Tawhíd* [*tawhíd* means unity]. This *súra* has only 4 verses. Quddús' famous long commentary was on this letter *sád* of the word *Samad* from this *súra*. Quddús began writing this commentary while held in confinement in Sári at the home of Mírzá Muḥammad-Taqí [see **DB 17-18, Section 5**,], and continued writing it in Fort Shaykh Tabarsí [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p357], right through to the last days even the face of severely dire conditions of famine [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p390].

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p357. This commentary of Quddús is interpreted as being a eulogy to Bahá'u'lláh: "Did not the Báb, in the earliest days of His Mission, allude, in the opening passages of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, His commentary on the Súrih of Joseph, to the glory and significance of the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh? Was it not His purpose, by dwelling upon the ingratitude and malice which characterised the treatment of Joseph by his brethren, to predict what Bahá'u'lláh was destined to suffer at the hands of His brother and kindred? Was not Quddús, although besieged within the fort of Shaykh Ṭabarsí by the battalions and fire of a relentless enemy, engaged, both in the daytime and in the night-season, in the completion of his eulogy of Bahá'u'lláh—that immortal commentary on the *šád* of *šamad* which had already assumed the dimensions of five hundred thousand verses? Every verse of the *Qayyúmu'l-Asmá'*, every word of the aforementioned commentary of Quddús, will, if dispassionately examined, bear eloquent testimony to this truth." *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 3, p70-71.

⁴ The writings of Quddús have been lost. Just before the fall of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí Quddús collected and sent all his writings away to a Mullá Muḥammad-i-Ḥamzih who was not a Bábí but a friend of Quddús for safe keeping. He was a pious and learned man and did not side with the other '*ulamá* of Bárfurúsh. *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p409 states: "To him [Mullá Muḥammad-i-Ḥamzih] Quddús, a few days before his abandonment of the fort, had committed, through one of his trusted companions of Mázindarán, a locked saddlebag containing the text of his own interpretation of the *šád* of *šamad* as well as all his other writings and papers that he had in his possession, the fate of which remains unknown until the present day." This same Muḥammad-i-Ḥamzih was

Quddús was clear to the companions about what lay ahead. Referring to the afflictions that were to come, he compared them to the calamities that befell the Prophet Job, and told the companions:

Such will be the measure of our calamity that none but he who has been endowed with constancy and patience will be able to survive them.¹

The profound reverence and obedience which Mullá Husayn from the very start had shown Quddús was soon adopted by all the companions. The companions observed how at times, even in the midst of the night, Mullá Husayn would be seen quietly circumambulating², in a state of prayer, the part of the fort where Quddús was sleeping.³

Such was life in the fort of Shaykh Tabarsí at this time. The calamities foreshadowed by Quddús would soon arrive.

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the person who had Quddús' remains collected and buried after his martyrdom. [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p413 footnote 1].

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p356

² means to walk all the way around something

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p353-354

Section Two: The Second Wave of Attacks [December 1848]

The Grand Vazír, the *Amír-Kabír*, was enraged when the news reached him of what had happened to 'Abdu'lláh Khán and his forces. He ordered Prince Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá, one of the brothers of the recently deceased Muhammad Sháh, to mobilize his army and put an end to this Bábí enclave at this fort.

Prince Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá and his army lay siege to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí

Soon after the work on the moat surrounding the fort was completed, the news was received that Prince Mihdí-Qulí and his large army was close by. They first camped at the village of Shír-Gáh and then moved closer to the fort to the village of Vás-Kas.





Village of Shír-Gáh [top] and village of Vás-Kas [bottom]. Archival photos.¹

On his arrival, the Prince sent a messenger to the fort to inform Mullá Husayn that they had been sent by royal command to put an end to this sedition. Mullá Husayn sent this response back:

Tell your master, that we utterly disclaim any intention either of subverting the foundations of the monarchy or of usurping the authority of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh. Our Cause concerns the revelation of the promised *Qá'im* and is primarily associated with the interests of the ecclesiastical [means religious] order of this country. We can set forth incontrovertible arguments and deduce infallible proofs in support of the truth of the Message we bear.²

Mullá Husayn then laid out a defence of the Báb's Cause and its claims for the Prince's messenger. His passionate sincerity touched the heart of the messenger, who then asked Mullá Husayn what did he suggest should be the path forward. Mullá Husayn asked that the Prince get the '*ulamá*' of both Sári and Bárfurúsh to come to the fort and have a large gathering with the Prince as the head and judge. The companions would lay out the claims of the Báb and His Message, and the '*ulamá*' could ask any questions they had. The Prince using the *Qur'án* can be the judge of the truth of the matter based on that convocation. The messenger expressed his complete satisfaction with this and promised that before the lapse of three days, the gathering asked for by Mullá Husayn would be convened.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p362 [top photo] and p364 [bottom photo]

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p363-364

21 December 1848: The Prince and his mighty army fall

The messenger returned to the Prince, but the promise given by him to Mullá Husayn was not upheld by the Prince. Instead of calling a gathering of the *'ulamá* with Mullá Husayn to hear and discuss the Báb's claims, the Prince lined up his forces for an attack.

The companions in the fort saw that three regiments of infantry and several regiments of cavalry were preparing to attack the fort. It was now the third day since the messenger had returned. It was still dark, as the sun had not risen. As they were getting ready to attack the fort, the Prince's forces were shocked to hear the cry: "Mount your steeds, O heroes of God!". With Quddús leading, Mullá Husayn and two hundred and two of his companions rode out of the fort. They broke through the ranks of the Prince's forces, and undaunted by the overwhelming forces arrayed against them and undeterred by the snow and mud which had accumulated in the roads, they made headway to Vás-Kas, which was the Prince's headquarters. Mullá Husayn was leading the charge to the Prince's base. The Prince, who was watching the movements of Mullá Husayn, ordered his men to focus their fire on him. The bullets which they discharged were powerless to hold Mullá Husayn back. He forced his way through the gate of the Prince's base and rushed into the private apartments of the Prince. The Prince was now so panicked that he threw himself from a back window into the moat and escaped barefooted. The Prince's men at his base, deprived of their leader, were now confused and panicked as well. They fled in every direction.¹ At the Prince's base, the companions also came across a group of prisoners which they released. To their surprise the prisoners included Mullá Yúsuf-i-Ardibílí  [one of the Letters of the Living]. He had been on his way to the fort but been intercepted and taken prisoner by the Prince's men. He now joined the companions in the fort.²

As the companions forced their way through the section of the base reserved for the Prince, two other princes of royal blood were also killed. The companions found coffers filled with gold and silver in these princes' lodgings. They left all of these untouched. The only two things they took were a pot of gunpowder and the favourite sword of the Prince. Mullá Husayn's own sword had been hit by a bullet, so when the companions presented the Prince's sword to Mullá Husayn, he now used that.³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p365-366

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p367.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p366-367

Quddús is hurt and Mullá Husayn fights with two swords

Mullá Husayn and the companions who had entered the Prince's base in Vās-Kas rejoined Quddús and the rest of the companions who were at the outskirts of Vās-kas. They were surveying the enemy lines, when they saw a large regiment of cavalry charge them. They all jumped onto their horses, raising the cry: *Yá Sahibu'z-Zamán*. They split into two groups. Mullá Husayn and a group of companions went in one direction, and Quddus and a group of companions went in the other. As the charge proceeded, the detachment that was heading toward Mullá Husayn suddenly deflected its course, and going round him, joined forces with the detachment that had surrounded Quddús and those who were with him. At that moment, they discharged a thousand bullets, one of which struck Quddús in the mouth, knocking out several of his teeth and wounding both his tongue and throat.

The loud noise of the discharge of a thousand bullets against Quddús could be heard a long distance away. Mullá Husayn who was charging to this scene, jumped off his horse and ran towards Quddús. The sight of blood dripping profusely from the mouth of his beloved chief filled Mullá Husayn with dismay. He raised his hands in horror and was on the point of beating himself on his own head in sorrow, when Quddús signalled him to not do that. Obeying his leader instantly, he asked Quddús if he could be allowed to use his sword, which Quddús granted. With this Mullá Husayn turned together with one hundred and ten of the companions and faced the Prince's army. Wielding the sword of his beloved leader in one hand, and that of his disgraced opponent in the other, Mullá Husayn charged into the large host arrayed against him. In what was an impossible feat, within thirty minutes, Mullá Husayn and his companions succeeded in putting the entire army gathered there to flight.

Mullá Husayn and the companions conducted the wounded Quddús back to the fort. The companions were very saddened by Quddús' injury. Observing this, Quddús addressed a written appeal to them, as the injury had left him unable to speak, saying:

We should submit, to whatever is the Will of God. We should stand firm and steadfast in the hour of trial. The stone of the infidel broke the teeth of the Prophet of God¹; mine have fallen as a result of the bullet of the enemy. Though my body be afflicted, my soul is immersed in gladness. My gratitude

¹Reference to a *hadith* that the Prophet Muhammad during an attack by the Quraysh [at the battle of Uhud] was hit in the face by a stone which broke one [or more] of His teeth.

to God knows no bounds. If you love me, suffer not that this joy be obscured by the sight of your lamentations.¹

Mullá Husayn's swordsmanship: "in him resided a spirit which God alone could bestow"

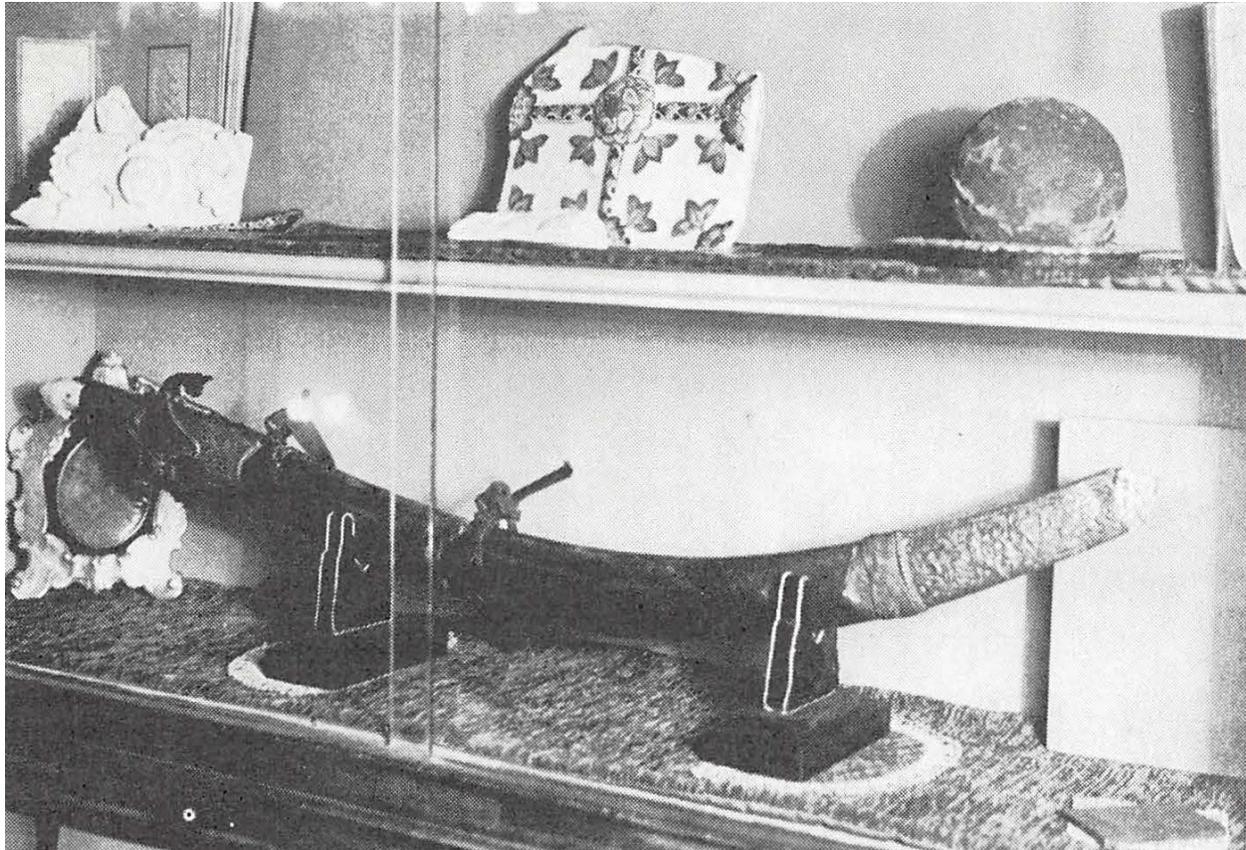
Some years after the episode of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, the survivors on both sides remembered the amazing swordsmanship of Mullá Husayn. One of the main captains who led part of the army that attacked Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, describing one battle scene during the siege, said:

Then I saw Mullá Husayn unsheathe his sword raise his face towards heaven, and heard him exclaim: "O God I have completed the proof to this host, but it availeth not." Then he began to attack us on the right and on the left. I swear by God that on that day he wielded the sword in such wise as transcends the power of man. ... And, during that war not once was his sword-stroke at fault, but every blow that he struck fell true. And by the nature of their wounds I could recognise all whom Mullá Husayn had cut down with his sword, and since I had heard and knew that none could rightly wield the sword save the Chief of Believers [Imám 'Alí]², and that it was well-nigh impossible for sword to cut so true, therefore I forbade all who were aware of this thing to mention it or make it known, lest the troops should be discouraged and should wax faint in the fight.³

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p368

² The legendary swordsmanship of Imám 'Alí is acknowledged by all historical sources whether Shí'á or otherwise.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p413 footnote 2, quoting *Tárikh-i-Jadíd* p106-109.



One of Mullá Husayn's swords and a cannon ball recovered from Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.¹

Nabíl records his conversation with the distinguished believer Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí , one of the survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.² In one of the opponents' historical memoirs, it was claimed that Mullá Husayn had, in his early youth, been instructed in the art of swordsmanship, and that he acquired his incredible sword skills only after a considerable period of training. Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí, who had known Mullá Husayn since they were young, responded to this claim:

¹ Photo from *Bahá'í World* vol 13, p432

² Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí was one of those highly learned who, according to Nabíl [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 6, p125] had become a Bábí on Mullá Husayn's very first visit back to Mashhad after the Declaration of the Báb [DB 4-7, Section 2]. He came from the village Dúghábád, which is about 200 km [125 miles] south-west of Mashhad. He went to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí together with five other companions. He was wounded five times, but as prophesied to him by Quddús, he became one of the few survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. Several of Nabíl's accounts about what transpired in Fort Shaykh Tabarsí come from him. In time he became a devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh. [Balyuzi *Some Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh* Chapter 13, p157-159]. Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí's son, Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Fúrúghí followed in his father's footsteps and also became a distinguished believer and is named as one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh [Shoghi Effendi *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. 3, p80-81]. [For [Portrait of Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Fúrúghí](#) see [Bahaipedia](#) and Balyuzi *Some Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh* Chapter 13, p157-170.]

This is sheer fabrication. I have known him [Mullá Husayn] from his childhood, and have been associated with him, as a classmate and friend, for a long time. I have never known him to be possessed of such strength and power. I even deem myself superior in vigour and bodily endurance. His hand trembled as he wrote, and he often expressed his inability to write as fully and as frequently as he wished. He was greatly handicapped in this respect, and he continued to suffer from its effects until his journey to Mázindarán. The moment he unsheathed his sword, however, to repulse that savage attack [the first attack at Bárfurúsh] ¹, a mysterious power seemed to have suddenly transformed him. In all subsequent encounters, he was seen to be the first to spring forward and spur on his charger into the camp of the aggressor. Unaided, he would face and fight the combined forces of his opponents and would himself achieve the victory. We, who followed him in the rear, had to content ourselves with those who had already been disabled and were weakened by the blows they had sustained. His name alone was sufficient to strike terror into the hearts of his adversaries. They fled at mention of him; they trembled at his approach. Even those who were his constant companions were mute with wonder before him. We were stunned by the display of his stupendous force, his indomitable will and complete intrepidity. We were all convinced that he had ceased to be the Mullá Husayn whom we had known, and that in him resided a spirit which God alone could bestow.²

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¹ DB 19, Section 2, where Mullá Husayn cuts in two the man, the musket and the tree all at once with one stroke.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p333-334

Section Three: The Third Wave of Attacks and Mullá Husayn's Martyrdom [February 1849]

The routing of the Prince's army at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí was on 21 December 1848. About three to four weeks before this, Bahá'u'lláh, faithful to His promise to Mullá Husayn, had set out from Núr for Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.

December 1848: Bahá'u'lláh is imprisoned and bastinadoed in Ámul

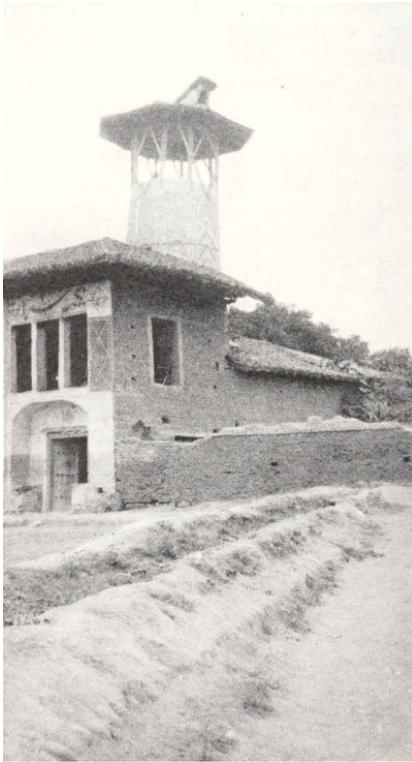
The routes leading to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí were heavily patrolled by soldiers. When Bahá'u'lláh with His few companions got closer to the fort, they were spotted and arrested.¹ They were redirected and brought to the town of Ámul. As soon as they were arrested, Bahá'u'lláh gave a signal to the companions in His party to secretly throw away all the Writings of the Báb they had on them. This unfortunately was not obeyed by all of them. At Ámul, they were interrogated by a gathering of the *'ulamá*, who upon searching found the Writings of the Báb. In spite of losing the discussion that ensued with Bahá'u'lláh, the gathered *'ulamá* demanded a death sentence for the Bábís. Unlike the *'ulamá*, the acting governor of Ámul had high regard for Bahá'u'lláh and wished to protect Him. He therefore convinced the *'ulamá* of Ámul to punish the prisoners by bastinado now and then send them to the capital, to the Sháh, to decide their ultimate fate. When they took the other Bábís to bastinado them, Bahá'u'lláh stepped in saying:

None of these men are guilty of any crime. If you insist on inflicting your punishment. I offer Myself as a willing Victim of your chastisement.²

As this was the only way to save the lives of Bahá'u'lláh and His companions, the acting governor agreed to this. Bahá'u'lláh was bastinadoed, and together with His companions imprisoned in one of the rooms of the *masjid* [mosque] of Ámul.

¹ The detailed account of who were these companions and what happened in Ámul in this episode is given in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p368-377

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p372



Masjid in Ámul where Bahá'u'lláh was confined and bastinadoed. Archival photos.¹

¹ *Bahá'í World* vol 5, p506



Two early believers in Tihrán about to be bastinadoed. Archival photo.¹

After a few days, through the efforts of the acting governor, Bahá'u'lláh and His companions were brought to the house of the governor and treated with great respect. In time, Bahá'u'lláh and His companions were released through the governor's efforts, and a safe passage to Tihrán arranged for them. And so as destined, Bahá'u'lláh was unable to return to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.²

January – February 1849: The siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí enters heightened stage

The sudden routing of the Prince's army in just one day and the disappearance of the Prince himself caused a domino effect in the region. Panic ensued, and neighboring towns began to incorrectly believe they were exposed to danger, and in spite of the onset of winter, one could see caravans of the local populace, including women and children, fleeing the area.³ The Grand Vazír *Amír-Kabír* was

¹ *Bahá'í World* vol 7, p188

² The detailed account of what happened in Ámul in this episode is given in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p368-377.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p366 footnote 1

not only furious but stupefied. He wrote to the Prince who had been so ignominiously defeated:

I have charged you, with the mission of subduing a handful of young and contemptible students. I have placed at your disposal the army of the Sháh, and yet you have allowed it to suffer such a disgraceful defeat.¹

At the order of the *Amír-Kabír*, reinforcements were now sent to the reassembling the army of the Prince. The reinforcements included regiments of infantry and cavalry led by the military commander of the province, ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán-i-Lárijání (اَبّاس قلی خان لاریجانی), who was also the governor of Ámul. While the Prince had set up his base in Sári² which is not very close to Fort Tabarsí, ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán led his regiment right up to the fort itself. They set up a series of seven barricades around the fort. The heightened siege conditions had its effect on the fort, blocking all access to food and water.

1 February 1849: A well is dug and Mullá Husayn prepares for his final day

The heightened siege compelled the Bábís to dig a well in the fort, to at least get water. It was 1 February 1849 when the well digging was completed. That morning, Mullá Husayn said to his companions who had laboured so hard:

Today we shall have all the water we require for our bath. Cleansed of all earthly defilements, we shall seek the court of the Almighty and shall hasten to our eternal abode. Whoso is willing to partake of the cup of martyrdom, let him prepare himself and wait for the hour when he can seal with his life-blood his faith in his Cause. This night, ere the hour of dawn, let those who wish to join me be ready to issue forth from behind these walls and, scattering once again the dark forces which have beset our path, ascend untrammelled to the heights of glory.³

Nabíl recounts what happened next:

That same afternoon, Mullá Husayn performed his ablutions, clothed himself in new garments, attired his head with the Báb’s turban,⁴ and prepared for

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p332

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p389

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p379

⁴ The Báb has sent one of His green turbans to Mullá Husayn to wear, when Mullá Husayn was in Mashhad. At that same time the Báb had also sent another of His green turbans to Quddús who was in Sári. Now both Mullá Husayn and Quddús will be martyred at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí wearing these same green turbans that they had received from the Báb. Mullá Husayn’s preparation before his last battle at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí is described

the approaching encounter. An undefinable joy illumined his face. He serenely alluded to the hour of his departure and continued to his last moments to animate the zeal of his companions. Alone with Quddús, who so powerfully reminded him of his Beloved, he poured forth, as he sat at his feet in the closing moments of his earthly life, all that an enraptured soul could no longer restrain.¹

Before dawn 2 February 1849: Mullá Husayn is mortally wounded

Nabíl continues:

Soon after midnight, as soon as the morning-star had risen, the star that heralded to him the dawning light of eternal reunion with his Beloved, he started to his feet and, mounting his charger, gave the signal that the gate of the fort be opened.

As he rode out at the head of three hundred and thirteen of his companions to meet the enemy, the cry of *Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán* again broke forth, a cry so intense and powerful that forest, fort, and camp vibrated to its resounding echo. Mullá Husayn first charged the barricade which was defended by Zakaríyyáy-i-Qádí-Kaláí , one of the enemy's most valiant officers. Within a short space of time, he had broken through that barrier, disposed of its commander, and scattered his men. Dashing forward with the same swiftness and intrepidity, he overcame the resistance of both the second and third barricades, diffusing, as he advanced, despair and consternation among his foes. Undeterred by the bullets which rained continually upon him and his companions, they pressed forward until the remaining barricades had all been captured and overthrown. In the midst of the tumult which ensued, 'Abbás-Qulí *Khán-i-Láríjání*  had climbed a tree, and, hiding himself in its branches, lay waiting in ambush for his opponents. Protected by the

here [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p379]. And later, describing Quddús leaving Fort *Shaykh* Tabarsí to go meet the enemy which will lead to his martyrdom, Nabíl records this: "As the hour of their departure approached, Quddús attired his head with the green turban which the Báb had sent to him at the time He sent the one that Mullá Husayn wore on the day of his martyrdom." In the interrogation of Quddús that then followed in the enemy camp, Nabíl records this question put to Quddús: "For what reason," the *Sa'idu'l-'Ulamá* impertinently enquired, "have you, by choosing to place a green turban upon your head, arrogated to yourself a right which only he who is a true descendant of the Prophet can claim?" [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p409].

Note: The green turban is worn by *siyyids* as a sign of their lineage. The Báb was a *siyyid* meaning He was a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad. *Siyyids* are usually distinguished by wearing a green turban or a black turban and a green shawl or sash.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p379

darkness which surrounded him, he was able to follow from his hiding place the movements of Mullá Husayn and his companions, who were exposed to the fierce glare of the conflagration which they had raised. The steed of Mullá Husayn suddenly became entangled in the rope of an adjoining tent, and ere he was able to extricate himself, he was struck in the breast by a bullet from his treacherous assailant. Though the shot was successful, 'Abbás-Qulí Khán was unaware of the identity of the horseman he had wounded.¹



Tree from which Mullá Husayn was shot. Archival photo.²

Mullá Husayn, who was bleeding profusely, dismounted from his horse, staggered a few steps, and, unable to proceed further, fell exhausted upon

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p379-380

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p380

the ground. Two of his young companions, Qulí, and Hasan, both from Khurásán came to his rescue and bore him to the fort.¹

Another historian records:

Although seriously wounded, the Bábí chief continued, nevertheless, to give orders and to lead and stimulate his men until, seeing that little more could be gained, he gave the signal to retreat, remaining himself with the rear guard.²

No less than ninety of the companions were wounded that night, most of whom would eventually succumb to their injuries.³

Dawn of 2 February 1849: Mullá Husayn dies

Nabíl recounts the following he heard from Mullá Sádiq-i-Khurásání  and Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí , two distinguished believers who were survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí:

We were among those who had remained in the fort with Quddús. As soon as Mullá Husayn, who seemed to have lost consciousness, was brought in, we were ordered to retire. “Leave me alone with him,” were the words of Quddús as he bade Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir  close the door and refuse admittance to anyone desiring to see him. “There are certain confidential matters which I desire him alone to know.” We were amazed a few moments later when we heard the voice of Mullá Husayn replying to questions from Quddús. For two hours they continued to converse with each other. We were surprised to see Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir so greatly agitated. “I was watching Quddús,” he subsequently informed us, “through a fissure in the door. As soon as he called his name, I saw Mullá Husayn arise and seat himself, in his customary manner, on bended knees beside him. With bowed head and downcast eyes, he listened to every word that fell from the lips of Quddús, and answered his questions. “You have hastened the hour of your departure,” I was able to hear Quddús remark, “and have abandoned me to the mercy of my foes. Please God, I will ere long join you and taste the sweetness of heaven’s ineffable delights.” I was able to gather the following

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p380

² Comte de Gobineau’s *Les Religions et les Philosophies dans l’Asie Centrale*, p. 174. From *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p380 footnote 1.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p382

words uttered by Mullá Husayn: “May my life be a ransom for you. Are you well pleased with me?”

A long time elapsed before Quddús bade Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir open the door and admit his companions. “I have bade my last farewell to him,” he said, as we entered the room. “Things which previously I deemed it unallowable to utter I have now shared with him.” We found on our arrival that Mullá Husayn had expired. A faint smile still lingered upon his face. Such was the peacefulness of his countenance that he seemed to have fallen asleep.¹

Daytime 2 February 1849: Mullá Husayn is buried

Nabíl’s account continues:

Quddús attended to his [Mullá Husayn’s] burial, clothed him in his own shirt, and gave instructions to lay him to rest to the south of, and adjoining, the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí.

“Well is it with you to have remained to your last hour faithful to the Covenant of God,” he said, as he laid a parting kiss upon his eyes and forehead. “I pray God to grant that no division ever be caused between you and me.” He spoke with such poignancy that the seven companions who were standing beside him wept profusely, and wished they had been sacrificed in his stead.

Quddús, with his own hands, laid the body in the tomb, and cautioned those who were standing near him to maintain secrecy regarding the spot which served as his resting place, and to conceal it even from their companions.²

He afterwards instructed them to inter the bodies of the thirty-six martyrs who had fallen in the course of that engagement in one and the same grave on the northern side of the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. “Let the loved ones of God,” he was heard to remark as he consigned them to their tomb, “take

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p381-382

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p381 footnote 1: “His [Mullá Husayn’s] mortal remains still repose in the little inner room of the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí where, at the direction of Mullá Muhammad-‘Alí Bárfurúshí, they were reverently laid by the hands of his sorrowing comrades in the beginning of the year A.D. 1849.” [*A Traveller’s Narrative*, Note F, p. 245].

heed of the example of these martyrs of our Faith. Let them in life be and remain as united as these are now in death.”¹

And there were seventy-two companions

It was dawn of 2 February 1849 when Mullá Husayn died. He was thirty-six years old when he drank the cup of martyrdom. It was one hundred and sixteen days from the day of Mullá Husayn’s arrival at Bárfurúsh when he and his companions were first attacked [10 October 1848] to his death at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí [2 February 1849]. The number of his companions who were martyred during this one hundred- and sixteen-day period was seventy-two.²

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p381-382

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p382. Note: Imám Husayn was martyred in Karbalá’ together with seventy-two of his companions.

Section Four: The Fourth Wave of Attacks [March 1849]

The charge led by Mullá Husayn on 2 February 1849 before the hour of dawn had delivered a severe blow to the forces that had laid siege to the fort. The besieging forces did not know about the death of Mullá Husayn and the injuries the companions had sustained that day. Furthermore, an unexpected severe cold spell hit the area, which caused the army to delay all its action. This gave a brief respite to the firing onto the fort. However, the siege itself remained in full force as the army reassembled with further forces arriving.

As to life in the fort, the leadership role of Mullá Husayn was largely taken over by Muhammad-Báqir-i-Qá'iní, the builder of Bábiyyih. One historian records:

Mullá Husayn's brother and constant companion, Mírzá Muhammad Hasan,¹ was fighting with the companions on the night that Mullá Husayn was martyred. He was badly wounded but returned to the fort alive. After Mullá Husayn died, Quddús consoled Muhammad Hasan and place him in command of the companions. He delivered to the new commander both the green turban that Mullá Husayn had received from the Báb and Mullá Husayn's sword. The appointment was largely honorary, however, since his severe wounds were slow to heal and kept him from the fighting.² Actually, it was Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir, the builder of Bábiyyih,³ who assumed leadership of the company.⁴

Early March 1849: The last of the food supply in the Fort

The siege had caused the food supply in the fort to draw to an end. Mullá Husayn had stored some extra rice for when supplies would run out, and what was left of that emergency supply was now distributed. Now there was no food left. When

¹ He and Mullá Husayn's nephew had accompanied Mullá Husayn from the time of the passing of Siyyid Kázim in Karbalá' to Shíráz where they eventually met the Báb and all three became Letters of the Living. All three will be martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyrs #2, #3 and #4, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#).

² Mírzá Muhammad Hasan, the brother of Mullá Husayn is eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyr #3, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#).

³ Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir-i-Qá'iní, is eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyr #7, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#).

⁴ Mehrabkhani, *Mullá Husayn – Disciple at Dawn*, Epilogue, p278

each had received their portion, which was the last of the rice supply, Quddús summoned all the companions in the fort and said:

Whoever feels himself strong enough to withstand the calamities that are soon to befall us, let him remain with us in this fort. And whoever perceives in himself the least hesitation and fear, let him betake himself away from this place. Let him leave immediately ere the enemy has again assembled his forces and assailed us. The way will soon be barred before our face; we shall very soon encounter the severest hardship and fall a victim to devastating afflictions.¹

It was now a little over ten days before *Naw-Rúz*² of 1849.

The betrayers among the companions

The very night Quddús had given this warning, a siyyid from Qum, Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavallí ﴿﴾, was moved to betray his companions. He wrote a secret letter to ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán-i-Lárijání ﴿﴾, in which he disclosed that Mullá Husayn and number of the companions were dead, that the occupants of the fort were starving, and that if ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán were to attack, he would surely win the battle. This sealed letter was entrusted to a Siyyid ‘Alíy-i-Zargar ﴿﴾, who snuck out of the fort at midnight and went straight to ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán who was camped not far from the fort. He reached ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán at sunrise. ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán was thrilled to hear about the death of Mullá Husayn, and wanting all the glory of victory for himself, decided he was going to attack the fort without informing the Prince and other captains. To prevent this intelligence from spreading, he instantly killed Siyyid ‘Alíy-i-Zargar and made up an excuse so he was not suspected of the murder. He ordered his officers to prepare and immediately launch an attack on the fort.³

Tenth day before Naw-Rúz 1849: ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán’s army attacks

It was the tenth day before *Naw-Rúz* of that year when ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán, marching at the head of two regiments of infantry and cavalry, encompassed the fort. The day had just broken as they opened fire on to the fort. At this, Quddús called Mírzá Muhammad Báqir, and said:

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p384

² Fársí, means New Day. It is the Persian New Year. It marks the day of the Spring Equinox and therefore always falls between March 19 – 22.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p384-386

The betrayer has announced the death of Mullá Husayn to ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán. Emboldened by his removal, he is now determined to storm our stronghold and to secure for himself the honour of being its sole conqueror. Sally out and, with the aid of eighteen men marching at your side, administer a befitting chastisement upon the aggressor and his host. Let him realise that though Mullá Husayn be no more, God’s invincible power still continues to sustain his companions and enable them to triumph over the forces of their enemies.¹

Nabíl recounts what happened:

No sooner had Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir selected his companions than he ordered that the gate of the fort be flung open. Leaping upon their chargers and raising the cry of “*Yá Sáhibu’z-Zamán!*” they plunged headlong into the camp of the enemy. The whole army fled in confusion before so terrific a charge. All but a few were able to escape. They reached Bárfurúsh utterly demoralised and laden with shame. ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán was so shaken with fear that he fell from his horse. Leaving, in his distress, one of his boots hanging from the stirrup, he ran away, half shod and bewildered, in the direction which the army had taken. Filled with despair, he hastened to the Prince and confessed the ignominious reverse he had sustained. Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir, on his part, emerging together with his eighteen companions unscathed from that encounter, and holding in his hand the standard [flag] which an affrighted enemy had abandoned, repaired with exultation to the fort and submitted to his chief [Quddús], who had inspired him with such courage, this evidence of his victory.²

Attacking forces are reinforced

Prince Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá was quite pleased that ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán had been defeated in this battle, because this meant he wasn’t the only one who had been defeated by the Bábís at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.³ He asked ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán to reassemble his forces, and to these were added additional infantry and cavalry regiments led by senior captains Sulaymán Khán-i-Afshár 🗣️ and Ja’far-Qulí Khán 🗣️. They dug trenches to be bunkers for those with guns and set up additional barricades around the fort, fortifying the siege. Additional ammunition including cannons, mortars and

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p386-387

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p387

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p389

explosive devices that could start fires were also brought in. The besieging forces also began building towers as high as various levels of the fort, from which they could then fire into the fort.

Food runs out in the Fort: They had to eat horse flesh

Although the spirits were high in the fort, all the food had run out. There was one cow left, which they used to milk and used the milk to prepare a pudding for Quddús as his food. Quddús would only take a few teaspoons of this and share the rest with the companions. Soon, they had to start killing and eating the horses they had brought away from the camp of the enemy. Everyone grew more worn and wasted through lack of food as days passed.

Mullá Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí , one of the survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, describes how during that time, every morning and every evening, Quddús would send verses to be chanted to the companions¹, and how these would energize them:

God knows that we had ceased to hunger for food. Our thoughts were no longer concerned with matters pertaining to our daily bread. We were so enraptured by the entrancing melody of those verses that, were we to have continued for years in that state, no trace of weariness and fatigue could possibly have dimmed our enthusiasm or marred our gladness. And whenever the lack of nourishment would tend to sap our vitality and weaken our strength, Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir would hasten to Quddús and acquaint him with our plight. A glimpse of his face, the magic of his words, as he walked amongst us, would transmute our despondency into golden joy. We were reinforced with a strength of such intensity that, had the hosts of our enemies appeared suddenly before us, we felt ourselves capable of subjugating their forces.²

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p390: “Despite these adverse circumstances, he [Quddús] unfailingly continued further to elucidate in his commentary the significance of the šád of šamad, and to exhort his friends to persevere till the very end in their heroic endeavours. At morn and at eventide, Mírzá Muḥammad-Báqir would chant, in the presence of the assembled believers, verses from that commentary, the reading of which would quicken their enthusiasm and brighten their hopes.”

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p390

Naw-Rúz 1849

*Naw-Rúz*¹ 1849 arrived. Though oppressed by hunger and weak in body, the companions in the fort used this occasion to give voice to their feelings of thanksgiving and praise to the Almighty for the many blessings their souls had received. The army besieging the fort was shocked to hear the loud chants of praise and songs which arose from the fort. They just couldn't fathom how these Báb's were joyous in spite of their dire physical conditions.

On the day of *Naw-Rúz*, Quddús addressed a written message to the companions, in which he alluded to the approach of such trials as would bring in their wake the martyrdom of a considerable number of the companions. Except for a very few, who would subsequently not be able to handle the even more severe hardships that came, all the other companions faced the future with boundless courage and radiant spirits.²

Ninth day after Naw-Rúz 1849:

On the ninth day after *Naw-Rúz*, the amassed forces of the Prince and the other captains ordered their artillery to open fire on the fort. Cannon balls rained down on it. While the bombardment was in progress, Quddús came out and walked to the middle of the fort. A cannon ball landed just in front, but Quddús face was wreathed in smiles, and his demeanour breathed forth the utmost tranquillity. Turning to the companions, he calmly reminded them of their glorious station:

Beware lest you allow the encroachments of self and desire to impair so glorious a station. Fear not the threats of the wicked, neither be dismayed by the clamour of the ungodly. Each one of you has his appointed hour, ... If the powers of the earth league themselves against you, they will be powerless, ere that hour strikes, to lessen by one jot or tittle the span of your life. Should you allow your hearts to be agitated for but one moment by the booming of these guns which, with increasing violence, will continue to

¹ Fársí, means New Day. It is the Persian New Year. It marks the day of the Spring Equinox and therefore always falls sometime between March 19 – 22.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p388: "Neither the severity of their distress nor the continual threats of the enemy could cause them to deviate a hairbreadth from the path which their departed companions had so heroically trodden. A few were found who subsequently faltered in the darkest hour of adversity. The faint-heartedness which this negligible element was compelled to betray paled, however, into insignificance before the radiance which the mass of their stouthearted companions shed in the hour of realised doom."

shower their shot upon this fort, you will have cast yourselves out of the stronghold of Divine protection.¹

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p392

Section Five: The Last Wave of Attacks [April 1849]

The massive bombardment of the fort which began on the ninth day after Naw-Rúz was continued by the army for several days. But the combined forces of the Prince and other captains were surprised that in spite of this heavy cannonade, the voice of prayer that arose from the fort continued.

The besieging army builds towers

The army now focused attention on building towers from which they could fire from a high level directly into the fort. The first tall tower was built for the canons under the supervision of the experienced military captain Ja'far-Qulí Khán . Quddús summoned Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir and instructed him to take a few of the companions and teach Ja'far-Qulí Khán a lesson:

Let him know, that God's lion-hearted warriors, when pressed and driven by hunger, are able to manifest deeds of such heroism as no ordinary mortals can show.¹

Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir immediately ordered eighteen of his companions to jump onto their steeds and follow him. The gates of the fort were flung open, and the companions rode out with the cry of “*Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán!*”, now heard fiercer and more thrilling than ever. Overcoming the barricades, they got to the towers, climbed them and toppled the guns to the ground. Ja'far-Qulí Khán, with thirty of his men, perished. Triumphant and unhurt, Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir and the companions returned to the fort.²

The bombardment of the fort intensifies

The besieging forces intensified their construction of towers and bombardment into the fort. One historian records:

Thus the latter [the besieging army] constructed four towers on the four sides of the fort, and raised them so high that they were able to command the interior of the fortress with their guns, and to make the garrison targets for their bullets. Then the faithful, seeing this, began to dig subterranean

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p394

² Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir-i-Qá'íní, is eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyr #7, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 1](#).

passages and to retreat thither. But the ground of Mázindarán lies near the water and is saturated with moisture, added to which rain fell continually, increasing the damage, so that these poor sufferers dwelt amidst mud and water till their garments rotted away with damp.... Whenever one of their comrades quaffed the draught of martyrdom before their eyes, instead of grieving they rejoiced. Thus, for instance, on one occasion bomb-shell fell on the roof of a hut, which caught fire. Shaykh Sálíh of Shíráz went to extinguish the fire. A bullet struck his head and shattered his skull. Even as they were raising his corpse a second bullet carried away the hand of Áqá Mírzá Muhammad 'Alí, the son of Siyyid Ahmad who was the father of Áqá Siyyid Husayn, 'the beloved.' So too, was Áqá Siyyid Husayn 'the beloved,' a child ten years of age slain before his father's eyes and he fell rolling in mud and gore, with limbs quivering like those of a half-killed bird.¹

April 1849: They eat grass, leather, ground dead bones and Mullá Husayn's buried dead horse

The siege had been going on for over four months. Conditions in the fort were now extreme. They had consumed all the horses and were now reduced to chewing the leather of the saddles. Whenever there was a lull in the bombardment, some of the companions would sneak out of the fort and gather whatever grass they could reach, which they brought back, boiled and ate.

One historian records:

Those who remained firm had already consumed not only their food supply, but such grass as they could find in the enclosure and the bark of all the trees. There remained only the leather of their belts and the scabbards of their swords. ... they ground the bones of the dead and made flour with the dust thereof. At last desperate, they were reduced to perpetrate a sort of profanation. The horse of Mullá Husayn had died of the wound suffered during that fatal night that witnessed the death of its master. The Bábís had buried it out of regard for their holy leader ... They held council and, ... debated the question whether extreme distress could justify them to disinter the sacred charger and eat the remains. With deep sorrow, they agreed the deed was justifiable. They cooked the remains of this horse with the flour

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p393 footnote 2: quoting *Tárikh-i-Jadíd* p 81- 83

made from the bones of the dead, they ate this strange mixture and took up their guns once more.¹

In the historical account *Memorials of the Faithful*, 'Abdu'l-Bahá when describing the hardships and sufferings endured by the heroic defenders of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, writes:

For eighteen days, they remained without food. They lived on the leather of their shoes. This too was soon consumed, and they had nothing left but water. They drank a mouthful every morning and lay famished and exhausted in their fort. When attacked, however, they would instantly spring to their feet, and manifest in the face of the enemy a magnificent courage and astonishing resistance.... Under such circumstances to maintain an unwavering faith and patience is extremely difficult, and to endure such dire afflictions a rare phenomenon.²

Nabíl's account adds:

As their strength declined, as they languished exhausted within the walls of their fort, Quddús multiplied his visits to them, and endeavoured by his words of cheer and of hope to lighten the load of their agony.³

End April 1849: The last attack

All the structures the Bábís had erected in the fort were mainly made of wood, reed and straw. As the bombardment continued, "the outer defenses of the fort were brought down; nothing was left of them but fallen girders, smoked and burning timbers, scattered stones."⁴

The Islamic month of *Jamádíyu'th-Thání*  [24 April – 23 May 1849] had just begun, when the Prince ordered a detachment of the army consisting of several regiments of infantry and cavalry to storm the fort.⁵ As the sound of their approach became evident, Quddús summoned the companions to repulse their attack. He added:

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p395 footnote 1: quoting Comte de Gobineau's *Les Religions et les Philosophies dan l'Asie Centrale* p183- 184

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p395 footnote 1 quoting *Memorials of the Faithful* section 2.6 p9.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p395

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p391 footnote 1

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p395 and footnote 2

Never since our occupation of this fort, have we not under any circumstances attempted to direct any offensive against our opponents. Not until they unchained their attack upon us did we arise to defend our lives. Had we cherished the ambition of waging holy war against them, had we harboured the least intention of achieving ascendancy through the power of our arms over the unbelievers, we should not, until this day, have remained besieged within these walls. The force of our arms would have by now, as was the case with the companions of Muhammad in days past, convulsed the nations of the earth and prepared them for the acceptance of our Message. Such is not the way, however, which we have chosen to tread. Ever since we repaired to this fort, our sole, our unalterable purpose has been the vindication, by our deeds and by our readiness to shed our blood in the path of our Faith, of the exalted character of our mission. The hour is fast approaching when we shall be able to consummate this task.¹

With these words, Quddús ordered Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir to charge out with thirty-six of his companions and repulse the attack. Nabíl records:

Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir once more leaped on horseback and, with the thirty-six companions whom he had selected, confronted and scattered the forces which had beset him. He carried with him, as he re-entered the gate, the banner which an alarmed enemy had abandoned as soon as the reverberating cry of "*Yá Sáhibu'z-Zamán!*" had been raised. Five of his companions suffered martyrdom in the course of that engagement, all of whom he bore to the fort and interred in one tomb close to the resting place of their fallen brethren.²

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p396

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p396

Section Six: The Siege Ends Through False Promises [May 1849]

By now the Prince and his captains were desperate. They could not fathom how this group of young students and aged teachers of religious studies and some old merchants could withstand the imperial forces. The siege had gone on for over four months and even the Sháh had grown impatient and was demanding an immediate resolution. The Prince knew something had to be changed. He got all his captains together and they deliberated for three days. They knew that the Bábís were exhausted with hunger and conditions in the fort were extremely bad. But they also now knew that the Bábís were unafraid to die in battle. One of the captains, in later years, described it like this:

But in truth I know not what had been shown to these people, or what they had seen, that they came forth to battle with such alacrity and joy, and engaged so eagerly and gladly in the strife, without displaying in their countenance any trace of fear or apprehension. ... And the astonishing thing was that all these men were scholars and men of learning, sedentary recluses of the college and the cloister, delicately nurtured and of weakly frame, inured indeed to austerities, but strangers to the roar of cannon, the rattle of musketry, and the field of battle. During the last three months of the siege, moreover, they were absolutely without bread and water, and were reduced to the extreme of weakness through lack of even such pittance of food as is sufficient to sustain life. Notwithstanding this, it seemed as if in time of battle a new spirit were breathed into their frames, insomuch that the imagination of man cannot conceive the vehemence of their courage and valour. They used to expose their bodies to the bullets and cannon-balls not only fearlessly and courageously, but eagerly and joyously, seeming to regard the battle-field as a banquet, and to be bent on casting away their lives.¹

As the Prince and his captains discussed what to do, a messenger from the Sháh arrived demanding an immediate resolution of the situation. The decision was made to suspend all manner of attacks on the fort, as it was proving futile anyways, and instead to lure the Bábís out by making false promises.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p413 footnote 2 quoting *Tárikh-i-Jadíd* p 106 - 109

Early May 1849: A messenger is sent with false promises to the fort

A messenger was selected who knew two Bábí brothers from Kand, both of whom were in the fort. The messenger approached the fort and called the Bábí sentinels. He asked them to convey a message to the brother he was closest to, Mullá Mihdí of Kand, that his old friend wanted to speak to him.¹ Mullá Mihdí reported the matter to Quddús who permitted him to meet his friend. Years later, this same messenger, described this meeting:

I saw, Mullá Mihdí appear above the wall of the fort, his countenance revealing an expression of stern resolve that baffled description. He looked as fierce as a lion, his sword was girded on over a long white shirt after the manner of the Arabs, and he had a white kerchief around his head. "What is it that you seek?" he impatiently enquired. "Say it quickly, for I fear that my master will summon me and find me absent." The determination that glowed in his eyes confused me. I was dumbfounded at his looks and manner.

The thought suddenly flashed through my mind that I would awaken a dormant sentiment in his heart. I reminded him of his infant child, Rahmán, whom he had left behind in the village, in his eagerness to enlist under the standard of Mullá Husayn. In his great affection for the child, he had specially composed a poem which he chanted as he rocked his cradle and lulled him to sleep. "Your beloved Rahmán" I said, "longs for the affection which you once lavished upon him. He is alone and forsaken, and yearns to see you." "Tell him from me," was the father's instant reply, "that the love of the true *Rahmán*,² a love that transcends all earthly affections, has so filled my heart that it has left no place for any other love besides His." ...

"What," I asked him, "if I venture to enter the fort and join you?" "If your motive be to seek and find the Truth," he calmly replied, "I will gladly show you the way. And if you seek to visit me as an old and lifelong friend, I will accord you the welcome of which the Prophet of God has spoken: 'Welcome your guests though they be of the infidels.' I will, faithful to that injunction, offer you the boiled grass and the churned bones which serve as my meat, the best I can procure for you. But if your intention be to harm me, I warn you that I will defend myself and will hurl you from the heights of these walls to the ground."

¹ Mullá Mihdiy-i-Kandí and his brother Mullá Baqir are both eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyrs #152 and #153, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 4](#).

² Reference to God. *Rahmán* means merciful.

His unswerving obstinacy convinced me of the futility of my efforts. ... “The prince,” I added, “has vowed that whoever steps out of this fort will be secure from danger, that he will even receive a safe passage from him, as well as whatever expenses he may require for the journey to his home.”

He promised to convey the prince’s message to his fellow-companions. “Is there anything further you wish to tell me?” he added. “I am impatient to join my master.” “May God,” I replied, “assist you in accomplishing your purpose.” “He has indeed assisted me!” he burst forth in exultation. “How else could I have been delivered from the darkness of my prison-home in Kand? How could I have reached this exalted stronghold?” No sooner had he uttered these words than, turning his face away from me, he vanished from my sight.¹

Some leave the fort

Nabíl records:

As soon as he had joined his companions, Mullá Mihdí² conveyed the prince’s message to them. On the afternoon of that same day, Siyyid Mírzá Husayn-i-Mutavallí  [the betrayer who had secretly sent the letter to the enemy about the death of Mullá Husayn], accompanied by his servant, left the fort and went directly to join the prince in his camp.

The next day, Rasúl-i-Bahnimírí ³ and a few other of his companions, unable to resist the ravages of famine, and encouraged by the explicit assurances of the prince, sadly and reluctantly separated themselves from their friends. No sooner had they stepped out of the fort than they were all instantly slain at the order of ‘Abbás-Qulí Khán-i-Láríjání ⁴.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p397-398

² Mullá Mihdí-i-Kandí and his brother Mullá Baqir are both eventually martyred at Fort Tabarsí; martyrs #152 and #153, [DB 19-20 Part B, Section 4](#).

³ Rasúl-i-Bahnimírí is listed as #75 of the martyrs of Tabarsí in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p420. He was leading the group of companions from the village of Bahnimír, which is a village near Barfurúsh. He is mentioned earlier in *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p361 as the siege of Tabarsí is unfolding. He complains to Quddús about the scarcity of food and water and Quddús in response prophesies the rainfall [[DB 19, Section 1](#)]. Also see [DB 19-20 Part A, Section 8](#).

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p398-399

The other Bábís back in the fort were however unaware of what had happened to these companions who had left. A few more days elapsed, and the army continued to refrain from any hostilities towards the fort. The impression given was that the army was fulfilling its promise.

Morning of 9 May 1849: The false promise is sealed with the *Qur'án*

On Wednesday morning, the ninth of May 1849, an emissary of the prince arrived at the fort and requested that two representatives be delegated by the besieged to conduct confidential negotiations with them in the hope of arriving at a peaceful settlement of the issues outstanding between them.

Nabíl records what happened next:

Accordingly, Quddús instructed Mullá Yúsof-i-Ardibílí ⁽¹⁾ and Siyyid Riḏáy-i-Khurásání ⁽²⁾ to act as his representatives, and bade them inform the prince of his readiness to accede to his wish.

Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá ⁽³⁾ ¹ courteously received them, and invited them to partake of the tea which he had prepared. “We should,” they said, as they declined his offer, “feel it to be an act of disloyalty on our part were we to partake of either meat or drink whilst our beloved leader languishes worn and famished in the fort.”

“The hostilities between us,” the prince remarked, “have been unduly prolonged. We, on both sides, have fought long and suffered grievously. It is my fervent wish to achieve an amicable settlement of our differences.” He took hold of a copy of the *Qur'án* that lay beside him, and wrote, with his own hand, in confirmation of his statement, the following words on the margin of the opening *súrih*: “I swear by this most holy Book, by the righteousness of God who has revealed it, and the Mission of Him who was inspired with its verses, that I cherish no other purpose than to promote peace and friendliness between us. Come forth from your stronghold and rest assured that no hand will be stretched forth against you. You yourself and your companions, I solemnly declare, are under the sheltering protection of the Almighty, of Muhammad, His Prophet, and of Náṣiri'd-Dín Sháh, our sovereign. I pledge my honour that no man, either in this army or in this

¹ The Prince. When “Mírzá” is used as a suffix to a name such as here in Mihdí-Qulí Mírzá, it stands for the “Prince”. When it is used a prefix to name, it just means “Mr.”.

neighbourhood, will ever attempt to assail you. The malediction of God, the omnipotent Avenger, rest upon me if in my heart I cherish any other desire than that which I have stated.

He affixed his seal to his statement and, delivering the *Qur'án* into the hands of Mullá Yúsuf, asked him to convey his greetings to his leader and to present him this formal and written assurance. "I will," he added, "in pursuance of my declaration, despatch to the gate of the fort, this very afternoon, a number of horses, which I trust he and his leading companions will accept and mount, in order to ride to the neighbourhood of this camp, where a special tent will have been pitched for their reception. I would request them to be our guests until such time as I shall be able to arrange for their return, at my expense, to their homes."¹

Afternoon of 9 May 1849: Quddús and the companions leave the fort

Quddús received the *Qur'án* from the hand of his messenger, kissed it reverently, and said: "O our Lord, decide between us and between our people with truth; for the best to decide art Thou."² Immediately after, he bade the rest of his companions prepare themselves to leave the fort. "By our response to their invitation," he told them, "we shall enable them to demonstrate the sincerity of their intentions."

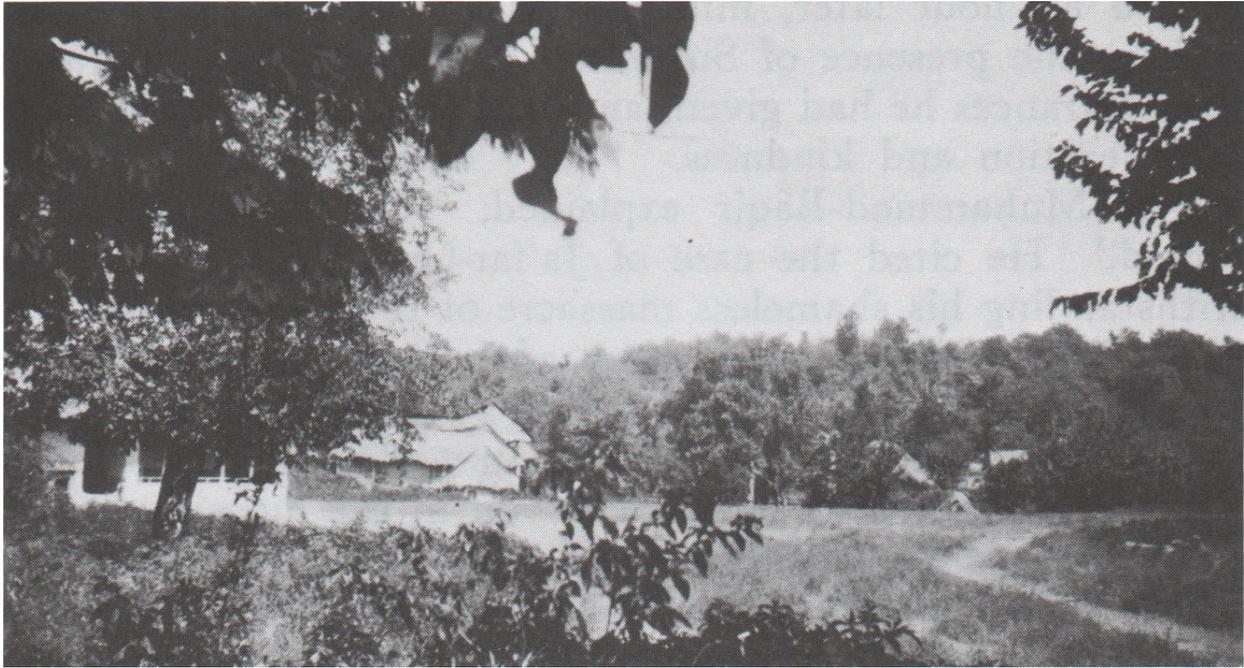
As the hour of their departure approached, Quddús attired his head with the green turban which the Báb had sent to him at the time He sent the one that Mullá Husayn wore on the day of his martyrdom. At the gate of the fort, they mounted the horses which had been placed at their disposal, Quddús mounting the favourite steed of the prince which the latter had sent for his use. His chief companions, among whom were a number of siyyids and learned divines, rode behind him, and were followed by the rest, who marched on foot, carrying with them all that was left of their arms and belongings.

As the company, who were two hundred and two in number, reached the tent which the prince had ordered to be pitched for Quddús in the vicinity of the public bath of the village of Dízvá, overlooking the camp of the enemy,

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p399-400

² *Qur'án* 7:88

they alighted and proceeded to occupy their lodgings in the neighbourhood of that tent.¹



Village of Dízvá. Archival photo.²

Evening of 9 May 1849: They prepare for what is to come

Soon after their arrival, Quddús emerged from his tent and, gathering together his companions, addressed them in these words:

You should show forth exemplary renunciation, for such behaviour on your part will exalt our Cause and redound to its glory. Anything short of complete detachment will but serve to tarnish the purity of its name and to obscure its splendour. Pray the Almighty to grant that even to your last hour He may graciously assist you to contribute your share to the exaltation of His Faith.³

Nabíl records what happened next:

A few hours after sunset, they were served with dinner brought from the camp of the prince. The food that was offered them in separate trays, each of which was assigned to a group of thirty companions, was poor and scanty. “Nine of us,” those who were with Quddús subsequently related, “were

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p400 - 401

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p401

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p 401

summoned by our leader to partake of the dinner which had been served in his tent. As he refused to taste it, we too, following his example, refrained from eating. The attendants who waited upon us were delighted to partake of the dishes which we had refused to touch, and devoured their contents with appreciation and avidity." A few of the companions who were dining outside the tent were heard remonstrating with the attendants, pleading that they were willing to buy from them, at however exorbitant a price, the bread which they needed. Quddús strongly disapproved of their conduct and rebuked them for the request they had made. But for the intercession of Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir, he would have severely punished them for having so completely disregarded his earnest exhortations.¹

The companions now prepared for what lay ahead.

* * * * *

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p401-402

Section Seven: The Promise is Broken and the Companions Massacred

10 May 1849: The Prince's promise sealed with the *Qur'án* is repeated

At daybreak a messenger arrived, summoning Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir to the presence of the Prince. With the consent of Quddús, Mírzá Muhammad-Báqir went to the Prince and returned an hour later. He informed Quddús, that the Prince in the presence of his captain Sulaymán Khán-i-Afshár  had reiterated the assurances he had given and treated him with consideration. The Prince had said: "My oath is irrevocable and sacred."¹

The Prince had also said that the next day he would accompany Quddús to the public bath, and from there, the whole Bábí group would proceed to Sang-Sar on horses that would be provided. From there the group would be asked to disperse and return to their homes right away.

On hearing these proposed steps by the Prince, Quddús remarked: "I am of the opinion that what his tongue professes, his heart does not believe at all."² With this he asked his companions to disperse that very night, and that he himself would soon proceed to Bárfurúsh. The companions were dismayed and begged Quddús not to be separated from him. He counselled them to be calm and patient and assured them that they would eventually meet again. His parting words were:

Weep not, the reunion which will follow this separation will be such as shall eternally endure. We have committed our Cause to the care of God; whatever be His will and pleasure, the same we will joyously accept.³

11 May 1849: The Prince breaks his promise

The next day, instead of coming to Quddús, the Prince sent a message asking Quddús and several of the companions to ride out and come to the Prince's headquarters. A little while after Quddús and the selected companions had left, the Prince's attendants came to the rest of the companions and lied to them that Quddús had asked them to join him at the Prince's headquarters.

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p402

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p402

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p402-403

Some companions are chained and survivors sold as slaves

Some of the companions believed the Prince's attendants and set out with them, although many did not. Once the companions who had set out were separated from the main group of companions, they were made prisoners and taken away in chains. Those who survived were eventually sold as slaves. But even this was guided by Divine Providence, because these companions were destined to be the few survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, who will transmit to the world the tale of what happened at that historic episode.¹

Some companions are killed right away

Having got some of the companions away from the main group and imprisoned them, the Prince's attendants wanted to get the rest. They turned their attention to Mullá Yúsuf-i-Ardibílí who had a short while earlier been sent by Quddús as one of his representatives to the Prince and was now held prisoner.² They told him he should return and inform the remainder of the companions that Quddús had asked they immediately disarm. As they pressured Mullá Yúsuf on their way, they asked him: "What is it that you will tell them exactly?". Mullá Yúsuf calmly responded: "I will warn them that whatever be henceforth the nature of the message you choose to deliver to them on behalf of their leader, that message is naught but downright falsehood." The attendants were enraged and put him mercilessly to death right away.³

The remaining companions left behind are killed

The Prince's soldiers now encompassed the remaining companions who had not gone to the Prince's headquarters and opened fire upon them. Those who escaped the bullets were killed by the swords of the officers and spears of their men. One historian further records:

They [the soldiers] formed them [the companions] in a line and made sport of cutting open their stomachs. This amused them the more because, from the perforated intestines, issued grass still undigested, striking evidence of

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403 only says Mullá Yúsuf. It presumably is the Letter of the Living, Mullá Yúsuf-i-Ardibílí, who had a short while earlier been sent by Quddús as one of his representatives to the Prince.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403. Mullá Yúsuf-i-Ardibílí is martyr #149 DB 19-20 Part B, Section 4.

the sufferings they had endured ... Some, very few, succeeded in escaping into the forest.¹

Nabíl also records:

In the very throes of death, these unconquerable heroes were still heard to utter the words, “Holy, holy, O Lord our God, Lord of the angels and the spirit,” words which in moments of exultation had fallen from their lips, and which they now repeated with undiminished fervour at this crowning hour of their lives.²

The fort is destroyed

The Prince’s soldiers now turned their attention to the fort, proceeded to bombard and demolish it completely. All the fortifications constructed by the Bábís were razed to the ground and even the ground was leveled to remove any evidence of the heroic defense put up by the Bábís.³

The companions at the Prince’s headquarters: The survivors

Back at the Prince’s headquarters, the Prince now turned his attention to the companions whom he had brought to his base camp.

He first selected those among them who were men of recognised social standing, and for whom he knew he could get a good ransom. He ordered his attendants to take them to Tíhrán and contact their friends and families and get the best possible ransom for each. This group included many of the outstanding survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, who in the future would serve the Cause of the Báb and Bahá’u’lláh. The group included Hájí ‘Abdu’l-Majíd-i-Níshábúrí  [the father of

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403 footnote 3 quoting A.L.M. Nicholas’ *Sijyid ‘Alí-Muhammad dit le Báb* p327.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403-404

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p403 footnote 2 quoting A.L.M. Nicholas’ *Sijyid ‘Alí-Muhammad dit le Báb* p327.

Badí],¹ Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí ,² Mullá Sádiq-i-Khurásání ³ and Hájí Nasír-i-Qazvíní .⁴

The fate of the other companions at the Prince's headquarters

As to the rest of the companions whom the Prince had brought to his headquarters, he gave orders for them either to be sent as prisoners to other towns to be dealt with there or to be executed right away.

Nabíl records:

A few were cut to pieces with the sword, others were torn asunder, a number were bound to trees and riddled with bullets, and still others were blown from the mouths of cannons and consigned to the flames.⁵

The atrocities committed against these innocent ones by those who laid claim to devoutly following Islam were unbelievable. One wonders what blindness and twisted ignorance can cause humans to willfully sink to such sub-human levels. We will soon see this pattern emerge throughout the land.

The captives that remained alive were bound in chains and sent off to various places. They were paraded as they travelled, with the sound of trumpets, and, every

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p404. At the time of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí, Badí was not even conceived. Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd survived and went back to his hometown of Níshápúr [also called Níshábúr]. Badí was born in 1851/1852. Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd's father was the owner of a turquoise mine in Níshápúr, so the family was wealthy [see DB 17-18, Section 3]. Hájí 'Abdu'l-Majíd himself is martyred in Khurásán some years after the martyrdom of Badí. For the story of Badí see Balyuzi's *Bahá'u'lláh – The King of Glory*, Chapter 33, p293-310.

² Mírzá Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí was one of those highly learned who, according to Nabíl [*Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 6, p125] had become a Bábí on Mullá Husayn's very first visit back to Mashhad after the Declaration of the Báb [DB 4-7, Section 2]. He came from the village Dúghábád, which is about 200 km [125 miles] south-west of Mashhad. He went to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí together with five other companions. He was wounded five times, but as prophesied to him by Quddús, he became one of the few survivors of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí. Several of Nabíl's accounts about what transpired in Fort Shaykh Tabarsí come from him. In time he became a devoted follower of Bahá'u'lláh. [Balyuzi *Some Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh* Chapter 13, p157-159]. Muhammad-i-Fúrúghí's son, Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Fúrúghí followed in his father's footsteps and also became a distinguished believer and is named as one of the nineteen Apostles of Bahá'u'lláh [Shoghi Effendi *The Bahá'í World*, Vol. 3, p80-81]. [For Portrait of Mírzá Mahmúd-i-Fúrúghí see Bahaipedia and Balyuzi *Some Eminent Bahá'ís in the time of Bahá'u'lláh* Chapter 13, p157-170.]

³ DB 4-7, Section 1 and DB 8-9, Section 1.

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p404 and footnote 2

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p404-405

time they went through an inhabited section, the prisoners were struck down and tortured. The stories are many. Here is one of them.

The story of the two sets of brothers from Sang-sar

The Prince now decided the fate of two sets of brothers from among the Bábís from the town of Sang-sar in the Semnán province. These were the two Karbilá'í brothers, and the two remaining Siyyid brothers [the third Siyyid brother had already been killed at Tabarsí]. Each have their own story. Both pairs of brothers were brought to the Prince for interrogation.

The back-story of the two Karbilá'í brothers from Sang-sar was this: Their father was a pious man with great spiritual insight. Through his spiritual intuition he had come to realize that soon the Black Standard prophesied by the Prophet Muhammad would be raised from Khurásán going to Mázindarán. He had urged his two sons that this marked the advent of the promised One, and when it occurred, they should sacrifice everything and follow it. The father had died soon after giving his sons these instructions. When Mullá Husayn rode through the Semnán province, the brothers immediately recognized the Black Standard and the Cause of the Báb. They dropped everything and followed Mullá Husayn. Now they were prisoners of the Prince having survived the grueling siege of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.¹

The Prince began his interrogation with the Karbalá'í brothers. He asked them:

“What is your belief concerning Hájí Muhammad-‘Alí [meaning the Báb]?”

One of the Karbalá'í brothers on behalf of both replied:

We believe, Mullá Husayn to have been the bearer of the standard of which Muhammad has spoken: “Should your eyes behold the Black Standards proceeding from Khurásán, hasten ye towards them, even though ye should have to crawl over the snow.” For this reason we have renounced the world and have flocked to his standard, a standard which is but a symbol of our Faith. If you wish to bestow upon me a favour, bid your executioner put an end to me and enable me to be gathered to the company of my immortal companions. For the world and all its charms have ceased to allure me. I long to depart this life and return to my God.²

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p405-406

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p407

The Prince did not like this answer and ordered that both Karbalá'í brothers be executed. They were immediately put to death.¹ The prophecy and the wish of their father were fulfilled. The Prince then turned his attention to the Siyyid brothers from Sang-sar.

The back-story of the Siyyid brothers from Sang-sar was this: They were sons of a man of great learning and piety, Mír Muhammad-'Alí (عليه السلام) of Sang-sar, who was a devoted follower of Siyyid Kázim. At the end of 1843, Mír Muhammad-'Alí had taken two of his sons to Karbalá' to meet Siyyid Kázim. However, by the time they got to Karbalá', Siyyid Kázim had died. Mír Muhammad-'Alí was sad and left to visit Imám 'Alí's shrine in nearby Najaf. While there, he had dream in which the Imám 'Alí came to him and told him that after his death, his two sons who were with him would attain the presence of the promised *Qá'im* and would each suffer martyrdom in His path. On waking, he called his two sons and told them about the dream and that his last will and wish was that they fulfill this dream. He died seven days after that dream. The two sons, Siyyid Ahmad (عليه السلام) and Mír Abdu'l-Qásim (عليه السلام), returned home to Sang-sar. They had another brother Siyyid Abú-Tálib (عليه السلام) who was in Sang-sar. A couple of years later first the two brothers [Siyyid Ahmad and Mír Abdu'l-Qásim] joined Mullá Husayn under the Black Standard and later the third brother also came to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí². Mír Abdu'l-Qásim met his death in Fort Shaykh Tabarsí on the same night as Mullá Husayn. Siyyid Ahmad and the third brother, Siyyid Abú-Tálib, now were prisoners in front of the Prince.³

The Prince was hesitant to execute these brothers from Sang-sar, as they were Siyyids [descendants of the Prophet Muhammad]. As the Prince was hesitatingly deciding what to do with them, Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí (عليه السلام) [the leading *mujtahid* of Sári who had confined Quddús]⁴ together with seven other '*ulamá* of Sári arrived at the Prince's camp. In the words of Nabíl: "[They] set out from that town to share in the meritorious act of inflicting the punishment of death upon the companions of Quddús."⁵ When they found that most of the Bábís had already been put to death, Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí was quite disappointed and upset. He now urged the prince

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p406. The brothers names were Muhammad-'Alí and Abu'l Qásim, sons of Karbilá'í Abú-Muhammad of Sang-sar. The brothers are listed as martyrs #51 and #52 **DB 19-20 Part B, Section 2**.

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p426-427 tells the story of how the third brother, Siyyid Abú-Tálib, joined Fort Shaykh Tabarsí.

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p405, 407

⁴ **DB 17-18, Section 5**

⁵ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p407

to reconsider his decision and to order the immediate execution of at least Siyyid Ahmad. The Prince decided to give Siyyid Ahmad and his brother Siyyid Abú-Tálib into the hands of Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí and the other *'ulamá* from Sárí. They were told to take them back to Sárí for a fair trial. Mírzá Muhammad-Taquí agreed, but as soon as they got away from the Prince's camp, he, together with the other seven *'ulamá* from Sárí, drew their swords and cut Siyyid Ahmad to pieces. Siyyid Abú-Tálib was miraculously spared, and he made it to Sang-sar and lived a life dedicated to service to the Cause of the Báb and later Bahá'u'lláh.¹ Thus was fulfilled the dream prophecy given by the Imám 'Alí to the father of these three brothers, that two of his sons, specifically Siyyid Ahmad and Mír Abdu'l-Qásim, would be martyred in the path of the promised *Qá'im*. The third brother survived.² [Note: The paternal uncle and the brother-in-law of these brothers had also come to Fort Shaykh Tabarsí and these two were also martyred there].³

16 May 1849: Quddús' Trial

The Prince brought his star captive, Quddús, with him to Bárfurúsh, which was Quddús' hometown. They arrived there on 11 May 1849. The *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* together with the other *'ulamá* and the people of the town came out to greet the Prince and congratulate him on his victory against the hated Bábís. What followed were three days of celebrations in the town. During this time the Prince gave no signs of what he intended to do with Quddús. He had originally intended to take Quddús to the capital Tihrán and hand him over to the Sháh. But the hate-filled *'ulamá*, in particular the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* of Bárfurúsh, had other plans. They put pressure on the Prince to decide the fate of Quddús right there. To do this, they riled up the ignorant masses of the town. The *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* raised the call of hate throughout the town. He told the masses:

I have vowed, to deny myself both food and sleep until such time as I am able to end the life of Hájí Muhammad 'Alí [Quddús] with my own hands!⁴

The threats of an agitated multitude succeeded in arousing the apprehension of the Prince, who thought his own life might be endangered at this rate. So, he called all

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p407-408

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p405

³ See **DB 19-20 Part B, Section 2** listing of martyrs of Fort Shaykh Tabarsí from Sang-sar [Semnán province]. The two martyred brothers Siyyid Ahmad and Mír Abu'l-Qásim are listed as #46 and #47 on Nabíl's listing. Their paternal uncle, Mír Mihdí is listed as martyr #48, and their brother-in-law, Mír Ibráhím, is listed as martyr #50.

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p409

the leading *'ulamá* of Bárfurúsh for what turned out to be pretend tribunal. Quddús was called in to defend himself. He was wearing the Báb's green turban. The *'ulamá* began by challenging about his wearing a green turban, which is reserved for Siyyids who are descendants of the Prophet Muhammad. But as soon as Quddús spoke and silenced the *'ulamá* [Quddús' mother was a descendant of Imám Hasan and therefore a Siyyid], the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá* burst out in a fit of rage. He flung his own turban to the ground and thundered:

This man has succeeded in proving to you that he is a descendent of the Imám Hasan. He will, ere long, justify his claim to be the mouthpiece of God and the revealer of His will!¹

The Prince knew that all this was pointless, and he wanted to be done with this whole Bábí problem, so he declared:

I wash my hands of all responsibility for any harm that may befall this man. You are free to do what you like with him. You will yourselves be answerable to God on the Day of Judgment.²

Immediately after he had spoken these words, the Prince called for his horse and accompanied by his attendants, departed for Sárí.

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¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p410

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p410

Section Eight: Quddús' Martyrdom

16 May 1849: Quddús' Martyrdom

No sooner had the Prince and his men left, than the *'ulamá* and people of Bárfurúsh led by the blood-thirsty *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá*, fell upon Quddús. They stripped him of his clothes; the green turban which the Báb had bestowed upon him was befouled; barefooted, bareheaded, and loaded with chains, he was paraded through the streets, followed and scorned by the entire population of the town; he was execrated and spat upon by the howling mob; he was assailed with the knives and axes of the scum of its female inhabitants; his body was pierced and mutilated, and eventually it was delivered to the flames!¹

Bárfurúsh was Quddús' hometown, where he had grown up and was well known.² It was also in its Sabzih-Maydán  [Green field/square] where he himself had prophesied he would one day be martyred.³

Nabíl records:

Amidst his torments, Quddús was heard whispering forgiveness to his foes. "Forgive, O my God," he cried, "the trespasses of this people. Deal with them in Thy mercy, for they know not what we already have discovered and cherish. I have striven to show them the path that leads to their salvation; behold how they have risen to overwhelm and kill me! Show them, O God, the way of Truth, and turn their ignorance into faith."

In his hour of agony, the Siyyid-i-Qumí, who had so treacherously deserted the fort, was seen passing by his side. Observing his helplessness, he smote him in the face. "You claimed," he cried in haughty scorn, "that your voice was the voice of God. If you speak the truth, burst your bonds asunder and free yourself from the hands of your enemies." Quddús looked steadfastly into his face, sighed deeply, and said: "May God requite you for your deed, inasmuch as you have helped to add to the measure of my afflictions."

Approaching the Sabzih-Maydán, he raised his voice and said: "Would that my mother were with me, and could see with her own eyes the splendour of

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p411

² DB 1-2, Section 4

³ DB 8-9, Section 4.

my nuptials!" He had scarcely spoken these words when the enraged multitude fell upon him and, tearing his body to pieces, threw the scattered members into the fire which they had kindled for that purpose. In the middle of the night, what still remained of the fragments of that burned and mutilated body was gathered by the hand of a devoted friend¹ and interred in a place² not far distant from the scene of his martyrdom.³



Madrisih of Mírzá Zakí  in Bárfurúsh where Quddús' remains were first buried. Archival photo.⁴

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p413 footnote 1 quoting *Tárikh-i-Jadíd*, p. 92: "At all events it appears that after the martyrdom of Jináb-i-Quddús a pious divine Hájí Muḥammad-'Alí-y-i-Ḥamzih  by name, whose skill in exegesis and spiritual gifts was recognised by all, secretly sent several persons to bury the mutilated remains in the ruined college already mentioned. And he, far from approving the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá's* conduct, used to curse and revile him, and never himself pronounced sentence of death against any Bábí, but, on the contrary used to obtain decent burial for those slain by the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'*. And when men questioned him concerning the garrison of the castle, he would reply: 'I do not condemn them or speak evil of them.' For this reason half of Bárfurúsh remained neutral, for at first he used to forbid men to traduce or molest the Bábís, though later when the trouble waxed great, he deemed it prudent to be silent and shut himself up in his house. Now his austerity of life, piety, learning, and virtue were as well known to the people of Mázindarán as were the irreligion immorality and worldliness of the *Sa'ídu'l-'Ulamá'*." Note: Hájí Muhammad 'Alí-y-i-Hamzih was also the person that Quddús had sent his writings to from the fort for safe-keeping.

² *Madrisih* of Mírzá Zakí in Bárfurúsh

³ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p411-413

⁴ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 20, p412





Views of Quddús gravesite in Bárfurúsh [now called Babol] demolished by the Islamic Republic of Iran. Photos 2004.

Note on supplemental resources: Further detailed historical accounts and analyses of the episode at Fort Shaykh Tabarsí can be found in Mehrabkhani *Mullá Husayn - Disciple at Dawn, Amanat Resurrection and Renewal*, and Handal *Quddús - The First in Rank*.

Epilogue

The Black Standard: It flew for eleven months

The events at Bárfurúsh and Fort Shaykh Tabarsí had been triggered with arrival of Mullá Husayn and his companions under the Black Standard to Bárfurúsh at the start of October 1848. It fulfilled the prophecy of old announcing the coming of the *Qáim*. In the words of Nabíl:

That standard was unfurled at the command of the Báb, in the name of Quddús, and by the hands of Mullá Husayn. It was carried aloft all the way from the city of Mashhad to the shrine of Shaykh Tabarsí. For eleven months [July 1848 to May 1849]¹, ... that earthly emblem of an unearthly sovereignty waved continually over the heads of that small and valiant band, summoning the multitude who gazed upon it to renounce the world and to espouse the Cause of God.²

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End of “DB 19-20: The Valiant Horsemen of the Merciful – PART A”

¹ *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p351: “For eleven months , from the beginning of *Sha’bán* in the year 1264 AH [3 July – 1 August 1848 AD] to the end of *Jamádíyu’th-Thání*, in the year 1265 AH, [24 April - 23 May 1849 AD] that earthly emblem of an unearthly sovereignty waved continually over the heads of that small and valiant band ...”

² *Dawn-Breakers* Chapter 19, p351